“To complete this movement of inner discovery, it is good not to neglect the mental development. For the mental instrument can be equally a great help or a great hindrance. In its natural state the human mind is always limited in its vision, narrow in its understanding, rigid in its conceptions, and a certain effort is needed to enlarge it, make it supple and deep.”

“The Science of Living”, On Education

Unfortunately, most people, the more they think, the more they believe themselves superior. The mind is satisfied with itself and does not aspire much for progress — it thinks it knows everything. And many people believe that their way of thinking is the best; they cannot understand that there are always several ways of thinking about the same subject. And the more their thought is strong and precise, the more are they convinced that there is only one way of thinking. That is why I have said here that certain exercises can enlarge your thought and give you the habit of seeing things from several points of view at the same time:

“It is very necessary that one should consider everything from as many points of view as possible. There is an exercise in this connection which gives great suppleness and elevation to thought; it is as follows. A clearly formulated thesis is set; against it is opposed the antithesis, formulated with the same precision. Then by careful reflection, the problem must be widened or transcended until a synthesis is found which unites the two contraries in a larger, higher and more comprehensive idea.”

Ibid.
Questions and Answers

Give me a thesis.

X: *Thesis: Each one carries his cross in the world. Antithesis: There are men who are above all human affliction.*

And the synthesis?

Y: *There is one part of the being in everyone which is above all affliction.*

Z: *There are different types of people in the world.*

W: *The cross is necessary to leap beyond suffering.*

That is not a synthesis.

X: *In my thesis I spoke of ordinary men. In the antithesis I speak of extraordinary men.*

Yes, but you believe that extraordinary men do not have their cross! Even higher beings have their cross to bear.

It is a question of a difference of consciousness. In some it is the external states of consciousness which are most developed; others, on the contrary, have taken care to develop the higher states of consciousness. So, to say “each one bears his cross” is true of the external consciousness (of material happenings, happenings which touch the vital being, the emotional being and the mental being); for such people there will always be a considerable number of catastrophes, all the more because catastrophes seem to be proportionate to the capacity of the individual, they seem to be dealt out according to his capacity to bear things. It may just be that those who have greater capacities have an over-plus of suffering and misfortune.
But there are people who are above all misfortune and yet misfortunes exist for them. Why? Because the inner consciousness in them is stronger, more developed than the other consciousness (I do not speak here of “transformed” beings, for in them one can conceive of a state of things in which even the physical being is above suffering; we are speaking of men as they are at present). If your consciousness is seated in a place where these external things do not exist, then it may be said that you do not bear your cross because you are above it. Yet there are exceptions, there are human beings who are above afflictions, yet carry their cross. How can we reconcile these two apparently contradictory things?

_Misfortunes are of different kinds._

No, human miseries and misfortunes are always of the same nature; there are sufferings that come from yourself, from circumstances or from the general state of things, that is, you are subject to these sufferings from your birth and none can escape them. They do not always have the same intensity but they are always there. Hence it seems there is a contradiction and yet this is not correct: because for some people it is as if the thing did not exist, even when it exists! As if it was not, even while it was! Neither the one nor the other is wholly true, neither the one nor the other is wholly false.

There is a state of human consciousness (it is not yet superhuman, it is truly human) in which the two things may coexist. One may have sufferings and not feel them, be as if they did not exist. That is, a misfortune, a “cross” touches only the outer consciousness, the physical, the mental, the vital, but the psychic — in truth, the psychic is above all suffering. Let us take a very simple example: an illness. A physical disorder brings suffering, at times much suffering, but there are people who are in such a state of consciousness that their physical sufferings do not exist, they are not real for them. It is the same thing with separation;
Questions and Answers

if you love someone and are separated from that person, you suffer — this is one of the most common of sufferings, it is the ties which are broken — well, in a certain state of consciousness the real link between two beings cannot be broken, for it does not belong to the domain where things break. Therefore one is above what may happen.

But before one reaches a higher state of consciousness, there is a stage where one can develop in oneself the faculty of reason — a clear, precise, logical reason, sufficiently objective in its vision of things. And when one has developed this reason well, all impulses, feelings, desires, all disturbances can be put in the presence of this reason and that makes you reasonable. Most people, when something troubles them, become very unreasonable. When, for example, they are ill, they pass their time saying, “Oh, how ill I am, how frightful it is; is it going to last like that all the time?” And naturally it gets worse and worse. Or when some misfortune befalls them, they cry out: “It is only to me that these things happen and I was thinking that everything was fine before”, and they burst into a fit of tears, a fit of nerves. Well, not to speak of superman, in man himself there is a higher capacity called reason, which is able to look at things calmly, coolly, reasonably. And this reason tells you, “Don’t worry, that will improve nothing, you must not grumble, you must accept the thing since it has come.” Then you immediately become calm. It is a very good mental training, it develops judgment, vision, objectivity and at the same time it has a very healthy action upon your character. It helps you to avoid the ridiculousness of giving way to your nerves and lets you behave like a reasonable person.

There is one thing very difficult for the mind to do but very important, according to me: you must never allow your mind to judge things and men. To say, “This is good, that is bad, this is right, that is wrong, this one has this defect, that one has that bad thing, etc.” — this is depreciatory judgment.

For people who exercise their intelligence, the more intelligent they are, the more do they grow aware that they know
nothing at all and that with the mind one can know nothing. One may think in a particular way, judge and see in a particular way, but one is never sure of anything — and never will be sure of anything. One can always say, “Perhaps it is like that” or “Perhaps it is like this” and so on, indefinitely, because the mind is not an instrument of knowledge.

Above the thoughts, there are pure ideas; thoughts serve to express pure ideas. And Knowledge is well above the domain of pure ideas, as these are well above thought. One must hence know how to climb from thought to pure idea, and pure idea is itself nothing but a translation of Knowledge. And Knowledge can be obtained only by a total identification. So, when you put yourself in your small human mentality, the mentality of the physical consciousness which is at work all the time, which looks at everything, judges everything from the height of its derisive superiority, which says, “That is bad, it should not be like that”, you are sure to be always mistaken, without exception. The best is to keep silent and look well at things, and little by little you make notes within yourself and keep the record without pronouncing any judgment. When you are able to keep all that within you, quietly, without agitation and present it very calmly before the highest part of your consciousness, with an attempt to maintain an attentive silence, and wait, then perhaps, slowly, as if coming from a far distance and from a great height, something like a light will manifest and you will know a little more of truth.

But as long as you excite your thoughts and cut them up into little bits, you will never know anything. I shall repeat this to you a hundred times if necessary, but I can assure you that so long as you are not convinced of this you will never come out of your ignorance.

*Is there an exact number of pure ideas?*

To know that, you must go and see the Supreme and ask Him! I am not interested in statistics!
Questions and Answers

Here is a little story. One of my friends had made a trip to India and was requested to give an account of his travels. An old, very credulous lady was there and she asked him, “In India, do they count the souls?” He answered, “Yes.” “How many are there?” asked the old lady. He answered, “One only.”