25 May 1955

Mother reads from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Human Cycle*, Chapter 14, “The Suprarational Beauty”.

I can see that you haven’t understood three-fourths of the thing. Now we shall go slowly, step by step.

(To a child) Ask a question just from where it begins; simply say, “Here, what does this mean?”

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*Here, Sweet Mother, it is written: “…the intellectual reason may well be an insufficient help and find itself, not only at the end but from the beginning, out of its province and condemned to tread… diffidently…”*

So?

*So, by what do we begin if it is not by the intellect?*

By what should one begin?

*Yes, with the help of what?*

You see, Sri Aurobindo defines religion as the seeking after the spiritual, that is, the Supermind, of what is beyond the ordinary human consciousness, and what ought to influence life from a higher realm. So, as religion seeks this it is beyond the reason, because it goes to the suprarational. And so how can reason help in the realm of religion? What he means is that if one uses reason to judge the field of religion and progress in it, one is sure to make mistakes, because reason is not the master there and it is not capable of enlightening. If you want to judge any religion with your reason, you are sure to make mistakes, for
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it is outside and beyond the field of reason. Reason can judge things which belong to the rational domain of ordinary life. And as he says later, the true role of reason is to be like a control and an organiser of the movements of human life in the mind and the vital.

Each time, for example, that one has some kind of vital disorder, of the passions, desires, impulses and all these things, if one calls the reason and looks at these things from the point of view of reason, one can put them back into order. It is truly the role of reason to organise and regulate all the movements of the vital and the mind. For instance, you can call the reason in order to see whether two ideas can go together or whether they contradict each other, whether two theories can stand side by side in your mental construction or one demolishes the other. It belongs to the domain of reason to judge and organise all these things, and also perhaps still more it is the work of reason to see whether the impulses are reasonable or not, whether they will lead to a catastrophe or can be tolerated and will not disturb anything in the life. So, this is its full domain; that’s what Sri Aurobindo says.

But in order to know the value of a religion, whether it truly has the power to put you into contact with the Divine, with the spiritual life, to lead you to it, how can the reason judge, since it is beyond its domain? It knows nothing about it. It is not its field, it understands nothing there. We must use other means. Naturally, that’s how he begins, at the end he will say what means one can use; I don’t know whether it is at the end of these chapters, but in any case he always gives an indication. That’s what this means; he says: Don’t use reason, you cannot judge with it — that’s all.

*Is the reason always right in its own domain?*

Reason? Yes. If it is really reason, it is right. It is not absolutely right if one looks at things from the spiritual point of view, for
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it understands nothing in these domains, but from the rational point of view it is naturally the sovereign judge.

For everything that concerns the ordinary life, and as I say, the mental, vital and physical life of man, a perfectly reasonable being, one who lives according to his reason, cannot make a mistake from this point of view. It is only if one says, “Human life restricted to these planes is not complete, nor perfect in these three planes, it is necessary to introduce a fourth one in it, the spiritual or suprarational plane”, then from this point of view we begin to say, “Reason understands nothing of this, and here it must keep quiet and let the suprarational influence work.” But from the viewpoint of the ordinary life, for people who lead the ordinary life, who do not want to do yoga or develop spiritually, reason is certainly an absolute and very recommendable master. People who live according to reason are usually very sattwic and do not commit any kind of excesses or make serious mistakes, they live reasonably. It is only when one comes out of the ordinary life, when one wants to enter a life leading to a spiritual realisation, that the reason has to abdicate. It can help all the same so long as one is not the absolute master of the movements of his mind and vital. As long as these two things are not transformed, to use your reason is very reasonable, because it will help you to master these movements.

Another question?

(To another child) You have understood, haven’t you? — understood something in any case. No? Then ask a question.

_Sweet Mother, what is the suprarational beauty?

Ah! That, my child, when we have read the chapter you will know, because that’s the very subject of the chapter. So he is going to explain it to you right through. If I tell you about it now it won’t be worth the trouble to read the chapter. (_Laughter_)
Of the mind properly speaking, of the human mind, yes, certainly. That is, with the reason one doesn’t risk making mistakes, as long as one remains in the purely human and purely mental domain.

How can reason become an obstacle to the spiritual life?

Because it understands nothing about it. Spiritual life goes beyond it, it is not its domain, and it doesn’t understand anything there. It is a very good instrument for all ethics, morality, self-control, but spiritual life goes beyond these things and reason understands nothing of it.

But if one truly has reason, then reason has to admit that the spiritual life is higher!

Yes.

Then why does it become an obstacle?

On condition that it keeps quiet, does not intervene any more... if it tries to intervene it is an obstacle, if it withdraws in an orderly way and remains quiet, then it is very good.

It is an obstacle if you want to use it as judge and master. But it is not an obstacle if you use it as an instrument, like all the other parts of the being. It is an excellent instrument on condition that it remains an instrument and doesn’t want to become the master who decides and judges. It is a power of judgment which, in its field, is absolutely right. But as soon as it goes beyond its domain, it cannot understand, it has no discernment any longer.

So if the reason understands this and keeps quiet, with the attitude of an instrument and not of master and judge, it is perfect. But for this the growing consciousness must already be developed enough in a suprarational domain to be able to
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act on the reason from above and make it understand the thing, because that domain is not a part of reason. So naturally it denies it unless there is a part of the consciousness which is sufficiently developed to be able to put something upon it that will make it understand. All depends on the degree of development of the individual’s consciousness. It is a purely individual question.

Mother, when you speak of the suprarational domain, is it a domain higher than the reason or is it a special domain?

It is rather a state than a domain. In the physical it is possible to have a suprarational domain, in the vital it is possible to have a suprarational domain, in the mind too it is possible to have a suprarational domain, and there are suprarational regions which lie beyond all these domains. In a certain part of the consciousness and of life it is rather a state than a region. It is a mode of being. It is something which goes beyond the state of ordinary consciousness. But even physically it can be experienced, vitally also. Suddenly one may feel that one is in contact with something surpassing all rational regions and it is there, in the vital itself, it is an influence acting from above. Otherwise it would be absolutely impossible to hope for the transformation of the lower parts of the being — either mental or vital or physical; they could never be transformed if they were incapable of receiving into themselves the suprarational influence; and it is here, it is to be found, to be discovered.

Sweet Mother, here Sri Aurobindo has written: “On one side it (the reason) is an enlightener — not always the chief enlightener...”

Yes, this is what we said, that in the rational domain that’s what gives the true judgment, the true guidance. This is what we call an enlightener: one who gives light. When you are not sure of
something, when you are in darkness, in a confusion, if you call to reason, it can guide you very well, make you see clearly where you were in darkness; therefore it is an enlightener. Now, “minister of the Spirit” means precisely what he was asking, that is, that it can be transformed into an instrument for revealing the spiritual reality in the lower parts of the being; “minister of the Spirit” — that’s what it means; a minister is an instrument of something, you see, it means the instrument of the Spirit. And it can prepare the paths for the coming of the rule of the Spirit, precisely make the being balanced and peaceful, right in its judgments, right in its way of acting, so that being in a state of luminous equilibrium, it becomes capable of receiving the Spirit.

A being who is in a whirlwind of darkness is obviously not ready to receive the Spirit. But when by the use of reason one has managed to organise his being logically and reasonably, in a balanced and wise way — reason is essentially an instrument of wisdom — well, this is an excellent preparation for going beyond, on condition that one knows that it is not a culmination, that it is only a preparation. It is like a base, you see; people who have spiritual experiences, who have a contact with the higher worlds and are not ready in the lower domains, have a lot of trouble, because they have to fight constantly against a heap of elements which are neither organised nor purified nor classified; and each one pulls its own way, there are impulses and preferences and desires, and so this light which has come from above has to organise all this; whereas if the reason had worked to begin with and made the place at least a habitable one, when the Spirit came it would have been more easily installed.

How can the reason be developed?

Oh! By using it. Reason is developed like the muscles, like the will. All these things are developed by a rational use. Reason! Everyone possesses reason, only he doesn’t make use of it. Some people are very much afraid of reason because it contradicts
impulses. So they prefer not to listen to it. Then, naturally, if one makes it a habit not to listen to reason, instead of developing, it loses its light more and more.

To develop reason you must want to do it sincerely; if on one side you tell yourself, “I want to develop my reason”, and on the other you don’t listen to what the reason tells you to do, then you never come to anything, because naturally, if each time it tells you, “Don’t do this” or “Do this”, you do the opposite, it will lose the habit of saying anything at all.

Mother, even in ordinary life, how can reason help in the appreciation of beauty, for example?

It cannot do it. That’s exactly what Sri Aurobindo is going to tell you in here: that reason is quite useless for appreciating beauty. In the last analysis, it is worthless, because beauty is something analogous to religion and goes beyond reason. The whole chapter is going to explain this to you. That is why he calls it the suprarational beauty. The higher principle of beauty is a suprarational principle and therefore reason understands nothing at all about it. If you want to judge art by reason you are sure to say foolish things.

In here (I think it is in this very chapter), he shows that beauty belongs to a domain as lofty as that of religion; that through beauty one can come into contact with the Divine even as through religion. And the next chapter is “The Suprarational Good”, and there he is going to show that reason cannot be the final judge also for what is good and not good; that the final judge is a suprarational judge. Only, in the same way, it can be a preparation, it can prepare the road by which to go there; but it is only a preparation. Of course, to understand fully what he wanted to tell us, we should have to read the entire book. But that way it would take us something like ten years, so I am not trying. I have taken only these because these two subjects are very interesting, apart from all the others: beauty and the good.
Beauty is the aesthetic instinct of man, and the good is his ethical instinct, and these two things are very important in human education and growth; and that is why I have chosen these two chapters for you. But to have the full development of the idea you must read the whole book. Later you will read it... perhaps some of you will have the curiosity to read it.

_Sweet Mother, what do aesthetic and ethical mean?_

Aesthetic is what is concerned with beauty, and ethical with the good.

Look, my children, if there are words which you don’t understand, take a dictionary and look them up. Because that will teach you the language and at the same time you will learn a little French. But, these words are the same in English; you ought to know them. They are written a little differently, pronounced a little differently, but they are exactly the same words.

_Mother, here Sri Aurobindo says: “In its own sphere of finite knowledge, science, philosophy, the useful arts, its right, one would think, must be indisputable. But this does not turn out in the end to be true...”_

_Then what should be the function of reason in the study of science, philosophy and the useful arts?_

A function of preparation, as I said; it is in order to prepare for something higher which is suprarational and which must come. It is a preparation. You see, he has said, “one would think”, it means that it is just an impression one has that its right is indisputable. It is not indisputable. He says that its province is vast, you see, that its powers are ample, that its action is more self-confident, but it always finds itself standing between the two other powers of our being, the infrarational and the suprarational. It is an intermediary to free us from the infrarational influence — that of all the instincts, all the desires, all the
passions, all the impulses — to free us from this domain and prepare for the coming of the suprarational one. Therefore it is an instrument of mediation, of transition, and in this intermediating... in this region, it is the best master. But it cannot go further. There is a point where it loses its power. When one is ready for the suprarational intervention, well, it has to keep quiet; and if for example, by an inner development, by a yogic action you have managed to come into contact with a divine consciousness and receive inspirations from this divine consciousness, if at this moment you want to judge these inspirations by the reason, then you are sure to make stupid mistakes, because reason understands nothing of this, and it should abdicate. But you must be sure that it is truly a contact with the divine Force; and to be sure of this... well, until one is sure of it, reason is very good for preventing you from deceiving yourself.

Usually people who have a tendency for not altogether ordinary experiences find reason very troublesome; and even before being ready to surpass its action they reject it, and that is how usually they become absolutely unreasonable and end up by being half-mad. That is why, so long as you don’t have an absolute certainty of having reached where you want to go, well, you must keep the reason very active in yourself in order to prevent yourself from becoming derailed. This is very, very important. One cannot dethrone reason unless the experience of the higher regions is so absolute, so true, so complete, that it compels recognition. It is not a very frequent thing. So I always advise people to keep their reason. But there’s a point where it must cease having its superior rights — that’s to judge spiritual experience, because it cannot judge this, it does not understand it; but it must truly be a spiritual experience, not something which tries to imitate it; here an absolute sincerity is necessary. One must not deceive oneself through ambition, or indeed let oneself be deceived by any odd humbugs who come and tell you extraordinary stories in order to make you believe in their superiority.
That’s all?

To prepare the path means...?

Oh! What does it mean, to prepare the path?

Have you never had the feeling in your life that you were on the way towards something? No? One doesn’t have the impression that when he is born he begins to set his feet on a road which is going to lead him by a curve through his whole life? That’s the image. So if you take the path which must lead you to a spiritual realisation, well, it means that all your actions are deliberately going to be directed to this goal. And so he says that there is a bit of the way which is under the control of reason and that reason, if you follow it, helps you to go forward here without your making mistakes too often. For it is quite remarkable that in life you start without knowing anything, and that at each step you take you have to learn, and that usually you come to the end, to the end of the path, without having learnt anything very much, because too often you make mistakes and you have nothing to guide you.

Ordinary people enter life without even knowing what it is to live, and at each step they have to learn how to live. And before knowing what they want to realise, they must at least know how to walk; as we teach a tiny little child how to walk, in life one has also to learn how to live. Which people know how to live? And it is through experience, through mistakes, through all kinds of misfortunes and troubles of every sort that gradually one begins to be what is called reasonable, that is, when one has made a mistake a certain number of times and has had troublesome consequences from this mistake, one learns not to make it again. But there is a moment, when the brain is developed enough and you can use the reason, well, reason can help you to reduce the number of these mistakes, to teach you to walk the path without stumbling too often.

The immense majority of human beings are born, live and
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die without knowing why this has happened to them. They take it... it is like that; they are born, they live, they have what they call their joys and their sorrows, and they come to the end and go away. They came in and went out without learning anything. This indeed is the immense majority.

There is among them a small number of people called the *élite*, who try to know what has happened to them, why they are upon earth and why all that happens to them happens. Then among these there are some who use their reason and they find a way of walking properly on the path, much faster than the others. These are reasonable beings.

Now there is a handful — a big handful — of people who are born with the feeling that there is something else to find in life, a higher purpose to life, that there is an aim, and they strive to find it. So for these the path goes beyond reason, to regions which they have to explore either with or without help, as chance takes them, and they must then discover the higher worlds. But there are not many of this kind. I don't know how many of these there are now in the world, but I have the impression that they could still be counted. So for these it depends on when they begin.

Now there are beings, I think, who are born and whose rational period of life may begin very early, when they are very young, and it may last for a very short time; and then they are almost immediately ready to set out on new and unexplored paths towards the higher realities. But in order to set out on these paths without fear and without any danger, one must have organised his being with the help of reason around the highest centre he consciously possesses, and organised it in such a way that it is inwardly in his control and he has not to say at every moment, "Ah! I have done this, I don't know why. Ah! That's happened to me, I don't know why" — and always it is "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know", and as long as it is like that, the path is somewhat dangerous. Only when one does what he wants, knows what he wants, does what he wants and is able to direct himself with certitude, without being tossed about by the
hazards of life, then one can go forward on the suprarational paths fearlessly, unhesitatingly and with the least danger. But one need not be very old for this to happen. One can begin very young; even a child of five can already make use of reason to control himself; I know it. There is enough mental organisation in the being in these little tots who look so spontaneous and irresponsible; there is enough cerebral organisation for them to organise themselves, their life, their nature, their movements, actions and thoughts with reason.

There are some little ones here of this kind. They are not all like that but there are some. There are some like that here, I know them. So if these were taught how to use their reason properly while still very young, they would be ready to start on the great adventure. They would gain much time. But one must not set out on this road with a baggage of impulses and desires, for that brings along all kinds of serious disturbances.

There, my children, that's all?

Nobody is saying a word?

(To a child) You have still something to say?

Do the laws of Nature follow the law of human reason?

Oh, no!

Then how can we explain so many laws of Nature by human reason?

Because human reason is higher than Nature.

Nature is infrarational. The laws of Nature are infrarational laws. So when men come along and tell you, “But what do you want, it is the law of Nature”, as for me, it makes me laugh. It is not worth being a man, it would be better for you to be a monkey or an elephant or a lion. The laws of Nature are infrarational.
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This is the only superiority that man has, his having a reason, and when he doesn’t make use of it he becomes absolutely an animal.

That’s the last excuse to give: “What do you want, it’s the law of Nature!”

It is late, otherwise I would tell you a few stories.

We must stop.