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the ordinary human consciousness does not seem at all natural — it seems almost supernatural!

Man questions himself because the mental instrument is intended to see all possibilities. And the immediate consequence of this is the concept of good and evil, or of what is right and what is wrong, and all the miseries that follow from that. One cannot say that it is a bad thing; it is an intermediate stage — not a very pleasant one, but still... one which was certainly inevitable for the complete development of the mind.

17 March 1961

58 – The animal, before he is corrupted, has not yet eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; the god has abandoned it for the tree of eternal life; man stands between the upper heaven and the lower nature.

Is it true that there was an earthly paradise? Why was man driven out of it?²⁰

From the historical point of view (I am not speaking from the psychological but from the historical point of view), if I base myself on my memories — only I cannot prove it; nothing can be proved, and I do not think there is any truly historical proof, that is to say, one which has been preserved, or at any rate none has yet been found — but according to what I remember, there was certainly a moment in earth’s history when there existed a kind of earthly paradise, in the sense that it was a perfectly harmonious and natural life; that is to say, the manifestation of the mind was in accord, was still in complete accord with the ascending march of Nature and totally harmonious, without perversion or distortion. This was the first stage of mind’s manifestation in material forms.

²⁰ Oral question and answer.
How long did it last? It is difficult to say. But for man it was a life that was like a kind of outflowering of animal life. I have a memory of a life in which the body was perfectly adapted to its natural environment and the climate adapted to the needs of the body, the body to the needs of the climate. Life was wholly spontaneous and natural, just as a more luminous and more conscious animal life would be; but there were none of the complications and distortions that the mind brought in later in the course of its development. I have the memory of that life — I had it, I relived it when I became conscious of the life of the earth as a whole. But I cannot say how long it lasted nor what area it covered. I do not know. I can only remember the condition, the state, what material Nature was like, what the human form and the human consciousness were like at that time and this kind of harmony with all the other elements on earth — harmony with animal life, and such a great harmony with plant life. There was a kind of spontaneous knowledge of how to use the things of Nature, of the properties of plants, of fruits and everything vegetable Nature could provide. No aggressiveness, no fear, no contradictions nor frictions and no perversions at all — the mind was pure, simple, luminous, uncomplicated.

It is only with the progress of evolution, the march of evolution, when the mind began to develop in itself, for itself, that all the complications and distortions began. So that the story of Genesis which seems so childish contains some truth. In the old traditions like that of Genesis, each letter\(^21\) stood for a specific knowledge, it was a graphic summary of the traditional knowledge of that time. But apart from that, even the symbolic story had a reality in the sense that there truly was a period of life on earth — the first manifestation of mentalised matter in human forms — which was still in complete harmony with all that preceded it. It was only later...

And the symbol of the tree of knowledge represents the kind

\(^{21}\) Of the Hebrew alphabet.
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of knowledge which is no longer divine, the material knowledge that comes from the sense of division and which started spoiling everything. How long did this period last? Because in my memory too it was like an almost immortal life, and it seems that it was an accident of evolution that made it necessary for forms to disintegrate... for progress. So I cannot say how long it lasted. And where? According to certain impressions — but they are only impressions — it would seem that it was in the vicinity of... I do not know exactly whether it was on this side of Ceylon and India or on the other (Mother points to the Indian Ocean, first to the west of Ceylon and India and then to the east, between Ceylon and Java), but it was certainly a place which no longer exists, which has probably been swallowed up by the sea. I have a very clear vision of this place and a very clear awareness of this life and its forms, but I cannot give any material details. To tell the truth, when I relived these moments I was not curious about details. One is in a different state of mind and one has no curiosity about these material details; everything changes into psychological factors. And it was... it was something so simple, so luminous, so harmonious, beyond all our preoccupations — precisely beyond all these preoccupations with time and place. It was a spontaneous, extremely beautiful life, and so close to Nature, like a natural flowering of the animal life. And there were no oppositions, no contradictions, or anything like that — everything happened in the best way possible.

(Silence)

Repeatedly, in different circumstances, several times, I have had the same memory. It was not exactly the same scene or the same images, because it was not something that I saw, it was a life that I was living. For some time, by night or by day, in a certain state of trance I went back to a life that I had lived and had the full consciousness that it was the outflowering of the human form on earth — the first human forms capable of embodying

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the divine Being. It was that. It was the first time I could manifest in an earthly form, in a particular form, in an individual form—not a “general” life but an individual form—that is to say, the first time that the Being above and the being below were joined by the mentalisation of this material substance. I lived this several times, but always in similar surroundings and with a very similar feeling of such joyful simplicity, without complexity, without problems, without all these questions; there was nothing, absolutely nothing of the kind! It was an outflowering of the joy of living, simply that, in universal love and harmony—flowers, minerals, animals: all were in harmony.

It was only long afterwards—but this is a personal impression—long afterwards that things went wrong. Probably because some mental crystallisations were necessary, inevitable for the general evolution, so that the mind might be prepared to move on to something else. This is where... Faugh! It is like falling into a hole, into ugliness, into obscurity; everything becomes so dark afterwards, so ugly, so difficult, so painful, it is really—it really feels like a fall.

(Silence)

I knew an occultist who used to say that it was not—how to put it?—inevitable. In the total freedom of the manifestation it is the deliberate separation from the Origin that is the cause of all disorder. But how to explain it? Our words are so poor that we cannot speak of these things. We can say that it was “inevitable” because it happened; but if we go outside the creation, we can conceive—or we could have conceived—of a creation in which this disorder would not have happened. Sri Aurobindo also said practically the same thing, that it was a kind of “accident”, if you like, but an “accident” which has given the manifestation a much greater and much more complete perfection than if it had never occurred. But this still belongs to the realm of speculation and these speculations are useless, to say the least. In any case,
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the experience, the feeling is this: a... *(Mother indicates an abrupt fall)* oh! all of a sudden.

For the earth it probably happened like that, all of a sudden: a kind of ascent, then a fall. But the earth is only a very small point of concentration. For the universe it is something else.

*(Silence)*

So the memory of that time is preserved somewhere, in the earth’s memory, in the region where all the memories of the earth are recorded, and those who are able to communicate with this memory can say that the earthly paradise still exists somewhere; but I know nothing about it, I do not see.

What about the story of the serpent? Why does the serpent have such an evil reputation?

The Christians say that it is the spirit of Evil.

*(Silence)*

But all this is a misunderstanding.

The occultist I spoke of used to say that the true interpretation of the Bible story about Paradise and the serpent is that man wanted to rise from a state of animal divinity — like the animals — to a state of conscious divinity through the development of the mind — and that is what the symbol means when it is said that they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. And the serpent — he always used to say that it was iridescent, that is to say, it was all the colours of the rainbow — it was not at all the spirit of Evil, it was the evolutionary force, the force, the power of evolution, and of course it was the power of evolution that had made them taste of the fruit of knowledge.

And so, according to him, Jehovah was the chief of the Asuras, the supreme Asura, the egoistic god who wanted to
dominate everything and have everything under his control. And once he had taken the position of supreme lord in relation to earthly realisation, of course he was not pleased that man should make this mental progress, for it would bring him a knowledge that enabled him not to obey any longer! This made him furious! For it would enable man to become a god by the evolutionary power of consciousness. And that is why they were driven out of Paradise.

There is a good deal of truth in that, a good deal.

And Sri Aurobindo fully agreed. He said the same thing. It is the evolutionary power — the power of the mind — that led man towards knowledge, a separative knowledge. And it is a fact that man became conscious of himself with the sense of good and evil. But, of course, that spoiled everything and he could not stay there. He was driven out by his own consciousness. He could no longer stay there.

But were they driven out by Jehovah or by their own consciousness?

It is just two different ways of saying the same thing.

According to me, all these old Scriptures and these old traditions have different levels of meaning (Mother makes a gesture to show the different levels); and according to the period, the people, the needs, one symbol or another has been selected and used. But there comes a time — when you transcend all these things and see them from what Sri Aurobindo calls “the other hemisphere” — when you become aware that these are merely ways of speaking to establish a contact — a kind of bridge or link between the lower way of seeing and the higher way of knowing.

And people who argue and say, “Oh, no! it is like this; it is like that” — there comes a time when it seems so funny, so funny! And just that, the spontaneous retort of so many people, “Oh, that is impossible” — the word itself is so funny! For the
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slightest, I might even say, the most elementary intellectual development enables you to realise that you could not even think of it if it were not possible.

(Silence)

Oh! If we could only find that again, but how?

Really, they have spoilt the earth, they have spoilt it — they have spoilt the atmosphere, they have spoilt everything! And now, for the atmosphere to come back to what it should be — oh! we have a long way to go, and above all psychologically. But even the very structure of matter (Mother feels the air around her), with their bombs and experiments, oh, they have made a mess of it all!... They have really made a mess of matter.

Probable — no, not probably — it is quite certain that it was necessary to knead it, to churn it, to prepare it so that it can receive this, the new thing which is not yet manifested.

It was very simple, very harmonious, very luminous, but not complex enough. And this complexity has spoilt everything, but it will bring a realisation that is infinitely more conscious — infinitely. And so when the earth again becomes so harmonious, simple, luminous, pure — simple, pure, purely divine — and with this complexity, then we shall be able to do something.

As the Mother was leaving she noticed a brilliant crimson Canna flower.

There were so many flowers just like this in the landscape of the earthly paradise, red, so beautiful.

11 March 1961

59 – One of the greatest comforts of religion is that you can get hold of God sometimes and give him a satisfactory beating. People mock at the folly of savages who beat