10 March 1954

This talk is based upon Mother's essay “The Fear of Death and the Four Methods of Conquering It”.

Why have you written “The Fear of Death” just now?

Because it was necessary to say this.

So far you had not said it, Mother, why do you say it now?

Ah! There are many things I have not said. One must indeed begin one day. I don’t think or have the impression that there was any occasion for it so far. Perhaps it came as the result of an experience.... Why, yes, I thought later that people would see a special significance in it, but there isn’t any! (Laughter) Perhaps within you there is something.

There is one thing I have noticed, that every time somebody dies in the Ashram, many people are seized by panic. Now, I cannot say I appreciate this very much! Perhaps it was because of that that I wrote this article. For truly it is high time we were free from these things— a sort of tremor. I remember, the first time someone died in the Ashram, there was a veritable panic. I know lots of people of this kind, whom I won’t name; they came here (they were already quite old) with the idea that, because they lived here, they would not die! It was an old idea, a very long time ago. And the first time someone died, it literally caused a panic. We received heaps of letters saying: “How is it possible? But then we are not safe! I was obliged to tell them that immortal life is something acquired with much effort, and not only much effort but the renunciation of so many things that there is not one among all those who were protesting who would give up his attachments for this immortal life. That is, they would prefer to die
and keep their old habits to living immortally and losing them! There are many things which must be given up.... I have just mentioned this by the way in that article, but there are yet many more. All the small personal satisfactions, generally, must disappear — satisfactions of all kinds. I remember having spoken to someone — that was a long time ago — of the possibility of physical transformation, and I told him that one of the results would be that one would no longer need to eat, that one would recuperate strength directly from the universal forces or else from the Divine. And this person in an absolute consternation said to me, “And all the fine things one eats!” (Laughter) So, it is like that.

If we become immortal, then creation must cease?

Which creation?

The birth of men.

Oh! Naturally. Why, even long before becoming immortal. If anyone wants in the least to transform himself, this is the first thing that must stop. I have said it elsewhere, but...

Is fear the only cause of death?

Oh, no! Not at all. That is not what I have said, besides. I said that if one wanted to conquer death it was necessary to begin by not fearing it, which is quite a different thing. But I have not said that it was fear that brought about death.

You have said: “One can neither hasten nor delay its hour.” But death comes if one stops progressing. So, if one progresses, one can put off the hour. Or does this mean that from one’s birth the day and the moment of death are predestined?

No. This is altogether something else and on another plane. I
have written elsewhere that one dies only when one consents to die — which seems to contradict what I have said here. But this is the truth. I have told you this once already, I believe; in any case, I have written it somewhere. There are two points of view. Here I have taken quite an ordinary, material point of view, that of the physical consciousness. But I have explained somewhere that there are, as it were, different “layers of determinisms” in our being. The physical existence has a determinism; the vital existence has a determinism; the mental existence has a determinism; the higher mental, the psychic have a determinism. And then the higher existences have determinisms — the supramental existence has a determinism. And the determinism of everyone comes from the combination of all these determinisms (I am sure I have written this somewhere). If, for instance, at a given moment, when the entire physical determinism must necessarily bring death, you suddenly enter into contact with an extremely high determinism, like the supramental one, for example, and you succeed in joining the two, you change your physical determinism completely at that moment: death which had been determined by the physical determinism is abolished, and the conditions change and are pushed back.

I do not speak of this in that article. I have taken a purely material point of view. I have given the example of people (and people who lived almost exclusively in their material consciousness, their physical consciousness, you understand, mental, vital and material), and who eagerly wanted to die from the time they were fifty — they lived to be eighty-seven! I have had an instance of that. I had another example the very opposite of this, of someone who ardently wanted to live very long, who felt that he had many very important things to do and that he must not die, and he took all kinds of precautions against that — and yet he died. There may be cases which seem contradictory, but that is only an appearance. There are explanations for all these things, they obey different laws. Here I have taken the purely material point of view.
If you do not make a higher determinism intervene, truly you can change nothing. That is the only way of changing your physical determinism. If you remain in your physical consciousness and want to change your determinism, you cannot... During the First War I knew a boy who had been told he would die of a gunshot (you know in war one dies easily), and he had even been given an approximate date. And that caused him such agony that he had succeeded in getting a long leave. He came to Paris on leave. He was an officer and had his pistol in his pocket. He jumped from a tram and fell down, the pistol went off and he was killed on the spot. He could not escape.

I could narrate any number of such examples to you. But this belongs to a single plane, the material plane — the purely material physical, mental and vital plane. It is only a higher knowledge and a contact with the higher planes and the descent of these higher planes into the physical plane, which can change circumstances. So too, if one succeeded in bringing down the supramental plane permanently into the physical life, physical life would be transformed, that is, it would change totally. But only on this condition. I do not speak of this in that article, that’s another subject.

Anything else?

Why does one feel afraid?

I have been told — and this was one of the teachings of a very old tradition — that it was the influence of the adverse forces upon earth that had created fear, for it was their way of acting on human beings. But animals also feel fear. So that takes away a little from the strength of the argument, for I don’t think the adverse beings have any special interest in creating fear in animals.

Fear is a phenomenon of unconsciousness. It is a kind of anguish that comes from ignorance. One does not know the nature of a certain thing, does not know its effect or what
will happen, does not know the consequences of one’s acts, one does not know so many things; and this ignorance brings fear. One fears what one does not know. Take a child, if it is brought before someone it does not know (I am not speaking of a child with an awakened inner consciousness, I am speaking of an ordinary child), — you bring it before someone it does not know, its first movement will always be one of fear. Only very rare children — and they have another consciousness — are very bold. It may also be a mixture of apprehension, a kind of instinct. When one instinctively feels that something is dangerous and hasn’t the means to remedy it, when one does not know what to do to protect himself from it, then he is afraid. There are, I believe, countless reasons for fear. But it is a movement of unconsciousness, in every case.

That which knows has no fear. That which is perfectly awake, which is fully conscious and which knows, has no fear. It is always something dark that is afraid.

One of the great remedies for conquering fear is to face boldly what one fears. You are put face to face with the danger you fear and you fear it no longer. The fear disappears. From the yogic point of view, the point of view of discipline, this is the cure recommended. In the ancient initiations, especially in Egypt, in order to practise occultism, as I was telling you last time, it was necessary to abolish the fear of death completely. Well, one of the practices of those days was to lay the neophyte in a sarcophagus and leave him in there for a few days, as though he were dead. Naturally, he was not left to die, neither of hunger nor suffocation, but still he remained lying there as though he were dead. It seems that cures you of all fear.

When fear comes, if one succeeds in putting upon it consciousness, knowledge, force, light, one can cure it altogether. There is indeed the Christian religion which says that fear comes of our having eaten the apple in the Garden of Eden — that with knowledge came fear; and upon earth it is always this fear which governs all life, for all human beings. Only, here again I repeat
my argument that animals also have fear — animals have not sinned, haven't eaten the apple, so they shouldn't have any fear! It is a half-consciousness mixed with a sort of ignorant instinct which stresses a danger and at the same time does not know its remedy. But certainly, the fact is that the adverse beings, beings of the vital world who fight against the divine Work, make an extensive use of fear. It is through that that they have the strongest hold on human beings. Besides, they are not the only ones: there are also all the political and religious means which are of that type. There are religions which found their power over the believers simply through the fear of death and of what will happen thereafter, and of all catastrophes which await you after death if you do not obey blindly the laws they dictate to you.

This fear may also come from an antipathy, that is, a lack of affinity with something. Some people are especially afraid of fire, some especially fear water, others have a special fear of one animal or another. It comes from a disharmony between the vital vibrations. And then it is translated in this body-unconsciousness by fear. The body is a terribly unconscious thing. How one has to work to give it just a very little consciousness! It lives automatically, by habit. It is terribly unconscious.

So, the sequel?

“The hour of death seems therefore to be inexorably fixed, except for a very few individuals who possess powers that the human race in general does not command.”

This is exactly what I have just explained. It is a very few who are capable of bringing down another determinism into the physical determinism. These can change the hour of death. This is exactly what I have just been explaining at full length. The power lies in bringing down a higher consciousness into the material consciousness, and with the higher consciousness bringing down a higher determinism which changes the material determinism.
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And not many have that power. I have said a very few do. In fact it is a very, very few.

_The last method, you have said, is to enter the domain of death deliberately and consciously while one is still alive...._

Yes.

_What is the difference between entering consciously into death and consciously going out of one’s body? Many people can go out of their body, can’t they?_

Yes, but they don’t all go into the world of death.

_Is it the same method as for going out of one’s body?_

Yes, but that is only the beginning. One begins by learning how to go out of one’s body. Many people, when they sleep, go out of their body. They do it more or less consciously — the majority unconsciously, but still there are a few who do it consciously. They go out of their body but remain in the physical domain. At the most they go into some mental region but they do not go into the domain of death.

There are some who go there, but then, for the process to be complete... you must know that when one goes out of one’s body, one remains tied to the body by a certain number of links — what shall I call them? They may be vital links, links of the mind, psychic links — when one goes out, it can be all kinds of things which go out of the body. Usually what goes out is something quite subtle, like the mind or the higher vital, and much remains in the body, enough for the body not to enter into trance. Among sleepers some even move about often in their sleep: there is one part of their being which is exteriorised but the most material part of their vital being is in the body. And as
long as that is there, it is altogether in the domain of life. First of all, it is not easy to detach from the body exactly that part which leaves it at the moment of death. This asks for a very rigorous discipline practised for a very long time. There is a process of exteriorisation to follow in order to succeed in making all the parts which leave at death go out; and in this case the body enters into a cataleptic state. It goes into the state in which it is found when one dies. It even becomes very rapidly completely rigid. Well, this is something one must learn to do, and it is not very easy; and if one wants to do it quite completely, somebody must always be there to watch the body so that nothing may happen. One can never do it all alone. Somebody must be there to guard the body.

But even if one does all that, that is not quite the experience I am speaking about. The experience I am speaking about is still much more difficult. Once one has gone out like that and left his body in a cataleptic state, one cuts the links. So, one is really dead; that is, the heart beats no longer. But as there is still “the life of the form”, and it is not through an accident that one has left, as it is by an act of will with knowledge and power, one can force one’s way back, re-establish the connection and come back forcibly into one’s body. It is not a comfortable business — the whole thing is difficult. Like that, on paper it seems to be nothing at all. But it is not easy.

You have said here: “It is within the reach of so few.” So this means there are people who have done it. Hence they have attained immortality, but so far...

Immortality! No, I have not said that this was immortality. I have said that they got rid of all fear of death. That is quite a different thing.

But they enter the domain of death, don’t they?
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Yes, but at that moment the body is in a good condition. The body is in good order and one can find it again—it is not a question of remaining outside for long like that!

But they have had the experience, so when they really die they try once again the same thing?

If their body is in good condition. But usually, when one dies something has happened to the body, you know. There is something seriously out of order in the body. But still, it is not yet certain that having gone out of one’s body, one cannot keep the ability to put what is disturbed back into order unless it is something very serious like a stab in the heart or when the head’s cut off! That is grave enough but still if the body remains intact, if it is only a disequilibrium, it can be re-established.

Mother, what happens if the links are broken?

If the links are broken? — One dies.

But the part that has gone out of the body?

That, if it is conscious, remains absolutely conscious. It has its own independent life, it remains absolutely conscious. Cut off or not, that changes nothing in its life. It does not give it more consciousness, does not take away any from it—the consciousness it has, the knowledge it has, the power it has, these it keeps. One who is able to do this does not depend upon the body. That is, in order to be conscious, one does not depend at all—at all—upon the body. He has an altogether independent consciousness.

“Domain of death” means what?

Every religion has spoken about it differently. The Greeks had their “Elysium”, one crossed over in a “boat”. There are all the paradises, all the hells.
No, not religions.

Generally, “domain of death” is the name given to a certain region of the most material vital into which one is projected at the moment one leaves one’s body. The part — how to put it? — of one’s life that’s usually the most conscious is projected there at the moment of death. Well, that region, that material vital world is very dark, it is full of adverse formations having desires at their centre or even adverse wills, and these are very, very elemental entities which have a very fragmentary life and are like vampires, in the sense that they feed on all that is thrown out from human beings. And so, at that moment, from the shock of death — for very few die without a shock, go out consciously, in full knowledge of the thing, there are not many such — usually it is an accident: a last accident; well, at that shock of death, those entities rush in upon this, upon this vitality that goes out, and feed upon it. So long as a person is alive, they cannot touch him. For, you have all had the experience of a nightmare in which, when the situation becomes really very dangerous, suddenly you wake up — you come back into your body, for the body is your protection. In the physical they can do nothing to you but when you are completely outside the physical (and even this link I spoke about serves as a protection to a certain extent when you go out), but if the links are broken and you are entirely without a body, well, unless you take advantage of special circumstances... as for instance when a person is much loved by others who are yet alive; if at that moment these people who love him concentrate their thought and love on the departed one, he finds a refuge therein, and this protects him completely against those entities; but one who passes away without anyone’s having a special attachment for him, either because he is surrounded by people he has harmed and who do not love him or by people who are in a terribly unconscious state — he is like a prey delivered to these forces. And that indeed is an experience that’s difficult to bear. They cannot touch anything
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e else except what belongs to their own domain, that is, the most material vital—the higher vital escapes them altogether, they can do nothing there. And so, this material vital goes out but the other remains; and this higher vital is attacked by other dangers, simply that. And if it also disappears, the mind remains. But behind all this is the psychic being which nothing can touch, which is above all possible attacks, and it indeed is free to go where it wants. Usually—unless it has a special opportunity and has reached a state of complete development—it goes to rest in the psychic worlds. There it enters into a kind of beatific contemplation in which it remains, and this is an assimilation of all its experiences, and when it has finished assimilating them and resting, well, it starts preparing to come down again for a new life. That being nothing can touch. But so very few are conscious of their psychic that one can hardly say that it is such and such a person whom one has known, for people as we know them are made of what?—of all their physical experiences, all their vital reactions, all their mental formations—that is, the body, the character, the thought—and with these we have a human being! Well, all that cannot persist after death unless it is organised and centralised around the psychic being and to the extent it is perfectly unified with the psychic. Otherwise all this mixture is dissolved and the psychic being alone remains, at times just as a flame, at times as a completely conscious being.

This of course is the general law. Now there are bridges, as it were, “protected passages” which have been built in the vital world in order to cross over all these dangers. There are atmospheres which receive people leaving their body, give them shelter, give them protection. There are all kinds of other conditions; what I have told you just now is the normal state of those who die, of ordinary human beings, but as soon as we come to a little higher type of humanity, all these conditions change. The general law remains unless there is a special higher development within the being. There are people with so total a cohesion in
their being that they no longer depend upon the body — not at all — whether it be there or not there.

But all this development does not come about just like that, simply by thinking about it from time to time, desiring it still less often and forgetting it most of the time — no, it is not like that that it can happen. These are disciplines, I may say, at least as arduous as the strictest spiritual disciplines.... Essentially it is for this that we are on the earth. Truly speaking, human beings were made for this purpose, to do that work, and it is perhaps because they refuse to do it that there is so much chaos in the world. If they did it truly, things would go much better.

My children, it is 9.20; if you have a very interesting question to ask, ask it!

_You had said you would tell us the story of the stones._

That is quite another domain. That’s not the domain of death; it is a domain of the material vital, the most material vital, that which controls the physical, is just behind the physical — the material vital.

There was a time we were living in the Guest House.¹ Sri Aurobindo lived on the first floor, in the room right at the end which is now the meditation-room of the children’s boarding. I believe there are two rooms side by side, one used to be a bathroom but is now an ordinary room, and a room next to it which was mine — the bathroom and another room. Sri Aurobindo was on one side.

How many of us were there in that house?... Amrita was there (turning to the disciple), weren’t you, Amrita, do you remember that day? (Laughter) We had a cook called Vatel. This cook was rather bad-tempered and didn’t like being reproved

¹ Sri Aurobindo lived in the Guest House (41 rue François Martin) between 1913 and September 1922. The incident related by Mother here occurred in 1921, sometime in the middle of December.
about his work. Moreover, he was in contact with some Musul- 
mans who had it seems, magical powers — they had a book of 
magic and the ability to practise magic. One day, this cook had 
done something very bad and had been scolded — I don't know 
if any of you knew Datta, it was Datta who had scolded him 
— and he was furious. He had threatened us, saying, “You will 
see, you will be compelled to leave this house.” We had taken 
no notice of it.

Two or three days later, I think, someone came and told me 
that stones had fallen in the courtyard — a few stones, three or 
four: bits of brick. We wondered who was throwing stones from 
the next house. We did exactly what we forbid children to do: 
we went round on the walls and roofs to see if we could find 
someone or the stones or something — we found nothing.

That happened, I believe, between four and five in the after-
noon. As the day declined, the number of stones increased. The 
next day, there were still more. They started striking specially 
the door of the kitchen and one of them struck Datta’s arm 
as she was going across the courtyard. The number increased 
very much. The interest was growing. And as the interest grew, 
it produced a kind of effect of multiplication! And the stones 
began falling in several directions at the same time, in places 
where there were neither doors nor windows; there was a stair-
case, but it had no opening in those days: there was only a small 
bull’s-eye. And the stones were falling on the staircase this way 
(*vertical gesture*); if they had come through the bull’s-eye, they 
would have come like this (*slantwise movement*), but they were 
falling straight down. So, I think everyone started to become 
truly interested. I must tell you that this Vatel had informed us 
that he was ill and for the last two days — since the stones had 
started falling — he hadn’t come. But he had left with us his 
under-cook, a young boy of about thirteen or fourteen, quite 
fat, somewhat lifeless and a little quiet, perhaps a little stupid. 
And we noticed that when this boy moved around, wherever 
he went the stones increased. The young men who were there
— Amrita among them — shut the boy up in a room, with all the doors and windows closed; they started making experiments like the spiritists (laughing): “Close all the doors, close all the windows.” And there was the boy sitting there inside and the stones began falling, with all the doors and windows closed! And more and more fell, and finally the boy was wounded in the leg. Then they started feeling the thing was going too far.

I was with Sri Aurobindo: quietly we were working, meditating together. The boys cast a furtive glance to see what was going on and began warning us, for it was perhaps time to tell us that the thing was taking pretty serious proportions. I understood immediately what the matter was.

I must tell you that we had made an attempt earlier to exhaust all possibilities of an ordinary, physical explanation. We had called in the police, informed them that there was somebody throwing stones at us, and they wanted very much to come and see what was happening. So a policeman — who was a fine good fellow — immediately told us, “Oh! You have Vatel as your cook. Yes, yes, we know what it is!” He had a loaded pistol and stood waiting there in the courtyard — not a stone! I was on the terrace with Sri Aurobindo; I said to Sri Aurobindo, “That’s a bit too bad, we call the police and just then the stones stop falling! But that is very annoying, in this way he will think we haven’t told the truth, for no stones are falling.” Instantaneously the stones began falling again. (Laughter)

You should note that the stones were falling quite a long way off from the terrace and not one of them came anywhere near us.

So the policeman said, “It’s not worthwhile, my staying here, I know what it is, it is Vatel who has done this against you, I am going.”

It was after this that we made the experiment of shutting up the boy, and the stones began to fall in the closed room and I was informed that the boy had been wounded. Then I said, “All right, send the boy out of the house immediately. Send him to another
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house, anywhere, and let him be looked after, but don’t keep him here, and then, that’s all. Keep quiet and don’t be afraid.” I was in the room with Sri Aurobindo and I thought, “We’ll see what it is.” I went into meditation and gave a little call. I said, “Let us see, who is throwing stones at us now? You must come and tell us who is throwing stones.”... I saw three little entities of the vital, those small entities which have no strength and just enough consciousness confined to one action — it is nothing at all; but these entities are at the service of people who practise magic. When people practise magic, they order them to come and they are compelled to obey. There are signs, there are words. So, they came, they were frightened — they were terribly frightened! I said, “But why do you fling stones like that? What does it mean, this bad joke?” They replied, “We are compelled, we are compelled... (Laughter) It is not our fault, we have been ordered to do it, it is not our fault.”

I really felt so much like laughing but still I kept a serious face and told them, “Well, you must stop this, you understand!” Then they told me, “Don’t you want to keep us? We shall do all that you ask.” “Ah!” I thought, “Let us see, this is perhaps going to be interesting.” I said to them, “But what can you do?” — “We know how to throw stones.” (Laughter) — “That doesn’t interest me at all, I don’t want to throw stones at anyone... but could you perchance bring me flowers? Can you bring me some roses?” Then they looked at one another in great dismay and answered, “No, we are not made for that, we don’t know how to do it.” I said, “I don’t need you, go away, and take care specially never to come back, for otherwise it will be disastrous!” They ran away and never came back.

There was one thing I had noticed: it was only at the level of the roof that the stones were seen — from the roof downwards, we saw the stones; just till the roof, above it there were no stones. This meant that it was like an automatic formation. In the air nothing could be seen: they materialised in the atmosphere of the house and fell.
And to complete the movement, the next morning — all this happened in the evening — the next morning I came down to pay a visit to the kitchen — there were pillars in the kitchen — and upon one of the pillars I found some signs with numbers as though made with a bit of charcoal, very roughly drawn — I don’t remember the signs now — and also words in Tamil. Then I rubbed out everything carefully and made an invocation, and so it was finished, the comedy was over.

However, not quite. Vatel’s daughter was ayah in the house, the maid-servant. She came early in the afternoon in a state of intense fright saying, “My father is in the hospital, he is dying; this morning something happened to him; suddenly he felt very ill and he is dying, he has been taken to the hospital, I am terribly frightened.” I knew what it was. I went to Sri Aurobindo and said to him, “You know, Vatel is in the hospital, he is dying.” Then Sri Aurobindo looked at me, he smiled: “Oh, just for a few stones!” (Laughter)

That very evening Vatel was cured. But he never started anything again.

How could the stones be seen?

That’s what is remarkable. There are beings that have the power of dematerialising and rematerialising objects. These were quite ordinary pieces of bricks, but these pieces materialised only in the field where the magic acted. The magic was practised for this house, especially for its courtyard, and the action of vital forces worked only there. That was why when I sent away the boy and he went to another house, not a single stone hit him any more. The magical formation was made specially for this house, and the stones materialised in the courtyard. And as it was something specially directed against Datta, she was hit on her arm.

There was yet something else.... Ah, yes! We came to know later to which magician Vatel had gone. He had gone to a
magician who, it seems, is very well known here and he had said that he wanted definitely to make us leave that house — I don’t know why. He was furious. And so he asked the magician to make stones fall there. The magician told him, “But that’s the house Sri Aurobindo lives in!” He said, “Yes.” — “Ah! No, I am not going to meddle in this business; you manage it, I am not getting involved.” Then Vatel insisted very much; he even promised him a greater reward, a little more money. The magician said, “Well, look here; we are going to make a rule: in a circle of twenty-five metres around Sri Aurobindo” — I think he said twenty or twenty-five metres — “the stones will not fall. Always there will have to be twenty-five metres’ distance between the stones and Sri Aurobindo.” And he arranged his order of magic in this way. And that was why never did a single stone come anywhere near us, never. They fell at the other end of the courtyard.

They know how to do all that, it is written in their books. These are words and ceremonies having a certain power. Naturally, those who do that must have a vital force. A vital force is necessary — a little mental force also, not much, even very little — but quite a strong vital power to control these little entities, govern them. And these people rule them precisely through fear, for they have the power to dissolve them, so these entities fear this very much. But upon all these formations, all these entities, it is enough to put simply one drop of the true, pure light, the pure white light — the true, pure light which is the supreme light of construction — you put one drop upon them: they dissolve as though there had been nothing at all there. And yet this is not a force of destruction; it is a force of construction but it is so alien to their nature that they disappear. It is this they feared, for I had called them by showing them this white light; I had told them, “Look, here is this! Come.” But their offer was touching: “Oh! We shall do everything you want.” I said, “Good, what can you do?” — “Throw stones!” (Laughter)