

Chapter Four

Transformation and the Body

The Transformation of the Body

It is quite true that the surrender and the consequent transformation of the whole being is the aim of the Yoga — the body is not excluded, but at the same time this part of the endeavour is the most difficult and doubtful — the rest, though not facile, is comparatively less difficult to accomplish. One must start with an inner control of the consciousness over the body, a power to make it obey more and more the will or the force transmitted to it. In the end as a higher and higher Force descends and the plasticity of the body increases, the transformation becomes possible.

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It is absolutely idle to think of transforming the body when other things that are so much easier to do — though of course none is easy — are not done. The inner must change before the outermost can follow. So what is the use of such a concentration — unless one thinks that everything else is perfect, which would be a rather astonishing claim. What has to be done with the body at first is to make it open to the Force, so as to receive strength against illness and fatigue — when they come, there must be the power to react and throw them off and to keep a constant flow of force into the body. If that is done, the rest of the bodily change can wait for its proper time.

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The supramental perfection means that the body becomes conscious, is filled with consciousness and that as this is the Truth consciousness all its actions, functionings etc. become by the power of the consciousness within it harmonious, luminous, right and true — without ignorance or disorder.

The Hathayogic method is to bring an immense vital force into the body and by this and by certain processes keep it strong and in good health and a capable instrument.

The Transformation of the Body in Other Traditions

It [*a body of light seen by the correspondent in a vision*] is the luminous body spoken of in the Veda as possessed by the beings of the higher planes. It is supposed by certain schools of Yoga in the East and West that in the final transformation on earth man will develop a body having these qualities. It was called the *corps glorieux*, “body of glory”, by the Mother’s first spiritual instructor.

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It has been the idea of many who have speculated on the subject that the body of the future race will be a luminous body (*corps glorieux*) and that might mean radio-active.¹ But also it has to be considered (1) that a supramental body must necessarily be one in which the consciousness determines even the physical action and reaction to the most material and these therefore are not wholly dependent on material conditions or laws as now known, (2) that the subtle process will be more powerful than the gross, so that a subtle action of Agni will be able to do the action which would now need a physical change such as increased temperature.

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I did not intend to evade anything, except that in so far as I do not yet know what will be the chemical constitution of the changed body, I could not answer anything to that. That was why I said it needed investigation.

I was simply putting my idea on the matter which has always been that it is the supramental which will create its own

¹ *The correspondent asked whether the chemicals in a transformed body would become “more Peace-active, Light-active, Force-active (as we say, radio-active)”.* — Ed.

physical basis. If you mean that the supramental cannot *fulfil itself* in the present body with its present processes that is true. The processes will obviously have to be altered. How far the constitution of the body will be changed and in what direction is another question. As I said it may become as you suggest radio-active: Théon (Mother's teacher in occultism) spoke of it as luminous, *le corps glorieux*. But all that does not make it impossible for the supramental to act in the present body for change. It is what I am looking forward to at present.

Of course a certain preliminary transformation is necessary, just as the psychic and spiritual transformation precedes the supramental. But this is a change of the physical consciousness down to the submerged consciousness of the cells so that they may respond to higher forces and admit them and to a certain extent a change or at least a greater plasticity in the processes. The rules of food etc. are meant to help that by minimising obstacles. How far this involves a change of the chemical constitution of the body I cannot say. It seems to me still that whatever preparatory changes there may be, it is only the action of the supramental Force that can confirm and complete them.

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If the consciousness cannot determine the physical action and reaction in the present body, if it needs a different basis, then that means this different basis must be prepared by different means. By what means? Physical? The old Yogis tried to do it by physical tapasya; others by seeking the elixir of life etc. According to this Yoga, the action of the higher Force and consciousness which includes the subtle action of Agni has to open and prepare the body and make it more responsive to Consciousness-Force instead of being rigid in its present habits (called laws). But a different basis can only be created by the supramental action itself. What else but the supermind can determine its own basis?

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I read the Bible, — very assiduously at one time. When I have looked at it, it has always given me a sense of imprecision in the

thought-substance, in spite of the vividness of the expression, and that makes it very difficult to be sure about these things. This passage about the body, for instance — although St. Paul had remarkable mystic experiences and, certainly, much profound spiritual knowledge (profound rather than wide, I think) — I would not swear to it that he is referring to the supramentalised body (*physical body*). Perhaps to the supramental body or to some other luminous body in its own space and substance, which he found sometimes as if enveloping him and abolishing this body of death which he felt the material envelope to be. This verse like many others is capable of several interpretations and might refer to a quite supraphysical experience. The idea of a transformation of the body occurs in different traditions, but I have never been quite sure that it meant the change in this very matter. There was a Yogi some time ago in this region who taught it, but he hoped when the change was complete, to disappear in light. The Vaishnavas speak of a divine body which will replace this one when there is the complete siddhi. But, again, is this a divine physical or supraphysical body? At the same time there is no obstacle in the way of supposing that all these ideas, intuitions, experiences point to, if they do not exactly denote, the physical transformation.

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The physical Nature does not mean the body alone but the phrase includes the transformation of the whole physical mind, vital, material nature — not by imposing siddhis on them, but by creating a new physical nature which is to be the habitation of the supramental being in a new evolution. I am not aware that this has been done by any Hathayogic or other process. Mental or vital occult power can only bring siddhis of the higher plane into the individual life — like the Sannyasi who could take any poison without harm, but he died of a poison after all when he forgot to observe the conditions of the siddhi. The working of the supramental power envisaged is not an influence on the physical giving it abnormal faculties, but an entrance and permeation changing it wholly into a supramentalised physical. I did not

learn the idea from Veda or Upanishad, and I do not know if there is anything of the kind there. What I received about the supermind was a direct, not a derived knowledge given to me; it was only afterwards that I found certain confirmatory revelations in the Upanishad and Veda.

Transforming the Body Consciousness

That [*stopping at each stage of transformation in order to deal with the body*] is hardly possible. The body consciousness is there and cannot be ignored, so that one can neither transform the higher parts completely leaving the body for later dealing nor make each stage complete in all its parts before going to the next. I tried that method but it never worked. A predominant overmentalisation of mind and vital is the first step, for instance, when overmentalising, but the body consciousness retains all the lower movements unovermentalised and until these can be pulled up to the overmental standard, there is no overmental perfection, always the body consciousness brings in flaws and limitations. To perfect the overmind one has to call in the supramental force and it is only when the overmind has been partially supramentalised that the body begins to be more and more overmental. I do not see any way of avoiding this process, though it is what makes the thing so long.

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The fallacy of the argument [*that after supramentalisation severe attacks on the body will still be possible*] lies in the premiss laid down in the beginning that even after supramentalisation difficulties and attacks will continue. In the supramental consciousness such attacks are not possible — the coexistence of the supramental and the lower darkness in the same being and body is not possible. It is precisely for that reason that the supramentalisation of the body consciousness is laid down as the condition of the successful transformation. If attacks continue and can come in successfully, it means that the body consciousness is not yet supramentalised.

Death and the Supramental Transformation

The change of the consciousness is the necessary thing and without it there can be no physical siddhi. But the fullness of the supramental change is not possible if the body remains as it is, a slave of death, disease, decay, pain, unconsciousness and all the other results of the ignorance. If these are to remain the descent of the supramental is hardly necessary — for a change of consciousness which would bring mental-spiritual union with the Divine, the Overmind is sufficient, even the Higher Mind is sufficient. The supramental descent is necessary for a dynamic action of the Truth in mind, vital and body. This would imply as a final result the disappearance of the unconsciousness of the body; it would no longer be subject to decay and disease. That would mean that it would not be subject to the ordinary processes by which death comes. If a change of body had to be made, it would have to be by the will of the inhabitant. This (not an obligation to live 3000 years, for that too would be a bondage) would be the essence of physical immortality. Still, if one wanted to live 1000 years or more, then supposing one had the complete siddhi, it should not be impossible.

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Death is necessary in the evolution, because the body can progress no longer — cannot suffice any longer as an instrument for the progress or evolution of the consciousness — it has to change its physical instrument and get a new one. If something can be brought into the body that will make it a plastic instrument for the soul, then only death is no longer necessary. If the supramental transformation is complete that is what should happen.

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It [*death*] has no separate existence by itself, it is only a result of the principle of decay in the body and that principle is there already — it is part of the physical nature. At the same time it is not inevitable; if one could have the necessary consciousness

and force, decay and death is not inevitable. But to bring that consciousness and force into the whole of the material nature is the most difficult thing of all — at any rate in such a way as to annul the decay principle.

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Immunity from death by anything but one's own will to leave the body, immunity from illness are things that can be achieved only by a complete change of consciousness which each man has to develop in himself, — there can be no automatic immunity without that achievement.

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That² is the argument of the Mayavadin to whom all manifestation is useless and unreal because it is temporary — even the life of the gods is no use because it is in Time, not in the Timeless. But if manifestation is of any use, then it is worthwhile having a perfect manifestation rather than an imperfect one. “Have to be left willingly” is a contradiction in terms. One keeps the body as long as one wills, with an illumined will, leaves it or changes it according to the same will. That is a very different thing from a body assailed constantly by desire and suffering and death brought on by decay or illness. Always assuming that the divine manifestation or any manifestation is worthwhile.

As for the second argument,³ change and progress are not excluded from the supramental life. I do not see why the change of cells, supposing it continues in the supramentalised body, takes away from the value of the transformation, if it is a change to something equally or more conscious and luminous.

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Well, don't you know that old men sometimes get a new or third set of teeth in their old age? And if monkey glands can renew

² *The correspondent asked, “What is the need of transformation if the body will have to be left willingly or unwillingly?” — Ed.*

³ *The correspondent asked, “Since the body cells undergo changes from second to second, what value has the transformation of the body?” — Ed.*

functionings and forces and can make hair grow on a bald head, as Voronoff has proved by living examples, — well? And mark that Science is only at the beginning of these experiments [*to prolong life*]. If these possibilities are opening before Science, why should one declare their absolute impossibility by other means?

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There is no ambiguity that I can see.⁴ “*En fait*” and “*attachée*” do not convey any sense of inevitability. “*En fait*” means simply that in fact, actually, as things are at present all life (on earth) has death attached to it as its end; but it does not in the least convey the idea that it can never be otherwise or that this is the unalterable law of all existence. It is at present a fact for certain reasons which are stated, — due to certain mental and physical circumstances — if these are changed, death is not inevitable any longer. Obviously the alteration can only come “if” certain conditions are satisfied — all progress and change by evolution depends upon an “if” which gets satisfied. If the animal mind had not been pushed to develop speech and reason, mental man would never have come into existence, — but the “if”, a stupendous and formidable one, was satisfied. So with the ifs that condition a farther progress.

The Conquest of Death

As for the conquest of death, it is only one of the sequelae of supramentalisation — and I am not aware that I have forsworn my views about the supramental descent. But I never said or thought that the supramental descent would automatically make everybody immortal. The supramental descent can only make the best conditions for anybody who can open to it then or thereafter attaining to the supramental consciousness and its

⁴ Sri Aurobindo is referring to the ambiguity seen by the correspondent in two statements of the Mother: “If this belief [in the necessity of death] could be cast out . . . death would no longer be inevitable” and “Death as a fact has been attached to all life upon earth. . . .” (*The Mother*, Questions and Answers 1929-1931, 2003 ed., p. 36) *The correspondent read these statements in French. — Ed.*

consequences. But it would not dispense with the necessity of sadhana. If it did, the logical consequence would be that the whole earth, men, dogs and worms, would suddenly wake up to find themselves supramental. There would be no need of an Asram or of Yoga.

What is vital is the supramental change of consciousness — conquest of death is something minor and, as I have always said, the last physical result of it, not the first result of all or the most important — a thing to be added to complete the whole, not the one thing needed and essential. To put it first is to reverse all spiritual values — it would mean that the seeker was actuated not by any high spiritual aim but by a vital clinging to life or a selfish and timid seeking for the security of the body — such a spirit could not bring the supramental change.

Certainly, everything depends on my success. The only thing that could prevent it, so far as I can see, would be my own death or the Mother's. But did you imagine that that [*my success*] would mean the cessation of death on this planet, and that sadhana would cease to be necessary for anybody?

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There can be no immortality of the body without supramentalisation; the potentiality is there in the Yogic force and Yogis can live for 200 or 300 years or more, but there can be no real principle of it without the Supramental.

Even Science believes that one day death may be conquered by physical means and its reasonings are perfectly sound. There is no reason why the Supramental Force should not do it. Forms on earth do not last (they do in other planes) because these forms are too rigid to grow expressing the progress of the spirit. If they become plastic enough to do that, there is no reason why they should not last.

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Death is there because the being in the body is not yet developed enough to go on growing in the same body without the need of change and the body itself is not sufficiently conscious. If

the mind and vital and the body itself were more conscious and plastic, death would not be necessary.

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As for immortality, it cannot come if there is attachment to the body, — for it is only by living in the immortal part of oneself which is unidentifed with the body and bringing down its consciousness and force into the cells that it can come. I speak of course of Yogic means. The scientists now hold that it is (theoretically at least) possible to discover physical means by which death can be overcome, but that would mean only a prolongation of the present consciousness in the present body. Unless there is a change of consciousness and change of functioning, it would be a very small gain.

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Immortality is one of the possible results of supramentalisation, but it is not an obligatory result and it does not mean that there will be an eternal or indefinite prolongation of life as it is. That is what many think it will be, that they will remain what they are with all their human desires and the only difference will be that they will satisfy them endlessly; but such an immortality would not be worth having and it would not be long before people are tired of it. To live in the Divine and have the divine consciousness is itself immortality and to be able to divinise the body also and make it a fit instrument for divine works and divine life would be its material expression only.

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It depends on the consciousness [*whether one wants to live a long life*]. As it is, at present, most people do not get tired of life; they die because they must, not because they want to — at least, that is true of the vital; it is only a minority that tire of life and for many of these it is due to the discomforts of old age, continued ill-health, misfortune. Supposing a consciousness descended in the body that got rid of these discomforts, would people get tired of life in the same way merely because of its

length or would they have some source of perpetual interest within as well as without that would keep them on — that is the question. Of course physical immortality would not mean that one is tied down to the body, but that one is not subject to disease and death, but can keep or leave the body at will. I don't know whether Ashwatthaman lives on because he cannot die or because he won't die — whether it is for him a doom or a privilege. There are by the way animals that live for many centuries, but as they have not the philosophic mind the question for them does not arise — probably they take it as a matter of course.

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What you say about being tired of life, is true. Edison's family was very long lived but his grandfather after a century found it too long and died because he wanted to. On the other hand there are men who are strongly vital and do not get tired of life, like the Turk who died recently at 150, I think, but was still eager to live.

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The ideal would be not to be subject to Death, but to change the body whenever it is necessary with full consciousness.

The Reproductive Method of the Supramental

The [*reproductive*] method of the supramental is more likely to be psychological than material. But these are things that we leave to the Supermind to arrange when it is there.

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It is not at all certain that the hereditary method will be used for the reproduction of supermen. If it were used, the seed would have to be very different from what it is now — and the question would not arise.