24 November 1954

This talk is based upon Sri Aurobindo’s *Bases of Yoga*, Chapter 2, “Faith – Aspiration – Surrender”.

“To keep the psychic awake and in front”: what does “in front” mean, Sweet Mother?

That is to say, in the forefront of the consciousness, instead of being pushed behind, in a background which is only very rarely seen; to keep it right in front of the consciousness, in the active consciousness. In any case, you must want it and try to do it.

“Desire... leads to pulling down the force”: what does this mean?

You see, one has an aspiration for Light, for Knowledge, for all kinds of things. Now, if a desire is mixed with your aspiration, instead of simply aspiring and awaiting the answer, you begin to pull, as one draws things when one desires them — you draw them to yourself. So instead of waiting for the Force and Light and Consciousness and Truth to answer your aspiration, you pull them down like that, towards yourself with a very egoistical movement, as though you were pulling a rope or something, and so anything at all can come in answer. Instead of its being, for example, a true light, it can be a false light which takes brilliant appearances to deceive you; instead of its being a true force, it can be an adverse force of the vital which wants to take possession of you. It means that when one has an aspiration, it is better that no desires get mixed up in it, because desires always spoil everything.

What does “inner tapasya” mean, exactly?
Questions and Answers

Inner tapasya? It means the tapasya for the character, and for changing the psychological movements of the being, precisely to conquer the desires, conquer the passions, overcome egoism, get rid of fears. This is the inner tapasya.

Outer tapasya is all the ascetic or hathayogic methods; to make use of physical means for one’s yoga is an outer tapasya. But inner tapasya consists of attending to one’s character and trying to change it.

*Sweet Mother, what is the difference between willing and desiring?*

They are not at all the same thing. When you see that something ought to be done, for instance, that it is good to do it — take your reason: say your reason decides that this ought to be done — then your will starts working and makes you do the things required for this thing to be done. Your will is an executing power, which ought to be at the disposal, the service of what was decided by the reason or a higher force. It is something coordinated, organised, which acts in accordance with a plan, precisely in a fully controlled way.

Desire is an impulse. It takes hold of you... it doesn’t necessarily hold you with any conscious thought. It is an impulse which pushes you to get possession of something. You can put your will at the service of your desire, but desire is not will. Desire is an impulse. There are people who are full of desires and who have no will. So they simply are eaten up, as we say, by their desires; but this leads to nothing, because they don’t even have the will to realise them. Most people always put the little bit of will that’s at their disposal at the service of their desires. But will is a force with a power of organisation and it can be put at the service of any purpose whatever. It is something that, when one has will-power, one has [ . . . ]\(^1\) to a definite purpose. This is will.

\(^1\) Words missing in transcript.
You must not mistake desire for will. Desire is an impulse: it
seizes you, you know, it clings to you, holds you. And then, if you
let desire do what it likes, well, it makes you do anything at all,
and it makes use of your will. But usually, a desire is something
violent, passionate and transient. Rarely is it very sustained; it
does not have the stuff, the organisation of a sustained effort.
When a desire seizes you, it can make you do anything whatever
— but impulsively, not methodically.

_Sweet Mother, why do some children have the habit of
always asking for things?_

What things?

_Material things, like sweets, everything they see..._

Oh, because they are full of desires. They were probably formed
with vibrations of desires, and as they have no control over
themselves it is expressed freely. Older people are also full of de-
sires, but usually they have a kind of... how do we call it?... they
are a little shy of showing their desires or they feel a bit ashamed
or perhaps are afraid they will be laughed at; so they don’t show
them. Well, they too are full of desires. Only children are more
simple. When they want something they say so. They don’t tell
themselves that perhaps it would be wiser not to show this,
because they don’t yet have this kind of reasoning. But I think,
generally speaking, with very few exceptions, that people live in
perpetual desires. Only, they don’t express them, and sometimes
they are ashamed also to acknowledge it to themselves. But it
is there, this need of having something... you know, one sees
something pretty, it is immediately translated into a desire for
possession; and this is one of the things... it is absolutely childish.
It is childish and indeed it is ridiculous, because at least ninety
times out of a hundred, when the one who had a desire for
something possesses it, he doesn’t even look at it any longer. It
is very rarely that this thing continues to interest him once he has it, whatever the nature of the object.

_Sweet Mother, how can we help a child to come out of this habit of always asking?_

There are many ways. But first of all you must know whether you will not just stop him from freely expressing what he thinks and feels. Because this is what people usually do. They scold, even sometimes punish him; and so the child forms the habit of concealing his desires. But he is not cured of them. And you see, if he is always told, “No, you won’t have that”, then, simply, this state of mind gets settled in him: “Ah, when you are small, people don’t give you anything! You must wait till you are big. When I am big I shall have all that I want.” That’s how it is. But this does not cure them. It is very difficult to bring up a child. There is a way which consists in giving him all he wants; and naturally, the next minute he will want something else, because that’s the law, the law of desire: never to be satisfied. And so, if he is intelligent, one can tell him, “But you see, you insisted so much on having this and now you no longer care for it. You want something else.” Yet if he was very clever he would answer, “Well, the best way of curing me is to give me what I ask for.”

Some people cherish this idea all their life. When they are told that they should overcome their desires, they say, “The easiest way is to satisfy them.” This kind of logic seems impeccable. But the fact is that it is not the object desired that has to be changed, it is the impulse of desire, the movement of desire. And for this a great deal of knowledge is needed, and this is difficult for a very young child.

It is difficult. Indeed, they don’t have the capacity for reasoning; one can’t explain things to them, because they don’t understand the reasons. So you see, when it is like that the parents usually tell the child, “Keep quiet, you are a nuisance!” In this way they get out of the difficulty. But this is no solution. It
is very difficult. It asks for a sustained effort and an unshakable patience. Some people are like that all their life; they are like babies throughout their existence and it is impossible to make them see reason. As soon as one tells them that they are not reasonable and that one can’t all the time be giving them things to satisfy their desires, they simply think, “These people are unpleasant. This person is not nice.” That’s all.

In fact, perhaps one should begin by shifting the movement to things which it is better to have from the true point of view, and which it is more difficult to obtain. If one could turn this impulsion of desire towards a... For example, when a child is full of desires, if one could give him a desire of a higher kind — instead of its being a desire for purely material objects, you understand, an altogether transitory satisfaction — if one could awaken in him the desire to know, the desire to learn, the desire to become a remarkable person... in this way, begin with that. As these things are difficult to do, so, gradually, he will develop his will for these things. Or even, from the material point of view, the desire to do something difficult, as for example, construct a toy which is difficult to make — or give him a game of patience which requires a great deal of perseverance.

If one can orient them — it requires much discernment, much patience, but it can be done — and if one can orient them towards something like this, to succeed in very difficult games or to work out something which requires much care and attention, and can push them in some line like this so that it exercises a persevering will in them, then this can have results: turn their attention away from certain things and towards others. This needs constant care and it seems to be a way that’s most — I can’t say the easiest, for it is certainly not easy — but the most effective way. To say “No” does not cure and to say “Yes” does not cure either; and sometimes it becomes extremely difficult also, naturally.

I knew people, for example, whose children wanted to eat everything they saw. They were allowed to do it. So they fell
Questions and Answers

very ill. After that, they felt disgusted. But this is a little risky, isn’t it? There are children who fidget with everything. Now, one day, you see, one child got hold of a box of matches. Then, instead of telling him, “Don’t touch it”, they let him do it: he burnt himself. He never touched them again.

But it is a little dangerous, because some children are altogether unconscious and very bold in their desires: for example, those who like to walk on the edge of a wall or the top of a roof or have the desire to plunge into water when they see it or to dive into a river... you see, this becomes sometimes very difficult... or those who have the mania for crossing the street: each time they see a car coming... they try to cross it. So if they are allowed to do so, the experience may one day be fatal.

Well, I knew people who did this. I don’t know if they succeeded much in it. As I said, the child was burnt, but this was a nuisance because it left scars. And then too, one who played quite unthinkingly on the railing of a staircase and fell and half-broke his head... you see, this has its consequences. But to say “No” to them too doesn’t cure them, quite the contrary. And to tell them, “Especially don’t take this, this will harm you” — they don’t believe it; they think it is just to get rid of their desire.

It is a very difficult problem. There was someone who had ideas like this, on freedom in education and who made theories to tell me that individual freedom should be respected to the extent of never making use of past experience for new people, and that we ought to leave them to make all their experiments themselves. This goes very far and they criticised me very much because I was trying to prevent accidents. So they told me, “You are absolutely wrong in preventing them.” So I said, “But if someone dies?” — “Well, it means he had to die. You have no right to intervene in their destiny and the freedom of their development. They want to commit stupidities, let them do stupid things. When they realise that these are stupidities, they won’t do them.” And there are cases in which one is sure never to do it again, because one has gone beyond the limit.
It is a very difficult problem, if one wants to make a theory of it. But each case is absolutely different and asks for a different procedure. And in fact, if one truly wanted to give the best education to a child, well, one would have to spend all his time on it. One could not do anything else, because, even considering that one should not watch over him visibly, in order to do the right thing at the right time, one should always observe him, even without his knowing it. One would not be able to do anything else.

So, probably, one needs to find a middle term between the two, between the two extremes: that of watching over him all the time and that of leaving him absolutely free to do what he likes, without even warning him against the accidents which are likely to occur. An adjustment to make every minute! Difficult.

*Here it is written: “It is very unwise for anyone to claim prematurely to have possession of the supermind or even to have a taste of it.” What is a foretaste of the supermind?*

It is still more unwise to imagine that one has it. That’s it. Yes, because some people, as soon as they find a phrase in a book, in a teaching, immediately imagine that they have realised that. So, when Sri Aurobindo began speaking about the supermind — in what he was writing — everyone wrote to him: “I have seen the supramental Light, I had an experience of the supermind!” Now, it is better to keep the word “supermind” for a later time. For the moment let us not speak about it.

Somewhere he has written a very detailed description of all the mental functions accessible to man. Well, when we read this, we say that merely to traverse the mental domain to its highest limit there are so many stages which have not yet been crossed that truly we don’t need to speak about the supermind for the time being.
Questions and Answers

When he speaks of the higher ranges of the mind, one becomes aware that one very rarely lives in these places. It is very rare for one to be in this state of consciousness. On the contrary it is in what he calls the altogether ordinary mind, the mind of the ordinary man, that we live. And to the ordinary consciousness the reason seems to belong to a very high region; and the reason for him is one of the average faculties of the human mind. There are mental regions very much higher than that, which he has described in detail. And it is quite certain that those correspondents, if they had... Suddenly they said that they were having wonderful supramental experiences, because one is rarely in these regions which lie beyond the reason, which are regions of direct perception, intuition and other faculties of intuition of the same kind, which go far beyond the reason; and these are still mental regions, they have nothing of the supramental.

Mother, you said that between the supermind and the mind there are many stages, didn’t you? And it is written that the next logical stage in the evolution of Nature is the superman. Why not a race which is...

Intermediary? We shall see that later.

Does this mean that from the mind we can go to the supermind without passing through the intermediary stages?

I did not say that they were between the mind and the supermind. I said it is in the mind itself, without coming out of the mind, that there are all these regions which are almost inaccessible for most human beings. I did not say between the mind and supermind. You mean this evening or at some other time? What are you speaking of, of something I said this evening or something I said on another day?
This very evening, you were saying...

No, you did not hear. I said in the mind itself. Before reaching the extreme limit of the mind, there are so many regions and mental activities which are not at all accessible to most human beings. And even for those who can reach them, they are not regions where they constantly live. They must make an effort of concentration to get there and they don’t always arrive. There are regions which Sri Aurobindo has described which only very rare individuals can reach, and still he speaks of them as mental regions. He does not use for them the word supramental.

It can very well happen — besides, when he spoke of the supermind he said that there are many regions in the supermind itself and that it would naturally be the first ones, the lowest regions, which would manifest to begin with — it can very well happen that there are still a number of intermediary states of being, this is possible — intermediary stages.

Certainly the perfect race will not come spontaneously. Very probably not. But already, even the first attempts... in comparison with the present human being, it will make a great difference, great enough for one to feel that this is something miraculous. It can very well happen that the first supramental manifestations will be altogether incomplete. But even to these, man as he is at present will seem something absolutely gross. There is no halt in the universal development and even the thing which would seem at a certain time absolutely perfect and finished, will still be only a stage for future manifestations. But men very much like to sit down and say, “Now I have done what I had to do.”

But the universe is not like that; it does not sit down, it does not rest, it always goes on. One can never say, “Now it is over, I close the door and that’s all.” One may shut the door but then one cuts himself off from the universal movement. Expressions are always relative, and the first being which is no longer a human animal but begins to be a divine human, a divine man, will seem something absolutely marvellous, even if he is
Questions and Answers

still very incomplete as the perfect type of this new race. One must get accustomed to living in a perpetual movement. There is something which likes very much — perhaps it is necessary for facilitating the action — to fix a goal and say, “This indeed is the end”, but not at all. “This is perfection” — there is no absolute perfection. All things are always relative and constantly they are changing.

There we are. I think this is enough. There are no important questions? That’s good.