Sweet Mother, if someone falls seriously ill, is this a purely physical phenomenon or is it a difficulty in his spiritual life?

That depends on the person! If it is someone who is doing yoga, it is quite obviously a difficulty in his spiritual life. If it is somebody who is not at all engaged in yoga and who lives an ordinary life in the most ordinary manner, it is an ordinary accident. It depends absolutely on the person. The outer phenomena may be similar, but the inner causes are absolutely different. No two illnesses are alike, though labels are put on diseases and attempts made to group them; but in fact every person is ill in his own way, and his way depends on what he is, on his state of consciousness and the life he leads.

We have often said that illnesses are always the result of a disturbance of equilibrium, but this disturbance can occur in completely different states of being. For the ordinary man whose consciousness is centred in the physical, outer life, it is a purely physical disturbance of equilibrium, of the functioning of the different organs. But when behind this purely superficial life, an inner life is being fashioned, the causes of illness change; they always become the expression of a disequilibrium between the different parts of the being; between the inner progress or effort and the outer resistances or conditions of one’s life, one’s body.

Even from the ordinary external point of view, it has been recognised for a very long time that it is a fall in the resistance of the vitality due to immediate moral causes which is always at the origin of an illness. When one is in a normal state of equilibrium and lives in a normal physical harmony, the body has a capacity of resistance, it has within it an atmosphere strong enough to resist illnesses: its most material substance emanates
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subtle vibrations which have the strength to resist illnesses, even
diseases which are called contagious — in fact, all vibrations are
contagious, but still, certain diseases are considered as especially
contagious. Well, a man who, even from the purely external
point of view, is in a state in which his organs function harmo-
niously and an adequate psychological balance prevails, has at
the same time enough resistance for the contagion not to affect
him. But if for some reason or other he loses this equilibrium or
is weakened by depression, dissatisfaction, moral difficulties or
undue fatigue, for instance, this reduces the normal resistance
of the body and he is open to the disease. But if we consider
someone who is doing yoga, then it is altogether different, in
the sense that the causes of disequilibrium are of a different
nature and the illness usually becomes the expression of an inner
difficulty which has to be overcome.

So each one should find out for himself why he is ill.

From the ordinary point of view, in most cases, it is usually
fear — fear, which may be mental fear, vital fear, but which is
almost always physical fear, a fear in the cells — it is fear which
opens the door to all contagion. Mental fear — all who have a
little control over themselves or any human dignity can eliminate
it; vital fear is more subtle and asks for a greater control; as for
physical fear, a veritable yoga is necessary to overcome it; for
the cells of the body are afraid of everything that is unpleasant,
painful, and as soon as there is any unease, even if it is insignifi-
cant, the cells of the body become anxious, they don’t like to be
uncomfortable. And then, to overcome that, the control of a con-
scious will is necessary. It is usually this kind of fear that opens
the door to illnesses. And I am not speaking of the first two types
of fear which, as I said, any human being who wants to be human
in the noblest sense of the word, must overcome, for that is cow-
ardice. But physical fear is more difficult to overcome; without it
even the most violent attacks could be repelled. If one has a min-
imum of control over the body, one can lessen its effects, but that
is not immunity. It is this kind of trembling of material, physical
fear in the cells of the body which aggravates all illnesses.

Some people are spontaneously free from fear even in their body; they have a sufficient vital equilibrium in them not to be afraid, not to fear, and a natural harmony in the rhythm of their physical life which enables them to reduce the illness spontaneously to a minimum. There are others, on the other hand, with whom the thing always becomes as bad as it can be, sometimes to the point of catastrophe. There is the whole range and this can be seen quite easily. Well, this depends on a kind of happy rhythm of the movement of life in them, which is either harmonious enough to resist external attacks of illness or else doesn’t exist or is not sufficiently powerful, and is replaced by that trembling of fear, that kind of instinctive anguish which transforms the least unpleasant contact into something painful and harmful. There is the whole range, from someone who can go through the worst contagion and epidemics without ever catching anything to one who falls ill at the slightest chance. So naturally it always depends on the constitution of each person; and as soon as one wants to make an effort for progress, it naturally depends on the control one has acquired over oneself, until the moment when the body becomes the docile instrument of the higher Will and one can obtain from it a normal resistance to all attacks.

But when one can eliminate fear, one is almost in safety. For example, epidemics, or so-called epidemics, like those which are raging at present — ninety-nine times out of a hundred they come from fear: a fear, then, which even becomes a mental fear in its most sordid form, promoted by newspaper articles, useless talk and so on.

*Mother, how are medicines to be used for a body which is not altogether unconscious? For even when we draw on the divine grace, we see that we need a little medicine, and if a little medicine is given it has a good effect. Does this mean that only the body needs medicine or is there something wrong with the mind and the vital?*
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In most cases the use of medicines — within reasonable limits, that is, when one doesn't poison oneself by taking medicines — is simply to help the body to have confidence. It is the body which heals itself. When it wants to be cured, it is cured. And this is something very widely recognised now; even the most traditional doctors tell you, “Yes, our medicines help, but it is not the medicines which cure, it is the body which decides to be cured.” Very well, so when the body is told, “Take this”, it says to itself, “Now I am going to get better”, and because it says “I am going to get better”, well, it is cured!

In almost every case, there are things which help — a little — provided it is done within reasonable limits. If it is no longer within reasonable limits, you are sure to break down completely. You cure one thing but catch another which is usually worse. But still, a little help, in a way, a little something that gives confidence to your body: “Now it will be all right, now that I have taken this, it is going to be all right” — this helps it a great deal and it decides to get better and it is cured.

There too, there is a whole range of possibilities, from the yogi who is in so perfect a state of inner control that he could take poison without being poisoned to the one who at the least little scratch rushes to the doctor and needs all sorts of special drugs to get his body to make the movement needed for its cure. There is the whole possible range, from total, supreme mastery to an equally total bondage to all external aids and all that you absorb from outside — a bondage and a perfect liberation. There is the whole range. So everything is possible. It is like a great key-board, very complex and very complete, on which one can play, and the body is the instrument.

Mother, by a mental effort — for instance, the resolution not to take medicines when one is ill — can one succeed in making the body understand?

That is not enough. A mental resolution is not enough, no.
are subtle reactions in your body which do not obey the mental resolution, it is not enough. Something else is needed.

Other regions must be contacted. A power higher than the mind’s is needed.

And from this point of view, all that is in the mind is always subject to inner questioning. You take a resolution but you can be sure that something will always come in which perhaps may not openly fight this resolution but will question its effectiveness. It is enough, you see, to be subject to the least doubt for the resolution to lose half its effect. If at the same time as you say “I want”, there is something silently lurking, somewhere behind, in the background, something which asks itself, “What will the result be?” that is enough to ruin everything.

This play of the mind’s working is extremely subtle and no ordinary human means can succeed in controlling it perfectly. For instance, this is well known among people who practise yoga and want to control their body: if through an assiduous yogic effort they have succeeded in controlling something in themselves — a particular weakness of the body, an opening to a certain disequilibrium — if they have managed to do this and had some result, for instance the disappearance of this disequilibrium for a very long time, for years, well, if one day at a particular moment, suddenly, the thought crosses their mind that “Ah! Now it is done”, the very next minute it returns. That is enough. For it proves that they have come into contact with the vibrations of the thing they had rejected, on a plane where they are vulnerable, the plane of thought, and that for some reason or other in the play of forces, they are open, and it comes back.

This is something very well known in yoga. The simple fact of observing the victory one has gained — observing it mentally, you see, thinking about it — is enough to destroy the effect of the yoga which may have existed for years. A mental silence strong enough to prevent all outer vibrations from coming in, is indispensable. Well, that is something so difficult to achieve that one must really have passed from what Sri Aurobindo
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calls “the lower hemisphere” to the higher, exclusively spiritual hemisphere, for it not to happen.

No, it is not in the mental field that the victories are won. It is impossible. It is open to all influences, all contradictory currents. All the mental constructions one makes carry their own contradiction with them. One can try to overrule it or make it as harmless as possible, but it exists, it is there, and at the slightest weakness or lack of vigilance or inadvertance, it enters, and destroys all the work. Mentally, one arrives at very few results, and they are always mixed. Something else is needed. One must pass from the mind into the domain of faith or of a higher consciousness, to be able to act with safety.

It is quite obvious that one of the most powerful means for acting on the body is faith. People who have a simple heart, not a very complicated mind — simple people, you see — who don’t have a very great, very complicated mental development but have a very deep faith, have a great power of action over their bodies, very great. That is why one is quite surprised at times: “Here’s a man with a great realisation, an exceptional person, and he is a slave of all the smallest physical things, while this man, well, he is so simple and looks so uncouth, but he has a great faith and goes through difficulties and obstacles like a conqueror!”

I don’t say that a highly cultured man can’t have faith, but it is more difficult, for there is always this mental element which contradicts, discusses, tries to understand, which is difficult to convince, which wants proofs. His faith is less pure. It is necessary, then, to pass on to a higher degree in the evolutionary spiral, pass from the mental to the spiritual; then, naturally, faith takes on a quality of a very high order. But I mean that in daily life, ordinary life, a very simple man who has a very ardent faith can have a mastery over his body — without it being truly a “mastery”; it is simply a spontaneous movement — a control over his body far greater than somebody who has reached a much higher development.
19 June 1957

Mother, I am asking you a small personal question. An incurable illness, an organic disease has been cured by your grace, but a purely functional illness is not. How can that be? In the same body. Is it a lack of receptivity or...?

It is something so personal, so individual, that it is impossible to reply. As I said, for each one the case is absolutely different, and one can’t give an explanation for these things without going into the details of the functioning. For each one, the case is different.

And for every thing, every event, there are as many explanations as there are planes of consciousness. In a way... well, in an over-simplified way, one may say that there is a physical explanation, a vital explanation, a mental explanation, a spiritual explanation, there is... There is an entire gradation of countless explanations that you could give for the same phenomenon. None is altogether true, all have an element of truth. And finally, if you want to enter the field of explanations, if you take one thing and follow it up, you always have to explain it by another, and you may go round the world indefinitely and explain one thing by another without ever reaching the end of your explanation.

Indeed, when one sees this in its totality and its essence, the wisest thing one can say is: “It is like that because it is like that.”