7 September 1955

Mother reads from *Lights on Yoga,* “Work”.

“All work” is “a school of experience”?

Yes, surely. You don’t understand?

No, Mother.

If you don’t do anything, you cannot have any experience. The whole life is a field of experience. Each movement you make, each thought you have, each work you do, can be an experience, and must be an experience; and naturally work in particular is a field of experience where one must apply all the progress which one endeavours to make inwardly.

If you remain in meditation or contemplation without working, well, you don’t know if you have progressed or not. You may live in an illusion, the illusion of your progress; while if you begin to work, all the circumstances of your work, the contact with others, the material occupation, all this is a field of experience in order that you may become aware not only of the progress made but of all the progress that remains to be made. If you live closed up in yourself, without acting, you may live in a completely subjective illusion; the moment you externalise your action and enter into contact with others, with circumstances and the objects of life, you become aware absolutely objectively of whether you have made progress or not, whether you are more calm, more conscious, stronger, more unselfish, whether you no longer have any desire, any preference, any weakness, any unfaithfulness — you can become aware of all this by working. But if you remain enclosed in a meditation that’s altogether personal, you may enter into a total illusion and never come out
of it, and believe that you have realised extraordinary things, while really you have only the impression, the illusion that you have done so.

That’s what Sri Aurobindo means.

*Then, Mother why do all the spiritual schools in India have as their doctrine escape from action?*

Yes, because all this is founded upon the teaching that life is an illusion. It began with the teaching of the Buddha who said that existence was the fruit of desire, and that there was only one way of coming out of misery and suffering and desire; it was to come out of existence. And then this continued with Shankara who added that not only is it the fruit of desire but it is a total illusion, and as long as you live in this illusion you cannot realise the Divine. For him there was not even the Divine, I think; for the Buddha, at least, there wasn’t any.

*Then did they truly have experiences?*

That depends on what you call “experience”. They certainly had an inner contact with something.

The Buddha certainly had an inner contact with something which, in comparison with the external life, was a non-existence; and in this non-existence, naturally, all the results of existence disappear. There is a state like this; it is even said that if one can keep this state for twenty days, one is sure to lose one’s body; if it is exclusive, I quite agree with it.

But it may be an experience which remains at the back, you see, and is conscious even while not being exclusive, and which causes the contact with the world and the outer consciousness to be supported by something that is free and independent. This indeed is a state in which one can truly make very great progress externally, because one can be detached from everything and act without attachment, without preference, with that inner
Yet this is the real necessity: once this inner freedom has been attained and the conscious contact with what is eternal and infinite, then, without losing this consciousness one must return to action and let that influence the whole consciousness turned towards action.

This is what Sri Aurobindo calls bringing down the Force from above. In this way there is a chance of being able to change the world, because one has brought in a new Force, a new region, a new consciousness and put it into contact with the outer world. So its presence and action will produce inevitable changes and, let us hope, a total transformation in what this outer world is.

So we could say that the Buddha quite certainly had the first part of the experience, but that he never dreamt of the second, because it was contrary to his own theory. His theory was that one had to run away; but it is obvious that there is only one way of escape, to die, and yet, as he himself has said so well, you may be dead and be completely attached to life and still be in the cycle of births and not have liberation. And in fact he has admitted the idea that it is by successive passing lives on the earth that one can manage to develop oneself to reach this liberation. But for him the ideal was that the world would not exist any longer. It was as though he accused the Divine of having made a mistake and that there was only one thing to do, to rectify the mistake by annulling it. But naturally, to be reasonable and logical, he did not admit the Divine. It was a mistake made by whom, how, in what way? — this he never explained. He simply said that it was made and that the world had begun with desire and had to end with desire. He was just on the point of saying that this world was purely subjective, that is, a collective illusion, and that if the illusion ceased the world would cease to be. But he did not come so far. It is Shankara who took over and made the thing altogether complete in his teaching.

If we go back to the teaching of the Rishis, for example, there was no idea of flight out of the world; for them the realisation freedom which is expressed outwardly.
Questions and Answers

had to be terrestrial. They conceived a Golden Age very well, in which the realisation would be terrestrial. But starting from a certain decline of vitality in the spiritual life of the country, perhaps, from a different orientation which came in, you see... it is certainly starting from the teaching of the Buddha that this idea of flight came, which has undermined the vitality of the country, because one had to make an effort to cut oneself off from life. The outer reality became an illusory falsehood, and one had no longer to have anything to do with it. So naturally one was cut off from the universal energy, and the vitality went on diminishing, and with this vitality all the possibilities of realisation also diminished.

But it is very remarkable... I have met many people who were trying this method of detachment and separation from life, and living exclusively in the inner reality. These people, almost all of them, had in the outer life absolutely gross defects. When they returned to the ordinary consciousness, they were very much lower than one of the elite, for instance, a man of great culture and great intellectual and moral development. These people in their ordinary conduct, when they came out of their meditation, their exclusive concentration, lived very grossly. They had very, very ordinary defects, you see. I knew many of this kind. Or perhaps they had come to a stage where their outer life was a sort of dream in which they were, so to say, not existing. But one had altogether the impression of beings who were completely incomplete, totally incomplete, that is, outwardly there was nothing at all.

But if in the outer consciousness one is very low, how can one meditate? It becomes very difficult, doesn’t it?

Yes, very difficult!

Then how do these people succeed?
But they came out of it completely, they left it as one takes off a cloak, then they put it aside and entered another part of their being. And this is what happened exactly, it was as though they took away this consciousness, laid it aside and entered another part of their being. And in their meditation, as long as they remained there, it was very good. But these people, most of them, when in that state, were in a kind of samadhi, and they could not even speak; and so when they came back and returned to the ordinary consciousness, it was just where it was before, completely unchanged; there was no contact.

You see, what makes the thing difficult for you to understand is that you don’t know concretely, practically, that there are... different planes of your being, as of all beings, which may not have any contact among themselves, and that one may very well pass from one plane to another, and live in a certain consciousness, leaving the other absolutely asleep. And moreover, even in activity, at different times different states of being enter into activity, and unless one takes the greatest care to unify them, put them all in harmony, one of them may pull from one side, another from the other, and a third pull from the third, and all of them be absolutely in contradiction with one another.

There are people who in a certain state of being are constructive, for example, and capable of organising their life and doing very useful work, and in another part of their being they are absolutely destructive and constantly demolish what the other has constructed. I knew quite a number of people of this kind who, apparently had a rather incoherent life, but it was because the two parts of the being, instead of completing each other and harmonising in a synthesis, were separated and in opposition, and one undid what the other did, and all the time they passed like this from one to the other. They had a disorganised life. And there are more people of this kind than one would think!

There are very outstanding examples, striking ones, so clear and distinct they are; but less totally opposed conditions, though all the same in opposition to one another, occur very, very often.
Questions and Answers

Besides, one has oneself the experience, when one has tried to make progress; there is one part of the being which participates in the effort and makes progress, and suddenly, without rhyme or reason, all the effort one has made, all the consciousness one has gained, capsizes in something which is quite different, opposed, over which one has no control.

Some people can make an effort the whole day through, succeed in building something within themselves; they go to sleep at night and the next morning all that they had done on the previous day is lost, they have lost it in a state of unconsciousness. This happens very often, these are not exceptional cases, far from it. And this is what explains, you see, why some people — when they withdraw into their higher mind for instance — can enter into very deep meditation and be liberated from the things of this world, and then when they return to their ordinary physical consciousness, are absolutely ordinary if not even vulgar, because they haven’t taken care to establish any contact, and to see that what is above acts and transforms what is below.

That’s all.

Mother, about the Buddha I have a question. You said that the Avatar comes to the earth to show that the Divine can live upon the earth. Then why did he preach just the contrary? Is he an Avatar or not?

That!... Some people say he was an Avatar, others say no, but this, to tell you the truth, it is...

I think that this first thing, that the Avatar comes to the earth to prove that the Divine can... it is not so much to prove by words as to prove by a certain realisation; and I think that it would be rather this aspect of the Divine which is constructive and preservative, rather than a transformative and destructive aspect. You see, to use the Indian names known in India, well, I think they are Avatars of Vishnu who come rather to prove
that the Divine can come upon earth; whereas each time Shiva has manifested he has always manifested like this, in beings who have tried to fight against an illusion and demolish what is there.

I have reasons to think that the Buddha was one. To speak more accurately, he manifested something of the power of Shiva: it was the same compassion, the same understanding of all the misery, and the same power which destroys — obviously with the intention of transforming, but destroys rather than constructs. His work does not seem to have been very constructive. It was very necessary to teach men practically not to be egoistic; from that point of view it was very necessary. But in its deeper principle it has not helped very much in the transformation of the earth.

As I said, you see, instead of helping the descent of the higher Consciousness into the terrestrial life, it has strongly encouraged the separation of the deeper consciousness, which he said was the only true one, from all outer expression.

Now, you see, this question of the Divine upon the earth: well, quite naturally those who believed in him have made a god of him. One has only to see all the temples and all the Buddhist godheads to know that human nature has always the tendency to deify what it admires.

So, there it is!

*There is something else we would like to ask. There are many discussions on this subject: should we take any interest in those songs which have no meaning, usually cinema songs?*

Take interest? How do you mean?

*There are many who listen to these songs and sing them also.*

Yes, but I don’t understand “taking interest”. One may like these
Questions and Answers

things because one has no taste, but I don’t see what is meant by “taking interest”. One takes interest in a study, one takes interest in a work, one takes interest in the progress to be made, but... One may indulge in an activity of idleness, but that doesn’t mean that one can take any interest in it.

*If one has to sing these songs?*

Has to? Why? To earn your living? *(Laughter)*

*Isn’t it an obstacle to our progress?*

But everything that brings down the consciousness is an obstacle in one’s progress. If you have a desire it creates an obstacle in your progress; if you have a bad thought or bad will, it creates an obstacle in your progress; if you welcome some kind of falsehood, it creates an obstacle in your progress; and if you cultivate vulgarity in yourself, it creates an obstacle in your progress; everything which is not in keeping with the Truth creates an obstacle to progress; and there are hundreds of these things every day.

For example, every movement of impatience, every movement of anger, every movement of violence, every tendency to dissimulation, every deformation of the truth, whether big or small, every bad will, every partial judgment, every preference, every encouragement to bad taste and to... yes, to vulgarity, all this is constantly in the way. All this, every one of these movements, big or small, passing or lasting, all are like so many stones to build the wall to prevent yourself from progressing. It is not one thing only, there are hundreds of them, thousands. It is enough to have a preference in oneself, it is enough to be impatient, enough to have a little desire to conceal something, enough to feel a disgust, a distaste for effort, it is enough... anything at all is enough, which has something to do with desires, repulsions, all that, for it to impede your progress. And then,
from the point of view of the intellectual being, the artistic being, the side of inner and outer culture, every lack of taste, whatever it may be, is a terrible obstacle.

This world, I must say, is a world of extremes from the point of view of taste, artistic and literary culture; on one side, it makes a great effort to discover something that’s very high, very pure, very noble, and on the other, at the other end, it sinks into a vulgarity which certainly is infinitely greater than the vulgarity of the past two or three centuries. What is curious is that, going back two or three centuries, people who were uncultured were gross, but their grossness resembled that of animals, and there was not much perversion in it; there was a little, because as soon as the mind is there, perversion comes in, but there was not a great deal of perversion. But now, what does not rise to the mountain-peak, what remains on ground-level, is absolutely perverted in its grossness, that is, it is not only ignorant and stupid, it is ugly, dirty and repugnant, it is deformed, it is wicked, it is very low. And it is indeed the wrong use of the mind which has produced this. Without the mind this perversion did not exist, but it's the wrong use of the mind which produces this perversion. Well, it has become what is ugly from every point of view, now, what is vulgar and ugly.

There are things, things considered very pretty nowadays... I have seen photographs or reproductions which are considered very fine but they are frightfully vulgar in their perversion, and yet people go into ecstasies over them and find them pretty! It's because there is something deformed, not only without culture, not only undeveloped, but deformed, something that's much worse, because it is much more difficult to restore something perverted and deformed than to enlighten something ignorant and uneducated. Well, I think some things have been great instruments of perversion, and among these one may put the cinema. It could have been, and I hope it will become, an instrument of education and development; but for the moment it has been an instrument of perversion, and of a truly hideous perversion:
perversion of taste, perversion of consciousness, and everything with a terrible moral and physical ugliness. Yet it is something which can be used for education, progress, culture and artistic development; and from this point of view it could be a means of spreading beauty and culture much more widely and making them much more accessible to all, than the former methods could do. But it is always like this — for what can be better, if it is not better, it becomes worse. And as I said at the beginning, we are in a period of excesses — excess in every way — a thing tries excessively to perfect itself and falls into excesses of perversion which, relatively, are as great if not greater. And if one looks attentively at oneself, one becomes aware that naturally, as one lives in the world as it is at present, one shares in its vulgarity, and that unless one observes oneself closely and constantly puts the light of one’s highest consciousness upon oneself, one risks making mistakes in taste, from the spiritual point of view, rather frequently.

There we are!

Now I am going to give you a meditation this evening, and I am going to see whether you are capable of taking a cerebral bath. Cleansing!

Mother, when we meditate here, on which centre should we concentrate?

Truly speaking, each time it ought to be different.

The first time I told you to meditate upon what we had read, didn’t I? Well, if you like, today we could try to let a purifying consciousness enter into us, which will give us, as I just said jokingly, a brain bath, that is, a good little cleansing — a light which purifies and cleans.