7 September 1963

DIALOGUE WITH A MATERIALIST

O Death, thou speakest Truth but Truth that slays,
I answer to thee with the Truth that saves.

Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Book X, Canto 3

The other day, in dealing with a question of work, I had occasion to explain my position from the standpoint of the materialists’ conviction. I do not know where they stand now, for I do not concern myself with that generally.

For them, all the experiences that men have are the result of a mental phenomenon — it is that. We have attained a progressive mental development. They would be quite unable to say why or how! — but in brief, it is Matter that has developed Life, and Life that has developed Mind, and all the so-called spiritual experiences of man are mental constructions — they use other words, but I believe that this is their idea. In any case, it is a negation of all spiritual existence in itself and a negation of a Being or of a Force or of Something higher which governs everything.

I repeat, I do not know where they stand now, but I was faced with a conviction like that.

And so I said: “But it is very simple! I accept your point of view. There is nothing else except what we see, humanity as it is, and all the so-called inner phenomena are due to a mental, a cerebral action; and when you die, you die — that is to say, when the phenomenon of agglomeration reaches the end of its life and dissolves, everything dissolves. It is all right.”

Probably if things had been like that, life would have appeared so disgusting that I would have gone out of it long ago. But I must immediately say that it is not for a moral or even a spiritual reason that I disapprove of suicide. It is for me a
Words of the Mother – III

cowardice, and there is something in me that does not like cowardice, and therefore I would not... I would never run away from the problem.

That is point number one.

And then, once you are here, you ought to go to the end, even if the end is nothingness — you go till the end, and it is better to go in the best way possible, that is to say, the way most satisfactory to you. It happens that I had some philosophical curiosity and studied a little about all these problems. I found myself in the presence of Sri Aurobindo’s teaching, and what he says is for me the most satisfactory of all. What he has taught (I should say revealed, but not to a materialist) is, among the systems formulated by man, by far the most satisfactory for me, the most complete, answering in the most satisfactory way all the questions that can be put, the one that helps me most in life to have the feeling that it is worth something. Therefore I try to conform entirely to what he teaches and to live it integrally in the best possible way to live — best for me. It is all the same to me if others do not believe in it — whether they believe in it or not makes no difference for me. I do not need to be supported by the conviction of others; my own satisfaction is enough. Well, there is nothing more to say.

The experiment lasted for a long time. In complete detail, to all problems I answered like that. And when I had ended, I told myself, “But this is marvellous as an argument!” Because all the elements of doubt, ignorance, incomprehension, ill-will, negation, all those things that come — immediately they go away with that argument; they are annulled, they have no effect.

And afterwards, everything was securely grasped, solid.
What have you got to say?

(Silence)

It is much easier to reply to materialists who are uncompromising, convinced, sincere (that is to say, sincere within the limits
7 September 1963

of their consciousness) than to people having a religion — much easier!

But naturally, from the intellectual point of view, all human convictions have an explanation and a place. There is nothing men have thought which is not the deformation of a truth. The difficulty is not there, but rather in the fact that for religious people there are things which it is their duty to believe and it is a sin to let the mind discuss them — and so they shut themselves up, naturally, and they can never make any progress. Whereas the materialists, on the contrary, are supposed to know everything, explain everything: they explain everything rationally. And thus (Mother laughs) by the very fact that they explain everything, they can be led to wherever one wants to go.

With religious people nothing can be done.

Yes.

But after all, that also is not good. If they have been clinging to a religion, it is because that religion has helped them in one way or another, it has helped in them precisely something which wanted to have a certitude, not to have to search but to be able to rest on something solid without being responsible for the solidity — somebody else is responsible (Mother laughs) and it goes on like that. It is a lack of compassion to want to pull them out of that — it is better to leave them where they are. I never dispute with someone who has a faith — let him keep his faith! I take care not to tell him anything that might shake his faith, because it would not be good — they are not capable of having another.

But to a materialist: “I do not dispute, I accept your standpoint; only, you have nothing to say — I have taken my position; you take yours. If you are satisfied with what you have, keep it. If it helps you to live, it is quite all right.

“But you have no right to blame me or criticise me, because it is on your own basis. Even if all that I imagine is simply an imagination, I prefer my imagination to yours.”

There!