‘Dear Sir ... I must begin by telling you that although this text is an excellent essay, it is not, in its present form, a book for the “Spiritual Masters” series. Let us enumerate the reasons for this. First of all, the general impression is of an ABSTRACT text. I can straight-away imagine your reaction to this and I dread misunderstandings! But putting myself in the reader's place, since, once again, it does involve a collection intended for a wide public that we are beginning to know well, I can assure you that this public will not be able to follow page after page of reflections upon what one is bound to call a philosophical and spiritual “system.” Obviously this impression is caused primarily by the fact that you have begun with twenty-one pages where the reader is assumed to already know of Sri Aurobindo's historical existence and the content of the Vedas and the Upanishads, plus I don't know how many other notions of rite, truth, divinity, wisdom, etc., etc.... In my view, and the solution is going to appear cruel to you, for you certainly value these twenty-one pages [on the Secret of the Veda], they should purely and simply be deleted, for everything you say there, which is very rich in meaning, can only become clear when one has read what follows. There are many books in which readers can be asked to make the effort entailed in not understanding the beginning until they have read the end: but not books of popular culture. One could envisage an introduction of three or four pages to situate the spiritual climate and cultural world in which Sri Aurobindo's thought has taken place, provided, however, that it is sufficiently 'descriptive,' and not a pre-synthesis of everything to be expounded upon in what follows. In a general way ... you are going to smile, finding me quite Cartesian! But the readership we address is more or less permeated by a widespread Cartesianism, and you can help them, if you like, to reverse their methodology, but on the condition that you make yourself understood right from the start. Generally, you don't make enough use of analysis and, even before analysis, of a description of the realities being analyzed.... That is why the sections of pure philosophical analysis seem much too long to us, and, even apart from the abstract character of the chapter on evolution (which should certainly be shorter), one feels at a positive standstill! After having waited patiently, and sometimes impatiently, for some light to be thrown on Sri Aurobindo's own experience, one reads with genuine amazement ... that “one can draw on energies from above instead of drawing on them from the material nature around oneself, or from an animal sleep,” or that “one can modify his sleep and render it conscious ... master illnesses before they enter the body.” All of that in less than a page; and you conclude that “the spirit that was the slave of matter becomes again the master of evolution.” But how Sri Aurobindo was led to think this, the experiences that permitted him to verify it, those that permit other men to consider the method transmittable, the difficulties, the obstacles, the realizations — doesn't this constitute the essence of what must be said to make the reader understand? ... Once again, it is the question of a pedagogy intimately tied in with the spirit of the collection.... Let me add as well that I always find it deplorable

I'm skipping over the carefully phrased introduction....
when a thought is not expressed purely for its own sake, but is accompanied by an aggressive irony towards concepts which the author does not share. This is pointless and harms the ideas being presented, all the more so because they are expressed in contrast with caricatured notions: the allusions you make to such concepts as you think yourself capable of evoking — the soul, creation, virtue, sin, salvation — would only hold some interest if the reader could find those very concepts within himself. But, as they are caricatured by your pen, the reader is given the impression of an all too easily obtained contrast between certain ideas admired and others despised. Whereas it would be far more to the point if they corresponded to something real in the religious consciousness of the West.... I have too much esteem for you and the spiritual world in which you live to avoid saying this through fear of upsetting you.....’

Amen.

(silence)

Yesterday night Sri Aurobindo told me, ‘They wouldn't have been satisfied unless they had been given a good pack of dubious miracles.’

That's exactly what they want — tales about miracles.

I don't believe your book can be changed — it's meaningless to snip at it. If you really want to know what I would do, I would write another one, putting myself in their place: something showing a comprehensible Sri Aurobindo — almost a congenial Sri Aurobindo — that is, only the constructive side of his teaching, in its most external form, leaving out ... not the philosophical notions, but the truly spiritual ones, for that is completely sealed to their understanding.

They are not ready! They are not ready.

(silence)

Seen from the European angle, Sri Aurobindo represents an immense spiritual revolution, redeeming Matter and the creation, which to the Christian religion is fundamentally a fall — it's really unclear how what has come from God could become so bad, but anyway, better not be too logical! it's a fall. The creation is a fall. And that's why they are far more easily convinced by Buddhism. I saw this particularly with Richard, whose education was entirely in European philosophy, with Christian and positivist influences; under these two influences, when he came into contact with Theon's ‘cosmic philosophy’ and later Sri Aurobindo's revelation, he immediately explained, in his Wherefore of the Worlds, that the world is the fruit of Desire — God's desire. Yet Sri Aurobindo says (in simple terms), ‘God created the world for the Joy of the creation,’ or rather, ‘He brought forth the world from Himself for the Joy of living an objective life.’ This was Theon's thesis too, that the world is the Divine in an objective form, but for him the origin of this objective form was the desire to be. All this is playing with words, you understand, but it turns out that in one case the world is reprehensible and in the other it is adorable! And that makes all the difference. To the whole European mind, the whole Christian spirit, the world is reprehensible. And when THAT is pointed out to them, they can't stand it.
So the very normal, natural reaction against this attitude is to negate the spiritual life: let's take the world as it is, brutally, materially, 'short and sweet' (since it all comes to an end with this short life), let's do all we can to enjoy ourselves now, suffer as little as possible and not think of anything else. Having said that life is a condemned, reprehensible, anti-divine thing, this is the logical conclusion. Then what to do? ... We don't want to do away with life, so we do away with the Divine.

That's it exactly.

They can't take it — even those who are very intelligent (and this man is very intelligent): they immediately close up.

I feel that this man himself is the obstacle and that if the book came out, it would be understood — not everywhere, but it would be understood. Not by those shut up in Catholicism (there's nothing to do for them), but I'm sure it's accessible to all who couldn't care less about that, who don't have Christian prejudices.

But I know that if we publish it here it will have a wide public in Europe and America swallowing it down like holy bread, and it will do a magnificent work. IF it comes from here. Not because of what they think of us [the Ashram], but because of what will be in it.

They want to 'tidy up' your book, do they! They can't take it. I saw this when the book was sent off: they can't take it, they just can't. They put up a barrier; they can't receive what is in it, and so they will do all they can to annul its effects.

Coming from here, of course, it will take much more time to touch the general public, but I see how things work in the universe: it will go far more surely and directly to those who are ready to receive it. And we mustn't believe that only an 'elite' public of especially intelligent and refined people will be touched: among very simple, open-hearted people there is a deep intelligence that understands and responds to these things far better than very cultivated people do — far better — because they feel, they feel the vibration of this profound Hope, this profound Joy, something corresponding to the intense need of their being. While the others begin to reason and sophisticate, which takes away half the power.

From the practical standpoint, I would much prefer the book to be printed here and for us to make the necessary effort for it to go out and touch as many people as possible. The publisher may be a handy and less troublesome channel, but he's not at all the best one — far from it. THAT I know, because I am constantly seeing your book with Sri Aurobindo's perception, and I am absolutely positive that he likes it very much; he has put a lot into it and he sees that it can be an enormous help — but not in the short run. There is always the sense of it needing a hundred years to have its full effect. With your publisher, on the other hand, the effects are far more violent, more external and noisy, but they fade far more quickly.

And I feel it's rather essential to change all the emphasis on pictures. I let them go because there was nothing else to do, but I must say I wasn't too happy about it.\(^1\) It was not a deep understanding, a soul-understanding, that chose the pictures, but a very developed intellect.

A few pictures, very few, simply giving an opening for the soul, is quite sufficient.

\(^{(silence)}\)

\(^1\) Satprem did not choose these pictures.
One more thing. Despite their blockage from the deep spiritual viewpoint, they evidently represent a certain goodwill which can be utilized and should be recognized — it must be given a place. That's why I was telling you to write a book on a much less elevated level, a book ... like the one I would write, if I ever wrote one!

_But Mother ...._

You know how I write — it's always unexpected; you always feel...

_No one but you can write like that!_

No. No, I don't believe it. It's only a question of attitude, that's all.

_No, Mother; it's a question of experience. One's writing must always well up from a deep and constant experience._

Yes!

_Yes, but I don't have that! I have a kind of awareness, but not the true experience.... But I'll try, Mother, if you believe I can do it._

I do believe it!

My book, of course, would be: _What I have known of Sri Aurobindo_ — and on his supreme level. _What I have known of Sri Aurobindo is ..._ what I have been able to perceive of the Avatar. What he represents. That's how I see him. So, _what I have known of Sri Aurobindo_, expressed ‘spontaneously’, with a minimum of external events, the very minimum, but with all the experiences of our meetings: at that time, this opened that; at that moment, I realized this or saw that or felt something else ... ; and then I was able to do such and such — and all of it was Sri Aurobindo.

I know it would create a furor if I wrote this book! Because any fool could read it like a story and feel perfectly satisfied — and he wouldn't even notice it taking hold of him inside and changing him.

_A philosophical book? ... No. A spiritual book? ... No, not at all! Just a nice, little commonsense book — that's what they would see!_

_I don't have time._

_I could possibly scribble a few things down and have you write a book with them, but.... I don't have the time and ... anyway, I just thought of it this minute. I hadn't an inkling of it ten minutes ago._

_I am seeing this book now. I see it. But when I leave here, with that whole throng around me and all that work to do, it will fade away. I would need to be very quiet, have nothing to do, and just write when it comes to me; because I cannot do things in a logical fashion — I have never been able to, never. The experience must come suddenly — a memory, an experience — then I note it down, put it aside and leave it. And when another comes, the same thing. In this way there would be (smiling) no plan to the book! It would be very simple: no plan of ideas, no plan of development, nothing; simply a story._
For example, the importance of the departure\(^2\): how he was present the whole time I was away; how he guided my entire life in Japan; how... Of course, it would be seen in the mirror of my own experience, but it would be Sri Aurobindo — not me, not my reactions: him; but through my experience because that's all I can speak of.

There would be interesting things even for....

But I have two very serious objections. One, it would be a major occult revelation (there would be a lot of occultism — what people term 'miracles' or things of that nature), a major revelation. I hesitate to do that because I don't think it's time yet. Mainly that. And then, in spite of everything, it would inevitably be far too personal, even if it weren't written along personal lines — far too personal. And now isn't the time for that.

There would inevitably be far too much of the physical person in it, and that isn't interesting. It would only be interesting if the Person, with a capital P, came to express Itself. That would be tremendous.

I feel that it will be done one day — when that Person does the writing. But now there is still too much mixture, too much of this (Mother touches her body), this collection of little... there's still too much reaction from the small physical person — not in what I might say but in the BRAIN that would have to transcribe it.

But something else could be done.... It's a great pity you never met him.... Perhaps it's best. It's very difficult to rise above appearances.\(^3\)

Here, just to give you an example: when I first began to work (not with Theon personally but with an acquaintance of his in France, a boy\(^4\) who was a friend of my brother), well, I had a series of visions (I knew nothing about India, mind you, nothing, just as most Europeans know nothing about it: ‘a country full of people with certain customs and religions, a confused and hazy history, where a lot of “extraordinary things” are said to have happened.’ I knew nothing.) Well, in several of these visions I saw Sri Aurobindo just as he looked physically, but glorified; that is, the same man I would see on my first visit, almost thin, with that golden-bronze hue and rather sharp profile, an unruly beard and long hair, dressed in a dhoti with one end of it thrown over his shoulder, arms and chest bare, and bare feet. At the time I thought it was ‘vision attire’! I mean I really knew nothing about India; I had never seen Indians dressed in the Indian way.

Well, I saw him. I experienced what were at once symbolic visions and spiritual FACTS: absolutely decisive spiritual experiences and facts of meeting and having a united perception of the Work to be accomplished. And in these visions I did something I had never done physically: I prostrated before him in the Hindu manner. All this without any comprehension in the little brain (I mean I really didn't know what I was doing or how I was doing it — nothing at all). I did it, and at the same time the outer being was asking, ‘What is all this?!’

I wrote the vision down (or perhaps that was later on) but I never spoke of it to anyone (one doesn't talk about such things, naturally). But my impression was that it was premonitory, that one day something like it would happen. And it remained in the background of the consciousness, not active, but constantly present.

As for Theon, he was European and wore a long purple robe that wasn't at all like the one in my vision. (I'm not sure, but I think he was either Polish or Russian, but more probably Russian, of Jewish descent, and that he was forced to leave his country; he never said anything about this to anyone, it's only an impression.) When I saw him I recognized him as a being of great power. And he bore a certain likeness to Sri Aurobindo: Theon was about the

---

\(^2\) In 1915, when Mother left Pondicherry for France and later Japan.

\(^3\) Actually, Satprem did see Sri Aurobindo in 1946 or 1947.

\(^4\) Themanlys.
same size (not a tall man, of medium height) and thin, slim, with quite a similar profile. But when I met Theon I saw (or rather I felt) that he was not the man I saw in my vision because he didn't have that vibration. Yet it was he who first taught me things, and I went and worked at Tlemcen for two years in a row. But this other thing was always there in the background of the consciousness.

Then when Richard came here he met Sri Aurobindo (he was haunted by the idea of meeting the ‘Master,’ the Guru, the ‘Great Teacher’). Sri Aurobindo was in hiding, seeing no one, but when Richard insisted, he met him, and Richard returned with a photograph. It was one of those early photos, with nothing in it. It was empty, the remnants of the political man, not at all resembling what I had seen — I didn't recognize him. ‘It's strange,’ I said to myself, ‘that's not it’ (for I saw only his external appearance, there was no inner contact). But still, I was curious to meet him. At any rate, I can't say that when I saw this photograph I felt, ‘He's the one!’ Not at all. He impressed me as being a very interesting man, but no more.

I came here... But something in me wanted to meet Sri Aurobindo all alone the first time. Richard went to him in the morning and I had an appointment for the afternoon. He was living in the house that's now part of the second dormitory, the old Guest House. I climbed up the stairway and he was standing there, waiting for me at the top of the stairs.... EXACTLY my vision! Dressed the same way, in the same position, in profile, his head held high. He turned his head towards me ... and I saw in his eyes that it was He. The two things clicked (gesture of instantaneous shock), the inner experience immediately became one with the outer experience and there was a fusion — the decisive shock.

But this was merely the beginning of my vision. Only after a series of experiences — a ten months' sojourn in Pondicherry, five years of separation, then the return to Pondicherry and the meeting in the same house and in the same way — did the END of the vision occur.... I was standing just beside him. My head wasn't exactly on his shoulder, but where his shoulder was (I don't know how to explain it — physically there was hardly any contact). We were standing side by side like that, gazing out through the open window, and then TOGETHER, at exactly the same moment, we felt, ‘Now the Realization will be accomplished.’ That the seal was set and the Realization would be accomplished. I felt the Thing descending massively within me, with the same certainty I had felt in my vision. From that moment on there was nothing to say — no words, nothing. We knew it was THAT.

But between these two meetings he participated in a whole series of experiences, experiences of gradually growing awareness. This is partly noted in Prayers and Meditations (I have cut out all the personal segments). But there was one experience I didn't speak of there (that is, I didn't describe it, I put only the conclusion) — the experience where I say ‘Since the man refused I was offering participation in the universal work and the new creation and the man didn't want it, he refused, and so I now offer it to God ....’

I don't know, I'm putting it poorly, but this experience was concrete to the point of being physical. It happened in a Japanese country-house where we were living, near a lake. There was a whole series of circumstances, events, all kinds of things — a long, long story, like a novel. But one day I was alone in meditation (I have never had very profound meditations, only concentrations of consciousness — Mother makes an abrupt gesture showing a sudden ingathering of the entire being); and I was seeing.... You know that I had taken on the conversion of the Lord of Falsehood: I tried to do it through an emanation incarnated in a physical being [Richard’], and the greatest effort was made during those four years in Japan.

5 Rue François Martin.
6 Mother is probably alluding to this passage in Prayers and Meditations (September 3, 1919): ‘Since the man refused the meal I had prepared with so much love and care, I invoke the God to take it.’
7 See conversation of November 5, 1961.
The four years were coming to an end with an absolute inner certainty that there was nothing to be done — that it was impossible, impossible to do it this way. There was nothing to be done. And I was intensely concentrated, asking the Lord, ‘Well, I made You a vow to do this, I had said, “Even if it's necessary to descend into hell, I will descend into hell to do it...”’ Now tell me, what must I do?...’ The Power was plainly there: suddenly everything in me became still; the whole external being was completely immobilized and I had a vision of the Supreme ... more beautiful than that of the Gita. A vision of the Supreme. And this vision literally gathered me into its arms; it turned towards the West, towards India, and offered me — and there at the other end I saw Sri Aurobindo. It was ... I felt it physically. I saw, saw — my eyes were closed but I saw (twice I have had this vision of the Supreme — once here, much later — but this was the first time) ... ineffable. It was as if this Immensity had reduced itself to a rather gigantic Being who lifted me up like a wisp of straw and offered me. Not a word, nothing else, only that.

Then everything vanished.

The next day we began preparing to return to India.

It was after this vision, when I returned from Japan, that this meeting with Sri Aurobindo took place, along with the certainty that the Mission would be accomplished.

(silence)

This can all be narrated in a very simple way; these things are not metaphysical. It involves occultism, of course, but it's utterly concrete and simple: things a child could understand.

And these are the real milestones of the whole Story.

I feel it will be told one day. But first of all, this (Mother touches her body) must be sufficiently changed. Then the story will take on its full value.

You understand, none of my certitudes — none, without exception — have EVER come through the mind. The intellectual comprehension of each of these experiences came much later. Little by little, little by little, came the higher understanding of the intellectual consciousness, long after the experience (I don't mean philosophical knowledge — that's nothing but scholarly mumbo-jumbo and leaves me cold). Since my earliest childhood, experiences have come like that: something massive takes hold of you and you don't need to believe or disbelieve, know or not know — bam! There's nothing to say; you are facing a fact.

Once, during those last difficult years, Sri Aurobindo told me that this was precisely what gave me my advantage and why (how to put it?) there were greater possibilities that I would go right to the end.

I still don't know. The day I do ... it will probably be done. Because it will come in the same manner, like a massive fact: it will be LIKE THAT. And only much later will the understanding say, ‘Ah! So that's what it is!’

First it comes, afterwards we know it.

For the moment, it's not here.

(silence)

---

8 Perhaps Mother is alluding to this passage from *Prayers and Meditations* (October 10, 1918): ‘My Father smiled at me and gathered me into his powerful arms....’
A book like that (sufficiently veiled, of course), written in the simplest way possible (like I wrote ‘The Science of Living,’ I believe) — and it's fine, you speak to people in their own language. Above all, no philosophy! None! You simply tell some extraordinary stories in the same way you would tell an ordinary story. But the Story is there, that's the most important thing.

It started in my infancy — the Story was already there.

But it never passed through my head first, never, never, never! Experiences came in my childhood that I didn't understand until Sri Aurobindo told me certain things; then I said, ‘Ah, so that's what it was! ...’ But I never had that kind of curiosity, I never cared to understand with the head, I wasn't interested. I was interested in the result, in the inner change: how my attitude towards the world changed, my position relative to the creation — that interested me from my infancy; how what seemed to be quite ordinary incidents could so completely change my relationship with that whole little world of children. And it was always the same thing: instead of feeling burdened, with a weight on your head, and just plodding on like a donkey, something would lift (gesture) and you would be on top of it — you could smile and begin to change. See that thing that's out of place? ... Why not set it right! Like arranging things in a drawer.

Why? How? What does it all mean? ... What do I care! Setting it right is what's important!

It began when I was five, almost eighty years ago.

If God wills and we reach the end, then we will simply tell our story, that's all — NO TEACHING.

There you are, mon petit.

Think it over. I would like us to publish your book exactly as it is, with its full force, with all that Sri Aurobindo has put into it; and we will give it a bit of help to go and do its work. And you should come to an understanding with these people.... But first you should write just a simple book, quite simple and quite positive: the constructive aspect — very constructive, very simple. No attempt to convince, no big problems — no, no, no! Sri Aurobindo has come to tell the world that man is not the final creation, that there is another creation; and he said this not because he knew it but because he felt it. And he began to do it. And that's all.

It needn't be long.

You want me to write a book again!?

Yes ... if it's not too much trouble! (Mother laughs) Spontaneously, simply — if you want to, if you feel like it. You know what I mean: a book that is TRUE, in the sense that you won't say anything not perfectly true, but accessible ... not only accessible to the 'superior' man, but to the honest man who finds that life really isn't good or pleasant and is wondering if there isn't some way to make it better.

Without ... without great speculations.

There are many things like that in Sri Aurobindo's book, On Himself, many things. Just see if you feel like it, mon petit.

If you get a feeling....

Write it in a relaxed way, spontaneously. And we will give them some pretty little photos ... magazine photos! It would be a very fine way to reply: ‘Ah, that's what you want! Well, by all means! But I retain the right to publish my original manuscript — I won't be
competing with you since we will publish it here in India. So please return my manuscript and we will prepare something very nice for you.’

And mind you, it can be very beautiful in its simplicity, a beauty sorrowful people can feel, people who are tired of life, people whose heads are sick of all these arguments and dogmas — people who are tired of thinking too many great thoughts.

And I am the first among them! Nothing tires me more than philosophers.