“At every moment one must know how to lose all in order to gain all.” What does this mean?

We have already spoken about this. When we enter upon the path of yoga, why do our dear ones leave us? One loses all worldly possessions, all one’s attachments; sometimes, even, one loses one’s position, and to gain what? — the most important thing, the only thing which is valuable: the divine Consciousness. And to gain this one must know how to lose all the goods of this world, to let go of all one’s possessions, all desires, all attachments, all satisfactions; one must know how to lose all this if one wants to get the divine Consciousness.

It is a little paradoxical for the mind.

You have said that after finishing their development psychic beings could go to other worlds; yet, the psychic being belongs exclusively to the earth, doesn’t it?

But the psychic being is not material, it is psychic! It is not bound to the material world; as soon as it stops living in a body, it goes away to the psychic world which is very far from being a material world.

How can one transform the vital?

The first step: will. Secondly, sincerity and aspiration. But will and aspiration are almost the same thing, one follows the other. Then, perseverance. Yes, perseverance is necessary in any process, and what is this process?... First, there must be the ability to observe and discern, the ability to find the vital in oneself, otherwise you will find it hard to say: “This comes from the
vital, this comes from the mind, this from the body.” Everything will seem to you mixed and indistinct.

After a very sustained observation, you will be able to distinguish between the different parts and recognise the origin of a movement. Quite a long time is necessary for this, but one can go quite fast also, it depends upon people. But once you have found out the different parts ask yourself, “What is there of the vital in this? What does the vital bring into your consciousness? In what way does it change your movements; what does it add to them and what take away? What happens in your consciousness through the intervention of the vital?” Once you know this, what do you do?... Then you will need to watch this intervention, observe it, find out in what way it works. For instance, you want to transform your vital. You have a great sincerity in your aspiration and the resolution to go to the very end. You have all that. You start observing and you see that two things can happen (many things can happen) but mainly two.

First, a sort of enthusiasm takes hold of you. You set to work earnestly. In this enthusiasm you think, “I am going to do this and that, I am going to reach my goal immediately, everything is going to be magnificent! It will see, this vital, how I am going to treat it if it doesn’t obey!” And if you look carefully you will see that the vital is saying to itself, “Ah, at last, here’s an opportunity!” It accepts, it starts working with all its zeal, all its enthusiasm and... all its impatience.

The second thing may be the very opposite. A sort of uneasiness: “I am not well, how tedious life is, how wearisome everything. How am I going to do all that? Will I ever reach the goal? Is it worth while beginning? Is it at all possible? Isn’t it impossible?” It is the vital which is not very happy about what is going to be done for it, which does not want anyone to meddle in its affairs, which does not like all that very much. So it suggests depression, discouragement, a lack of faith, doubt — is it really worth the trouble?
These are the two extremes, and each has its difficulties, its obstacles.

Depression, unless one has a strong will, suggests, “This is not worth while, one may have to wait a lifetime.” As for enthusiasm, it expects to see the vital transformed overnight: “I am not going to have any difficulty henceforth, I am going to advance rapidly on the path of yoga, I am going to gain the divine consciousness without any difficulty.” There are some other difficulties.... One needs a little time, much perseverance. So the vital, after a few hours — perhaps a few days, perhaps a few months — says to itself: “We haven’t gone very far with our enthusiasm, has anything been really done? Doesn’t this movement leave us just where we were, perhaps worse than we were, a little troubled, a little disturbed? Things are no longer what they were, they are not yet what they ought to be. It is very tiresome, what I am doing.” And then, if one pushes a little more, here’s this gentleman saying, “Ah, no! I have had enough of it, leave me alone. I don’t want to move, I shall stay in my corner, I won’t trouble you, but don’t bother me!” And so one has not gone very much farther than before.

This is one of the big obstacles which must be carefully avoided. As soon as there is the least sign of discontentment, of annoyance, the vital must be spoken to in this way, “My friend, you are going to keep calm, you are going to do what you are asked to do, otherwise you will have to deal with me.” And to the other, the enthusiast who says, “Everything must be done now, immediately”, your reply is, “Calm yourself a little, your energy is excellent, but it must not be spent in five minutes. We shall need it for a long time, keep it carefully and, as it is wanted, I shall call upon your goodwill. You will show that you are full of goodwill, you will obey, you won’t grumble, you will not protest, you will not revolt, you will say ‘yes, yes’, you will make a little sacrifice when asked, you will say ‘yes’ whole-heartedly.”

So we get started on the path. But the road is very long. Many things happen on the way. Suddenly one thinks one has
overcome an obstacle; I say “thinks”, because though one has overcome it, it is not totally overcome. I am going to take a very obvious instance, of a very simple observation. Someone has found that his vital is uncontrollable and uncontrolled, that it gets furious for nothing and about nothing. He starts working to teach it not to get carried away, not to flare up, to remain calm and bear the shocks of life without reacting violently. If one does this cheerfully, it goes quite quickly. (Note this well, it is very important: when you have to deal with your vital take care to remain cheerful, otherwise you will get into trouble.) One remains cheerful, that is, when one sees the fury rise, one begins to laugh. Instead of being depressed and saying, “Ah! In spite of all my effort it is beginning all over again”, one begins to laugh and says, “Well, well! One hasn’t yet seen the end of it. Look now, aren’t you ridiculous, you know quite well that you are being ridiculous! Is it worthwhile getting angry?” One gives it this lesson cheerfully. And really, after a while it doesn’t get angry again, it is quiet — and one relaxes one’s attention. One thinks the difficulty has been overcome, one thinks a result has at last been reached: “My vital does not trouble me any longer, it does not get angry now, everything is going fine.” And the next day, one loses one’s temper. It is then one must be careful, it is then one must not say, “Here we are, it’s no use, I shall never achieve anything, all my efforts are futile; all this is an illusion, it is impossible.” On the contrary, one must say, “I wasn’t vigilant enough.” One must wait long, very long, before one can say, “Ah! It is done and finished.” Sometimes one must wait for years, many years....

I am not saying this to discourage you, but to give you patience and perseverance — for there is a moment when you do arrive. And note that the vital is a small part of your being — a very important part, we have said that it is the dynamism, the realising energy, it is very important; but it is only a small part. And the mind!... which goes wandering, which must be pulled back by all the strings to be kept quiet! You think this can be done
overnight? And your body?... You have a weakness, a difficulty, sometimes a small chronic illness, nothing much, but still it is a nuisance, isn’t it? You want to get rid of it. You make efforts, you concentrate; you work upon it, establish harmony, and you think it is finished, and then.... Take, for instance, people who have the habit of coughing; they can’t control themselves or almost can’t. It is not serious but it is bothersome, and there seems to be no reason why it should ever stop. Well, one tells oneself, “I am going to control this.” One makes an effort — a yogic effort, not a material one — one brings down consciousness, force, and stops the cough. And one thinks, “The body has forgotten how to cough.” And it is a great thing when the body has forgotten, truly one can say, “I am cured.” But unfortunately it is not always true, for this goes down into the subconscious and, one day, when the balance of forces is not so well established, when the strength is not the same, it begins again. And one laments, “I believed that it was over! I had succeeded and told myself, ‘It is true that spiritual power has an action upon the body, it is true that something can be done’, and there! it is not true. And yet it was a small thing, and I who want to conquer immortality! How will I succeed?... For years I have been free from this small thing and here it is beginning anew!” It is then that you must be careful.

You must arm yourself with an endless patience and endurance. You do a thing once, ten times, a hundred times, a thousand times if necessary, but you do it till it gets done. And not done only here and there, but everywhere and everywhere at the same time. This is the great problem one sets oneself. That is why, to those who come to tell me very light-heartedly, “I want to do yoga”, I reply, “Think it over, one may do the yoga for a number of years without noticing the least result. But if you want to do it, you must persist and persist with such a will that you should be ready to do it for ten lifetimes, a hundred lifetimes if necessary, in order to succeed.” I do not say it will be like that, but the attitude must be like that. Nothing must discourage you; for there are all the difficulties of ignorance
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of the different states of being, to which are added the endless malice and the unbounded cunning of the hostile forces in the world.... They are there, do you know why? They have been tolerated, do you know why? — simply to see how long one can last out and how great is the sincerity in one's action. For everything depends upon your sincerity. If you are truly sincere in your will, nothing will stop you, you will go right to the end, and if it is necessary for you to live a thousand years to do it, you will live a thousand years to do it.

Does not the vital seek its own transformation? It aspires but it is always the victim of things, of impulsions from outside.

If it seeks to transform itself, it is truly wonderful! And if it aspires for transformation, it will try to free itself. If the vital is weak, its aspiration will be weak. And mark that weakness is an insincerity, a sort of excuse one gives oneself — not very, very consciously perhaps, but you must be told that the subconscious is a place full of insincerity. And the weakness which says, “I would like it so much, but I can’t” is insincerity. Because, if one is sincere, what one cannot do today one will do tomorrow, and what one cannot do tomorrow one will do the day after, and so on, until one can do it. If you understand once for all that the entire universe (or, if you like, our earth, to concentrate the problem) is nothing other than the Divine who has forgotten Himself, where will you find a place for weakness there? Not in the Divine surely! Then, in forgetfulness. And if you struggle against forgetfulness you struggle against weakness, and to the extent you draw closer to the Divine your weakness disappears.

And that holds good not only for the mind, but also for the vital and even for the body. All suffering, all weaknesses, all incapabilities are, in the last analysis, insincerities.

There are many places where insincerity may be lodged, and hence it should never be said as so often people say to me, “I
am perfectly sincere.” It is like those who assure you, “I have never told a lie.” If you were perfectly sincere, you would be the Divine, if you had never told a lie, that is, something that is not true, you would be the Truth! So, as you are neither the Divine nor the Truth in fact (you are that in essence but not in fact), you have always a long way to go to reach the Truth and sincerity.

You need not look unhappy because it is like that.

It is like those people in despair who tell you, “Why is the world so frightful?” What is the use of lamenting, since it is like that? The only thing you can do is to work to change it. Naturally, from a speculative point of view one may try to understand, but the human mind is incapable of understanding such things. For the moment it is quite useless. What is useful is to change it. We all agree that the world is detestable, that it is not what it ought to be, and the only thing we have to do is to work to make it otherwise. Consequently, our whole preoccupation should be to find the best means of making it different; and we can understand one thing, it is that the best means (though we do not know it quite well yet), is we ourselves, isn’t it? And surely you know yourself better than you know your neighbour — you understand better the consciousness manifested in a human being than that manifested in the stars, for instance. So, after a little hesitation you could say, “After all, the best means is what I am. I don’t know very well what I am, but this kind of collection of things that I am, this perhaps is my work, this is perhaps my part of the work, and if I do it as well as I can, perhaps I shall be doing the best I can do.” This is a very big beginning, very big. It is not overwhelming, not beyond the limits of your possibilities. You have your work at hand, it is always within your reach, so to say, it is always there for you to attend to it — a field of action proportionate to your strength, but varied enough, complex, vast, deep enough to be interesting. And you explore this unknown world.

Many people tell you, “But then this is egoism!” It is egoism
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if you do it in an egoistic way, for your personal profit, if you try to acquire powers, to become powerful enough to influence others, or if you seek means to make a comfortable life for yourself. Naturally, if you do it in this spirit, it will be egoistic. But the beauty of it is that you will not get anywhere! You will begin by deceiving yourself, you will live in increasing illusions and you will fall back into a greater and greater obscurity. Consequently, things are organised much better than one thinks; if you do your work egoistically (we have said that our field of work is always within our reach), it will come to nothing. And hence the required condition is to do it with an absolute sincerity in your aspiration for the realisation of the divine work. So if you start like that I can assure you that you will have such an interesting journey that even if it takes very long, you will never get tired. But you must do it like that with an intensity of will, with perseverance and that indispensable cheerfulness which smiles at difficulties and laughs at mistakes. Then everything will go well.

What mirror is that which can reflect the Supreme?

Consciousness itself. It is because that is there, without it one would never get anywhere. If the supreme Consciousness were not at the centre of all creation, never could the creation become aware of the Consciousness.

To transform the vital one must have will, perseverance, sincerity, etc. But in what part of the being are all these things found?

The source of sincerity, of will, of perseverance is in the psychic being, but this translates itself differently in different people. Generally it is in the higher part of the mind that this begins to take shape, but for it to be effective at least one part of the vital must respond, because the intensity of your will comes from
there, the realising power of the will comes from its contact with the vital. If there were only refractory elements in the vital, you would not be able to do anything at all. But there is always something, somewhere, which is willing — it is perhaps something insignificant, but there is always something which is willing. It is enough to have had once one minute of aspiration and a will even if it be very fugitive, to become conscious of the Divine, to realise the Divine, for it to flash like lightning through the whole being — there are even cells of the body which respond. This is not visible all at once, but there is a response everywhere. And it is by slowly, carefully, putting together all these parts which have responded, though it be but once, that one can build up something which will be coherent and organised, and which will permit one’s action to continue with will, sincerity and perseverance.

Even a fleeting idea in a child, at a certain moment in its childhood when the psychic being is most in front, if it succeeds in penetrating through the outer consciousness and giving the child just an impression of something beautiful which must be realised, it creates a little nucleus and upon this you build your action. There is a vast mass of humanity to whom one would never say, “You must realise the Divine” or “Do yoga to find the Divine.” If you observe well you will see that it is a tiny minority to whom this can be said. It means that this minority of beings is “prepared” to do yoga, it is that. It is that there has been a beginning of realisation — a beginning is enough. With others it is perhaps an old thing, an awakening which may come from past lives. But we are speaking of those who are less ready; they are those who have had at a certain moment a flash which has passed through their whole being and created a response, but that suffices. This does not happen to many people. Those ready to do yoga are not many if you compare them with the unconscious human mass. But one thing is certain, the fact that you are all here proves that at least you have had that — there are those who are very far on the path (sometimes they have no
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idea about it), but at least all of you have had that, that kind
of spontaneous integral contact which is like an electric shock,
a lightning-flash which goes through you and wakes you up to
something: there is something to be realised. It is possible that
the experience is not translated into words, only into a flame.
That is enough. And it is around this nucleus that one organises
oneself, slowly, slowly, progressively. And once it is there it never
disappears. It is only if you have made a pact with the adverse
forces and make a considerable effort to break the contact and
not notice its existence, that you may believe it has disappeared.
And yet a single flash suffices for it to come back.

If you have had this just once, you may tell yourself that in
this life or another you are sure to realise.