30 January 1957

“The whole world yearns after freedom, yet each creature is in love with his chains; this is the first paradox and inextricable knot of our nature.

“Man is in love with the bonds of birth; therefore he is caught in the companion bonds of death. In these chains he aspires after freedom of his being and mastery of his self-fulfilment.

“Man is in love with power; therefore he is subjected to weakness. For the world is a sea of waves of force that meet and continually fling themselves on each other; he who would ride on the crest of one wave, must faint under the shock of hundreds.

“Man is in love with pleasure; therefore he must undergo the yoke of grief and pain. For unmixed delight is only for the free and passionless soul; but that which pursues after pleasure in man is a suffering and straining energy.

“Man hungers after calm, but he thirsts also for the experiences of a restless mind and a troubled heart. Enjoyment is to his mind a fever, calm an inertia and a monotony.

“Man is in love with the limitations of his physical being, yet he would have also the freedom of his infinite mind and his immortal soul.

“And in these contrasts something in him finds a curious attraction; they constitute for his mental being the artistry of life. It is not only the nectar but the poison also that attracts his taste and his curiosity.”

Thoughts and Glimpses, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 385
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_Sweet Mother, what does “artistry” mean?_

What most men call “artistry” is just contrast. Artists say and feel that it is the shadows which make the light, that if there were no contrasts, they would not be able to make a picture. It is the same thing with music: the contrast between “forte” and “piano” is one of the greatest charms of music.

I knew some poets who used to say, “It is my enemies’ hatred which makes me value the affection of my friends....” And it is the almost inevitable likelihood of misfortune which gives all its savour to happiness, and so on. And they value repose only in contrast with the daily agitation, silence only because of the usual noise, and some of them even tell you, “Oh! it is because there are illnesses that good health is cherished.” It goes so far that a thing is valued only when it is lost. And as Sri Aurobindo says here: When this fever of action, of movement, this agitation of creative thought is not there, one feels one is falling into inertia. Most people fear silence, calm, quietude. They no longer feel alive when they are not agitated.

I have seen many cases in which Sri Aurobindo had given silence to somebody, had made his mind silent, and that person came back to him in a kind of despair, saying: “But I have become stupid!” For his thought was no longer excited.

What he says here is terribly true. Men want freedom but they are in love with their chains, and when one wants to take them away, when one wants to show them the path of true liberation, they are afraid, and often they even protest.

Almost all man’s works of art — literary, poetic, artistic — are based on the violence of contrasts in life. When one tries to pull them out of their daily dramas, they really feel that it is not artistic. If they wanted to write a book or compose a play where there would be no contrasts, where there would be no shadows in the picture, it would probably be something seemingly very dull, very monotonous, lifeless, for what man calls “life” is the drama of life, the anxiety of life, the violence of contrasts. And
perhaps if there were no death, they would be terribly tired of living.

(Long silence)

I have been asked a question about what I said in one of the former classes:

“The difficulties and obstacles met on the path when one wants to attain a certain aim — are they sometimes a sign that this decision, this plan or project was faulty from the beginning and that hence one should not persist or, on the contrary, do these difficulties indicate a victory to be won, a transformation to be attained? Are they a sign that one must persevere and hold fast? I am not speaking here of the decision to follow the path of Yoga, but of the little things connected with work, sports or other activities. In other words, how to recognise and interpret the Guidance which comes through circumstances or relations with others and through experience?”

I believe this is only an apparent contradiction.

If one wants to follow a discipline of yoga, naturally, before undertaking anything one must try to discern and know if the inspiration received is a real one, coming from the Divine, or whether it is simply a reaction to outer circumstances and an impulse, either vital or mental. It is quite important, even very important, to try to discern and act in full knowledge of the cause. But there are very many things one does and about which one is not in the habit of thinking beforehand. When the circumstance comes, one obeys it, so to say. And, indeed, these things, like almost everything one does in life, are not important in themselves. The only thing that matters is the attitude with which they are done. The fact that you do something because that action is present there before you for one reason or another
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and that you are, so to say, always obliged to act as long as you
are in the outer life — all this has a certain importance from the
point of view of the management of life if these acts are liable to
have far-reaching consequences in life, as for example, getting
married or going to live in one place or another or taking up
one occupation or another; these things are generally considered
important, and they are so to a certain extent; but even for them,
from the point of view of yoga, everything depends much more
on the attitude one takes than on the thing itself. And so, above
all, for all the very small actions of daily life, the importance is
reduced to a minimum.

There are some scrupulous people who set problems to
themselves and find it very difficult to solve them, because they
state the problem wrongly. I knew a young woman who was
a theosophist and was trying to practise; she told me, “We are
taught that the divine Will must prevail in all that we do, but in
the morning when I have my breakfast, how can I know whether
God wants me to put two lumps of sugar in my coffee or only
one?”... And it was quite touching, you know, and I had some
trouble explaining to her that the spirit in which she drank her
coffee, the attitude she had towards her food, was much more
important than the number of lumps of sugar she put into it.¹

It is the same with all the little things one does at every
moment. The divine Consciousness does not work in the human
way, It does not decide how many lumps of sugar you will put in
your coffee. It gradually puts you in the right attitude towards
actions, things — an attitude of consecration, suppleness, assent,
aspiration, goodwill, plasticity, effort for progress — and this is
what counts, much more than the small decision you take at
every second. One may try to find out what is the truest thing
to do, but it is not by a mental discussion or a mental prob-
lem that these things can be resolved. It is in fact by an inner

¹ About this story, a disciple remembers Mother telling him something to this effect:
“Now I would no longer laugh at this poor lady. I am not sure that the Lord does not
also attend to the number of lumps of sugar we put in our coffee!”
attitude which creates an atmosphere of harmony — progressive harmony — in which all one does will necessarily be the best thing that could be done in those particular circumstances. And the ideal would be an attitude complete enough for the action to be spontaneous, dictated by something other than an outer reason. But that is an ideal — for which one must aspire and which one can realise after some time. Till then, to take care always to keep the true attitude, the true aspiration, is much more important than to decide whether one will do gymnastic-marching or not and whether one will go to a certain class or not. Because these things have no real importance in themselves, they have only an altogether relative importance, the only important thing is just to keep the true orientation in one’s aspiration and a living will for progress.

As a general rule, and so that the experience may have its full benefit, when one has undertaken something one must do it with persistence, without caring for obstacles and difficulties, until an absolutely irrefutable event indicates that one no longer has to do it. This happens very rarely. Usually, things follow their own curve and when they reach an issue — either they have come to an end or have produced the desired result — one becomes aware of the reason for doing them. But the obstacles, oppositions — or encouragements — should not be considered as irrefutable signs to be followed, for these things may have very different meanings according to the case, and it is not at all on the basis of these outer events that one must judge the validity of one’s undertaking.

When one is very attentive and very sincere, one can have an indication, an inner but perceptible indication, of the value of what one has undertaken or the action one is doing. Truly, for someone who has an entire goodwill, that is, who in all sincerity, with the whole conscious part of his being, wants to do the right thing in the right way, there is always an indication; if for some reason or other one launches upon a more or less fatal action, one always feels an uneasiness in the region of the solar
plexus; an uneasiness which is not violent, which doesn’t compel recognition dramatically, but is very perceptible to someone who is attentive — something like a sort of regret, like a lack of assent. It may go as far as a kind of refusal to collaborate. But I must stress it, without violence, without brutal self-assertion: it makes no noise, does not hurt, it is at the most a slight uneasiness. And if you disregard it, if you pay no attention, attach no importance to it, after a little while it will completely disappear and there will be nothing any longer.

It is not that it increases with the growing error, on the contrary, it disappears and the consciousness becomes veiled.

Therefore, one cannot give this as a sure sign, for if you have disobeyed this little indication several times, well, it will no longer come. But I tell you that if in all sincerity you are very attentive to it, then it will be a very sure and precious guide.

But if there is an uneasiness, it comes at the beginning, almost immediately, and when it doesn’t show itself, well, no matter what one has started, it is preferable to do it to the very end so that the experience may be complete, unless one receives, as I said, an absolutely precise and categorical indication that it should not be done.