29 July 1953

Mother, you told us one day that all that happens to us has been decided in advance. What does that mean?

This is but a way of speaking. This happens because to express a thing I can’t be saying all the words at the same time, can I? I am obliged to say them one after another. Otherwise, if all the words were spoken at the same time, it would make a big noise and nobody would understand anything! Well, when you try to explain the universe, you do as you would when you speak. You say one thing after another, but to tell the truth, you must say everything at one go. Now, how can that be done?... Indeed, since you repeat it to me, it is very likely that I must have said that somewhere.... I must have said the contrary also! But if you put it in this way, that everything that happens has been decided in advance, then with the consciousness of time that you have now, it is as if you said: yesterday it was decided what would happen today; and this year it is decided what will happen next year. It is in this way that the thing is translated in your consciousness — naturally, because it is thus that we see, think, understand and above all speak and express ourselves. But it is not like that.

There are people who have perceived this unreality so strongly that they have felt there was no reason why they could not go back instead of going forward, for backward, forward, the present, everything that we express in this way exists all at the same time. It is on different levels. If I tell you: “What is happening to you had been decided in advance”, I could also say: “What is happening here, has already happened elsewhere”, that would be equally true, and equally false, because it is impossible to express this in words.

I am going to give you an example which perhaps will make
you understand. I do not remember exactly when it happened; it must have been some time in the year 1920 probably (perhaps earlier, perhaps in 1914-1915, but I don’t think so, it was some time in the year 1920). One day—every day I used to meditate with Sri Aurobindo: he used to sit on one side of a table and I on the other, on the veranda—and one day in this way, in meditation, I entered (how to put it?...), I went up very high, entered very deep or came out of myself (well, whatever one may say does not express what happened, these are merely ways of speaking), I reached a place or a state of consciousness from which I told Sri Aurobindo just casually and quite simply: “India is free.” It was in 1920. Then he put to me a question: “How?” And I answered him: “Without any fight, without a battle, without a revolution. The English themselves will leave, for the condition of the world will be such that they won’t be able to do anything else except go away.”

It was done. I spoke in the future when he asked me the question, but there where I had seen, I said, India is free, it was a fact. Now, India was not free at that time: it was 1920. Yet it was there, it had been done. And it happened in 1947. That is to say, from the external physical point of view I saw it twenty-seven years in advance. But it had been done.

Could you see Pakistan?

No, for the freedom could have come about without Pakistan. Indeed, if they had listened to Sri Aurobindo there would have been no Pakistan.

Well, externally it seems to take time, but in fact it is like that.

If you see some catastrophe coming, can you, Mother, by your effort change it?

That depends upon the nature of the event. There are many
things.... That depends also upon the level from which one sees. There is a plane where there are all the possibilities, and on that level, as there are all the possibilities, there is the possibility also of changing these possibilities. If a catastrophe is foreseen in that plane, one can have the power of preventing it also. In other cases, even though one is forewarned, one has no action upon the event. And yet there, it depends on the level from where one sees.

A case of this kind was reported to me once where the very seeing of a thing prevented it from happening. An American gentleman had arrived at one of those big American hotels where there are lifts (you do not go down a staircase, you take a lift to go up or come down); now, early in the morning just before getting up, he had a dream which he remembered well: he had seen a boy dressed as a lift-boy and making the same movement a lift-boy makes directing you to get in. He was there. And then, at the end of the movement, instead of a lift, there was a hearse! — that is to say, that kind of carriage... oh! you must have seen some here now and then, to carry the dead to the cemetery; when they are not burnt, they are carried on a bier with black draperies, etc. So there was such a carriage, a hearse for carrying the dead. And the boy was signing to him to get into the carriage. When he came out of his room, the boy was there with the lift to take him down: exactly the same boy, the same face, the same dress, the same gesture. He remembered the hearse — he did not get into the lift. He said: “No, no!” and he walked down. And before he reached the groundfloor, he heard a terrible noise and the lift had crashed down to the ground and all who were in it were killed. It was because of the dream that he had not got in, for he had understood.

Therefore in such a case when you have the vision, you can avert the catastrophe.

There are other cases, as I said, when you are simply forewarned. You are forewarned. In reality, it is to help you to prepare within for what must come, so that you may take the right inner attitude to face the event. It is like a lesson telling
you: “This is what it must teach you.” You cannot change the thing, but you can change your attitude and your inner reaction. Instead of having a bad reaction, a wrong attitude towards the experience that occurs, you have a good reaction, a good attitude, and you derive as much benefit as possible out of what has happened.

In either case, it depends absolutely on the plane on which you see. When you have control over your nights and are conscious of your sleep and your dreams or of your visions, you also see the difference between the two; you can distinguish the difference: what is given to you as a warning so that you may intervene and what is given to you as an intimation so that you may take the right attitude towards what is going to happen. It is always a lesson, but it is not always the same lesson. At times you can act with your will; at times you must learn the inner lesson which the incident is about to give you so that you may be ready for the event to have a fully favourable consequence. The same thing holds for everything that you see, there are hundreds of different varieties of visions and dreams and each one brings you the lesson it has to bring.

For example, when people are taken ill or when they are caught in an accident. Well, whether I see it myself or come to know of it from outside through someone’s telling me about it — in every case it is not the same. There are cases when I am informed and I see that it is for intervening and I have the full power to change the consequence, that is, to cure the sick person. There are cases where I see I am not to intervene. For instance, it is time for the person to leave his body: he will leave the body. But knowing this, I must do for the person and for those around him what has to be done for the event to have the maximum beneficial effect or the minimum adverse effect — it depends on the circumstances.

There are events appertaining to a universal necessity and those one cannot change. There are events still in the balance which can be decided either way. The whole thing is to have a
perception that's not only clear-sighted but also quite impartial and impersonal, without even the shadow of a shadow of preference. Then, when one is in that perfect state — it can’t be said, of neutrality, it is not neutrality: it is a state of consciousness which is immobile like a mirror — then one can see within it the quality of the thing that’s happening, one can see the things that have been decided so that they cannot be altered and those that are still in the balance and can be changed.

To tell the truth, for each event the situation is different. There are some that can be changed completely, reversed altogether; there are some that are capable of undergoing quite a considerable change; there are others that can suffer only a slight modification — a slight modification but one that has a considerable consequence; and there are some that are inevitable; they are so because they are so; if you tried to oppose, you would break your head against a wall and that would serve no purpose. The whole thing is to have this perspicacity, know to which domain the event belongs and not will any other thing than what must be.

I could give hundreds of instances of different cases.

A thing seems to have been completely determined: it is going to be so. But you have within you a will that surges up, a flame that is kindled, a great aspiration that is in harmony with a higher Will and you force it upon the event. And then a kind of combination takes place: what had to happen will happen, but along with something else which comes at the same time and changes the nature of the former. For events of importance to the earth, this happens very often. For example, when an entire set of movements, circumstances, combinations of forces bring about an absolute necessity of war, one can, by calling in another force, change the extent and the consequences, and sometimes even the nature of the war, but one is not able to avert it. I could give you examples of this kind, of a very general nature.

I told you the other day with regard to the “spirit” of death, what can be done, through an inner action, to prevent Death
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from coming to someone’s house; but then it goes to another’s. You cannot deprive Death of what is its due. I have explained this to you. There are other cases where one might say in a somewhat childish way: “Death was not yet informed”, and so you can take away from it its booty without any consequences. But that does not always happen. There are cases when one does that. But put in this way it sounds childish like a fairy tale. Yet, it corresponds to something in the setting of the circumstances: it depends on the way the circumstances move.

What I would like to bring home to you is that the problem is extremely complicated and subtle, and that at times the direction of the movement can be altered a little; at other times, the movement can be reversed; and at still others just the consequences and the inner attitude with regard to the movement alone can be changed. And naturally men see all these things in a too simplified way and translate all this by their prayer to God: they say, in one case, “God has given me what I asked from him”, in another case, “He has refused me.” And so, that’s that. That is how they understand and it is sheer stupidity. To know how it happens, you must have a general, collective consciousness, at least as wide as the earth. That is the minimum. To understand truly one must have a universal consciousness. Then you can understand. For, I have said it somewhere in what I was reading today; I have said that all things are interdependent and there is neither any “beginning” nor any “end”. Where do you put the beginning?1 ... To understand that, you

1 “If you look from one plane of consciousness, the individual will appear to you as if he were not only an instrument and recorder, but a creator. But look from another and higher plane of consciousness with a wider view of things and you will see that this is only an appearance. In the workings of the universe whatever happens is the result of all that has happened before. How do you propose to separate one being from the integral play of the manifestation or one movement from the whole mass of movements? Where are you going to put the origin of a thing or its beginning? The whole play is a rigidly connected chain; one link merges imperceptibly into another. Nothing can be taken out of the chain and explained by itself as if it were its own source and beginning.”

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have to go beyond the earth-bound consciousness, you have to enter a universal consciousness. Then you will be able to understand.

But we are compelled — I am repeating what I said at the beginning — we are compelled to say things one after another. We say: “When the universe began... When the creation began... it begins in that way.... This happened and then that happened and then this took place and then that took place....” We say one thing after another, and to say the truth, it is not really like that at all! From a certain point of view, it is foolishness, but we cannot do otherwise. I cannot say all the words at the same time. So it is the state of our consciousness and the means at our disposal for expressing ourselves which make us say things that are stupid from the point of view of the absolute knowledge. But it is an approximation. Our stupidity is an approximation and becomes less stupid when we become aware that it happens only because we cannot express ourselves otherwise. We are obliged to say things in succession, but they are a single whole.

And for most people it is not merely a question of saying but of knowing. They know things only one after another, feel them still more thus, live them yet more so. But there is a consciousness in which one knows all at the same time, understands all at the same time, can express all at the same time and can live wholly at the same time. But how to do it? Here it is not like that!

And so, you see, what one tries to do is to bring the two modes of consciousness as near each other as one is able to, so that even while living externally in the way we are compelled to do (because the physical world is like that and our physical consciousness is like that), we may be able at the same time to join the other Consciousness so closely that while doing things according to the material law and in the material way, in our consciousness we may not lose sight of the fact that it is only an approximation, a translation, and that it is not the Thing itself.
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Mother, I do not understand the question put here: “If our will is only an expression or echo of the universal Will, where is the place of individual initiative? Is the individual only an instrument to register universal movements? Has he no power of creation or origination?”

Ah! Nor do I. When these questions were put to me, I had the utmost difficulty in answering them, for they were altogether outside my understanding of things. Here precisely, when I read the question, I felt like telling you: “I am very sorry, but the person who put the question had a terribly confused thought and consciousness, she was mixing up everything.” For there are three things mixed up here.

First of all, I do not know who told her that our will is only an expression or echo of the universal Will.... Perhaps I had said somewhere before that there is only one Will and it is translated or rather deformed in the individual consciousness and this Will is taken as one’s own will. I must have said something like that, and that our will becomes truly our own will by the fact that it separates itself from the initial universal Will and it is so deformed that it no longer resembles that Will at all. So, it must be that which worked in her head and she asked whether our will was only the expression or echo of the universal Will.

What place does there remain then for individual initiative... that is to say, what can the individual do? Can he say, “It is I who have decided? It is I, I have decided that?” Then the second question; but here I do not understand at all: “Is the individual merely an instrument for recording universal movements?” What does that mean? I do not understand quite well what was meant by that. An instrument for recording? A gramophone, probably, yes, for recording universal movements.... There are very few people who are capable of recording universal movements, to start with. Generally, they record only the movements
of their small surrounding, themselves and what’s around them. And then, a third idea is added to that: “Has he no power of creation?” This is yet another thing. But I answered (perhaps at that time I understood better what she meant than I do now!), I answered, for I speak of the three things in the text that follows. I said that only when the individual rises in his consciousness up to the highest Consciousness which is the origin of all things, where is the origin of all things, can he become a creator. That is to say, if he is identified with the creative Consciousness, he is naturally and he becomes the creative Consciousness. If he identifies himself, he is identified.2

So, what was it that was troubling you in the question? What did you not understand?

_Even the whole question._

The whole question? And now, do you understand?... Not quite? I told you that you did not understand because it was muddled up; in one question three different ideas were included. So naturally it created a confusion. But taken separately they are what I explained to you just now, most probably; that is to say, one has this altogether ignorant and obliterated consciousness and is convinced that he is the cause and effect, the origin and result of himself, separate from all others, separate with a limited power to act upon others and a little greater capacity to be set in movement by others or to react to others’ influence. That is how people think usually, something like that, isn’t that so? How do you feel, you? What effect do you have upon yourself? And you? And you?...

You have never thought about it? You have never looked

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2 “If a being were able to create in that way a thought or feeling or action or anything else, he would be the creator of the world.... He can initiate a movement only by identifying himself with the conscious Power which is the ultimate source of all movements.” 

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into yourself to see what effect you exercise upon yourself? Never thought over it? No? How do you feel? Nobody will tell me? Come, you tell me that. Never tried to understand how you feel? Yes? No? How strange! Never sought to understand how, for example, decisions take place in you? From where do they come? What makes you decide one thing rather than another? And what is the relation between a decision of yours and your action? And to what extent do you have the freedom of choice between one thing and another? And how far do you feel you are able to, you are free to do this or that or that other or nothing at all?... You have pondered over that? Yes? Is there any one among the students who has thought over it? No? Nobody put the question to himself? You? You?...

Even if one thinks over it, perhaps one is not able to answer!

One cannot explain?

No.

It is difficult to explain? Even this simple little thing, to see where in your consciousness the wills that come from outside meet your will (which you call yours, which comes from within), at what place the two join together and to what extent the one from outside acts upon that from within and the one from within acts upon that from outside? You have never tried to find this out? It has never seemed to you unbearable that a will from outside should have an action upon your will? No?

I do not know.

Oh! I am putting very difficult problems! But, my children, I was preoccupied with that when I was a child of five!... So I thought you must have been preoccupied with it since a long time.
In oneself, there are contradictory wills.

Yes, many. That is one of the very first discoveries. There is one part which wants things this way; and then at another moment, another way, and a third time, one wants still another thing! Besides, there is even this: something that wants and another which says no. So? But it is exactly that which has to be found if you wish in the least to organise yourself. Why not project yourself upon a screen, as in the cinema, and then look at yourself moving on it? How interesting it is!

This is the first step.

You project yourself on the screen and then observe and see all that is moving there and how it moves and what happens. You make a little diagram, it becomes so interesting then. And then, after a while, when you are quite accustomed to seeing, you can go one step further and take a decision. Or even a still greater step: you organise — arrange, take up all that, put each thing in its place, organise in such a way that you begin to have a straight movement with an inner meaning. And then you become conscious of your direction and are able to say: “Very well, it will be thus; my life will develop in that way, because that is the logic of my being. Now, I have arranged all that within me, each thing has been put in its place, and so naturally a central orientation is forming. I am following this orientation. One step more and I know what will happen to me for I myself am deciding it....” I do not know, I am telling you this; to me it seemed terribly interesting, the most interesting thing in the world. There was nothing, no other thing that interested me more than that.

This happened to me.... I was five or six or seven years old (at seven the thing became quite serious) and I had a father who loved the circus, and he came and told me: “Come with me, I am going to the circus on Sunday.” I said: “No, I am doing something much more interesting than going to the circus!” Or
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again, young friends invited me to attend a meeting where we were to play together, enjoy together: “No, I enjoy here much more....” And it was quite sincere. It was not a pose: for me, it was like this, it was true. There was nothing in the world more enjoyable than that.

And I am so convinced that anybody who does it in that way, with the same freshness and sincerity, will obtain most interesting results.... To put all that on a screen in front of yourself and look at what is happening. And the first step is to know all that is happening and then you must not try to shut your eyes when something does not appear pleasant to you! You must keep them wide open and put each thing in that way before the screen. Then you make quite an interesting discovery. And then the next step is to start telling yourself: “Since all that is happening within me, why should I not put this thing in this way and then that thing in that way and then this other in this way and thus wouldn’t I be doing something logical that has a meaning? Why should I not remove that thing which stands obstructing the way, these conflicting wills? Why? And what does that represent in the being? Why is it there? If it were put there, would it not help instead of harming me?” And so on.

And little by little, little by little, you see clearer and then you see why you are made like that, what is the thing you have got to do — that for which you are born. And then, quite naturally, since all is organised for this thing to happen, the path becomes straight and you can say beforehand: “It is in this way that it will happen.” And when things come from outside to try and upset all that, you are able to say: “No, I accept this, for it helps; I reject that, for that harms.” And then, after a few years, you curb yourself as you curb a horse: you do whatever you like, in the way you like and you go wherever you like.

It seems to me this is worth the trouble. I believe it is the most interesting thing.

*Mother, what is this little screen?*
This screen? It is the psychic consciousness.

And this play? Play? It is the play of the central consciousness. It is precisely the consciousness that is at the origin of the psychic being. And then there you have to take only a tiny step to find out how this psychic consciousness should reflect and translate the one supreme Consciousness. And there the matter ends. This last step becomes very easy.

But it is the secret that's discovered at the end. And when it is discovered, there is no more fighting, for the battle has already been fought and everything arranged; so it is in one single movement and in a way as simple, as natural and as straight as possible that the thing happens, without any reaction.

I think that is what the sages of the past meant when they said: “Know thyself.” Not anything else. But then, instead of going in there as if with a bandage on your eyes, and knocking your nose or forehead against something hard to find out that it is hard or that it is a wall or a closed door or an obstruction or some bad will; instead of all that, there is no need of years of experience and all kinds of misfortune and more or less unpleasant circumstances, in order to learn to know oneself: you do the work quietly, as I said.

When I did that, there was no cinema, so I could not compare what I was doing with the cinema — it was not yet there, but it is exactly like projecting on the screen what is inside,

3 “In the universal play there are some, the majority, who are ignorant instruments; they are actors who are moved about like puppets, knowing nothing. There are others who are conscious, and these act their part, knowing that it is a play. And there are some who have the full knowledge of the universal movement and are identified with it and with the one Divine Consciousness and yet consent to act as though they were something separate, a division of the whole. There are many intermediary stages between that ignorance and this full knowledge, many ways of participating in the play.”

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objectifying it. And a screen that’s all white, quite smooth, that 
does not deform. If the screen were not quite smooth and very 
white, your image would be all hazy, you would not be able 
to see anything. Well, it is the same thing. The screen must be 
very white, quite smooth, quite clean, quite pure. Then one sees 
things as they are.

You must have a great deal of sincerity, a little courage and 
perseverance and then a sort of mental curiosity, you understand, 
curious, seeking to know, interested, wanting to learn. To love to 
learn: that, one must have in one’s nature. To find it impossible 
to stand before something grey, all hazy, in which nothing is seen 
clearly and which gives you quite an unpleasant feeling, for you 
do not know where you begin and where you end, what is yours 
and what is not yours and what is settled and what is not settled 
— what is this pulp-like thing you call yourself in which things 
get intermingled and act upon one another without even your 
being aware of it? You ask yourself: “But why have I done this?” 
You know nothing about it. “And why have I felt that?” You 
don’t know that, either. And then, you are thrown into a world 
outside that is only fog and you are thrown into a world inside 
that is also for you another kind of fog, still more impenetrable, 
in which you live, like a cork thrown upon the waters and the 
waves carry it away or cast it into the air, and it drops and rolls 
on. That is quite an unpleasant state. I do not know, but to me 
it appears unpleasant.

To see clearly, to see one’s way, where one is going, why one 
is going there, how one is to go there and what one is going to 
do and what is the kind of relation with others... But that is a 
problem so wonderfully interesting — it is interesting — and you 
can always discover things every minute! One’s work is never 
finished.

There is a time, there is a certain state of consciousness 
when you have the feeling that you are in that condition with 
all the weight of the world lying heavy upon you and besides 
you are going in blinkers and do not know where you are going,
but there is something which is pushing you. And that is truly a very unpleasant condition. And there is another moment when one draws oneself up and is able to see what is there above, and one becomes it; then one looks at the world as though from the top of a very very high mountain and one sees all that is happening below; then one can choose one’s way and follow it. That is a more pleasant condition. This then is truly the truth, you are upon earth for that, surely. All individual beings and all the little concentrations of consciousness were created to do this work. It is the very reason for existence: to be able to become fully conscious of a certain sum of vibrations representing an individual being and put order there and find one’s way and follow it.

And so, as men do not know it and do not do it, life comes and gives them a blow here: “Oh! that hurts”, then a blow there: “Ah! that’s hurting me.” And the thing goes on like that and all the time it is like that. And all the time they are getting pain somewhere. They suffer, they cry, they groan. But it is simply due to that reason, there is no other: it is that they have not done that little work. If, when they were quite young, there had been someone to teach them to do the work and they had done it without losing time, they could have gone through life gloriously and instead of suffering they would have been all-powerful masters of their destiny.

This is not to say that necessarily all things would become pleasant. It is not at all that. But your reaction towards things becomes the true reaction and instead of suffering, you learn; instead of being miserable, you go forward and progress.

After all, I believe it is for this that you are here — so that there is someone who can tell you: “There, well, try that. It is worth trying.” Indeed, this should be said when children are quite young. For unless it be awakened in their consciousness, they won’t understand. Yet it can be done even with a very young brain, for at five one doesn’t have a very big brain; you have particularly the feeling that there are gaps, that many things
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should be known but are not known. The brain has not yet been formed. There is the consciousness there, fully conscious, luminous, clear-sighted, all is there; but there are gaps, and when one tries to draw anything out of it, it does not come through. That is what happens when one is quite young. But if one continues little by little, little by little, the ideas are organised as they come, and instead of being a chaos which must be put into order afterwards, it gets organised as it takes shape. It is a great advantage.

Anyway, you are all still very young. You can try. Try for five minutes every day — not more — looking at yourself, seeing what happens there, within. It is so interesting!