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“Yoga means union with the Divine, and the union is effected through offering—it is founded on the offering of yourself to the Divine.”

Questions and Answers 1929 (28 April)

What is the difference between surrender and offering?

The two words are almost synonymous: “I make the offering of myself and I surrender myself”, but in the gesture of offering there is something more active than in the gesture of surrender. Unfortunately, soumission, in French, is not the true word; in English we use “surrender”; between the words “surrender” and “offering” there is hardly any difference. But the French word soumission gives the impression of something more passive; you accept, while offering is a giving—a voluntary giving.

What is the exact meaning of the word “consecration?”

“Consecration” generally has a more mystical sense but this is not absolute. A total consecration signifies a total giving of one’s self; hence it is the equivalent of the word “surrender”, not of the word soumission which always gives the impression that one “accepts” passively. You feel a flame in the word “consecration”, a flame even greater than in the word “offering”. To consecrate oneself is “to give oneself to an action”; hence, in the yogic sense, it is to give oneself to some divine work with the idea of accomplishing the divine work.

“When the resolution has been taken, when you have decided that the whole of your life shall be given to the Divine, you have still at every moment to remember it
and carry it out in all the details of your existence. You must feel at every step that you belong to the Divine; you must have the constant experience that, in whatever you think or do, it is always the Divine Consciousness that is acting through you. You have no longer anything that you can call your own; you feel everything as coming from the Divine, and you have to offer it back to its source. When you can realise that, then even the smallest thing to which you do not usually pay much attention or care, ceases to be trivial and insignificant; it becomes full of meaning and it opens up a vast horizon beyond.”

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Because the least detail of life and action, each movement of thought, even of sensation, of feeling, which is normally of little importance, becomes different the moment you look at it asking yourself, “Did I think this as an offering to the Divine, did I feel this as an offering to the Divine?...” If you recall this every moment of your life, the attitude becomes quite different from what it was before. It becomes very wide; it is a chain of innumerable little things each having its own place, whilst formerly you used to let them go by without being aware of them. That widens the field of consciousness. If you take a half-hour of your life and think of it, putting to yourself this question: “Is it a consecration to the Divine?” you will see that the small things become a big thing and you will have the impression that life becomes rich and luminous.

Identification is the goal of Yoga. Can one say that surrender is the first step and offering the second?

No, some begin with an offering and end with surrender. It depends upon the character of each one. You may perhaps begin by having a feeling of inferiority — you are a little crushed by the grandeur of the Divine, and then you feel a little freer and
Questions and Answers

give with joy what you are. This is not always so. Many begin by self-giving; for them the easiest movement is to give themselves. In the beginning the giving is a little indefinite, then one has to make an effort at times to surrender in detail; you can give yourself with much enthusiasm, but when at every step you have to submit to the higher Will, the thing becomes more difficult.

*Does not offering imply surrender?*

Not at all. You can give for the joy of giving, without any idea of surrender. In a movement of enthusiasm, when you have glimpsed something infinitely higher than yourself, you can give yourself in an *elan*, but when it is a question of living that every minute, of surrendering oneself every minute to the higher Will and when every minute requires this surrender, it is more difficult. But if by “offering” you mean the integral offering of all your movements, all your activities, that is equivalent to surrender, without implying it necessarily. But then it is no longer a movement made in enthusiasm, it is something which has to be realised in detail. One may say that any movement made in ardour and enthusiasm is relatively easy (that depends upon the intensity of the movement in you), but when it is a question of realising one’s aspiration every minute of one’s life and in all its details, the enthusiasm recedes a little and one feels the difficulty.

*Is there an experience which proves that one is living in the presence of the Divine?*

Once one begins to live in the presence of the Divine, one does not question any longer. It carries its own certitude — one feels, one knows, and it becomes impossible to question. One lives in the presence of the Divine and it is for you an absolute fact. Till then you ask, because you do not have the experience, but once you have the experience, it has such an authority that it is indisputable. One who says, “I think I live in the presence of the
Divine but I am not sure”, has not had the true experience, for as soon as one has the inner shock of this experience, no more questioning is possible. It is like those who ask, “What is the divine Will?” As long as you have not glimpsed this Will, you cannot know. One may have an idea of it through deduction, inference, etc., but once you have felt the precise contact with the divine Will, this too is not disputable any longer — you know.

I add, so that there may not be any misunderstanding: all experience has its worth only in the measure of the sincerity of the one who has it. Some are not sincere and fabricate wonderful experiences, and they imagine they have them. I put all that aside, it is not interesting. But for sincere people who have a sincere experience, once you have the experience of the divine presence, the whole world may tell you it is not true, and you will not budge.

If you are not sincere, you may have wonderful experiences, but these have no value either for you or for others. You should distrust your thought a good deal, for the mind is a wonderful constructor and it can give you wonderful experiences solely by its work of formation; but these experiences have no value. It is hence preferable not to know beforehand what is going to happen. For even with a great will to be sincere, the mind fabricates so much and so well that it can present to you a wonderful picture or even play for you a splendid comedy without your being aware of it, by its sheer power of formation, and it is very difficult to find out. Hence one essential condition for having true experiences: leave this machine in quietness; the less it moves, the better it is, and beware of everything it imagines for you.

*What is the difference between aspiration and a demand?*

When you have experienced both, you can easily make the distinction. In aspiration there is what I might call an unselfish flame which is not present in desire. Your aspiration is not a
turning back upon self — desire is always a turning back upon oneself. From the purely psychological point of view, aspiration is a self-giving, always, while desire is always something which one draws to oneself; aspiration is something which gives itself, not necessarily in the form of thought but in the movement, in the vibration, in the vital impulse.

True aspiration does not come from the head; even when it is formulated by a thought, it springs up like a flame from the heart. I do not know if you have read the articles Sri Aurobindo has written on the Vedas. He explains somewhere that these hymns were not written with the mind; they were not, as one thinks, prayers, but the expression of an aspiration which was an impulse, like a flame coming from the heart (though it is not the “heart” but the psychological centre of the being, to use the exact words). They were not “thought out”, words were not set to experiences, the experience came wholly formulated with the precise, exact, inevitable words — they could not be changed. This is the very nature of aspiration: you do not seek to formulate it, it springs up from you like a ready flame. And if there are words (sometimes there aren’t any), they cannot be changed: you cannot replace one word by another, every word is just the right one. When the aspiration is formulated, this is done categorically, absolutely, without any possibility of change. And it is always something that springs up and gives itself, whereas the very nature of desire is to pull things to oneself.

The essential difference between love in aspiration and love in desire is that love in aspiration gives itself entirely and asks nothing in return — it does not claim anything; whereas love in desire gives itself as little as possible, asks as much as possible, it pulls things to itself and always makes demands.

Aspiration always gives joy, doesn’t it?

Rather a feeling of plenitude — “joy” is a misleading word; a feeling of plenitude, of force, of an inner flame which fills you.
Aspiration can give you joy, but a very special joy, which has no excitement in it.

*Are the soul and the psychic being one and the same thing?*

That depends on the definition you give to the words. In most religions, and perhaps in most philosophies also, it is the vital being which is called “soul”, for it is said that “the soul leaves the body”, while it is the vital being which leaves the body. One speaks of “saving the soul”, “wicked souls”, “redeeming the soul”... but all that applies to the vital being, for the psychic being has no need to be saved! It does not share the faults of the external person, it is free from all reaction.

*When one works and wants to do one’s best, one needs much time. But generally we don’t have much time, we are in a hurry. How to do one’s best when one is in a hurry?*

It is a very interesting subject and I wanted to speak to you about it in detail, one day. Generally when men are in a hurry, they do not do completely what they have to do or they do badly what they do. Well, there is a third way, it is to intensify one’s concentration. If you do that you can gain half the time, even from a very short time. Take a very ordinary example: to have your bath and to dress; the time needed varies with people, doesn’t it? But let us say, half an hour is required for doing everything without losing time and without hurrying. Then, if you are in a hurry, one of two things happens: you don’t wash so well or you dress badly! But there is another way — to concentrate one’s attention and one’s energy, think only of what one is doing and not of anything else, not to make a movement too much, to make the exact movement in the most exact way, and (it is an experience lived, I can speak of it with certitude) you can
Questions and Answers

do in fifteen minutes what you were formerly doing in half an hour, and do it as well, at times even better, without forgetting anything, without leaving out anything, simply by the intensity of the concentration.

And this is the best answer to all those who say, “Oh, if one wants to do things well, one must have time.” This is not true. For all that you do — study, play, work — there is only one solution: to increase one’s power of concentration. And when you acquire this concentration, it is no longer tiring. Naturally, in the beginning, it creates a tension, but when you have grown used to it, the tension diminishes, and a moment comes when what fatigues you is to be not thus concentrated, to disperse yourself, allow yourself to be swallowed by all kinds of things, and not to concentrate on what you do. One can succeed in doing things even better and more quickly by the power of concentration. And in this way you can make use of work as a means of growth; otherwise you have this vague idea that work must be done “disinterestedly”, but there is a great danger there, for one is very quick to confuse disinterestedness with indifference.