25 January 1951

“The vital being in us is the seat of impulses and desires, of enthusiasm and violence, of dynamic energy and desperate depression, of passions and revolt. It can set in motion everything, build up and realise, it can also destroy and mar everything. It seems to be, in the human being, the most difficult part to train. It is a long labour requiring great patience, and it demands a perfect sincerity, for without sincerity one will deceive oneself from the very first step, and all endeavour for progress will go in vain.”

“The Science of Living”, On Education

It is very difficult to find the borderland between a true need and a desire (the yogic ideal, of course, is never to have any need, and therefore not to want anything), but this essay is written for all men of goodwill who try to know themselves and control themselves. And there we really face a problem which compels an extraordinary sincerity, for the very first way in which the vital meets life is through desire — and yet, there are necessities. But how to know if things are really necessary, not desired?... For that you must observe yourself very, very attentively, and if there is anything in you which produces something like a small intense vibration, then you may be sure that there lies a desire. For example, you say, “This food is necessary for me” — you believe, you imagine, you think that you need such and such a thing and you find the necessary means to obtain the thing. To know if it is a need or a desire, you must look at yourself very closely and ask yourself, “What will happen if I cannot get the thing?” Then if the immediate answer is, “Oh, it will be very bad”, you may be sure that it is a matter of desire. It is the same for everything. For every problem you draw back, look at yourself and ask, “Let us
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see, am I going to have the thing?” If at that moment something in you jumps up with joy, you may be certain there is a desire. On the other hand, if something tells you, “Oh, I am not going to get it”, and you feel very depressed, then again it is a desire.

If the vital is not to deceive you, you must not only be very mindful but your sincerity must also be almost miraculous — it is not to discourage you that I have used the word “miraculous”; on the contrary, it is in order to give you a greater aspiration for sincerity.

“With the collaboration of the vital no realisation seems impossible, no transformation impracticable.”

“The Science of Living”, On Education

It is this which is so wonderful. I believe the vital is very conscious of its power and that is why it is important: it has that dynamic energy which makes no difficulty too difficult for it; but it must be on the right side. If it collaborates, everything is wonderful, but it is not easy to get from it this constant collaboration. It is a very good worker, it works very, very well, but in working it seeks always its own satisfaction, it wants to get something from the work, all the pleasure that can be drawn from it, all the advantage that can be had, and when this satisfaction is not given for one reason or another (there may be many reasons), it is not happy, not at all happy: “That’s not fair, I work, and I am given nothing in return”; then it sulks, it does not move, it keeps mum, and at times it says, “I do not exist.” Then all energy runs out from the body, you get tired, exhausted, you can no longer do anything. And all of a sudden this becomes worse, for I must tell you that the mind is very friendly with the vital — not the reasoning mind but the physical mind is very, very friendly with the vital; so, as soon as the vital begins to say, “I have nothing to do with that, I have been badly treated, I won’t have anything to do with it”, the mind naturally comes in to encourage it, to explain, give good reasons, and it is the same
old story: “Life is not worth living, people are truly disgusting and all circumstances are against me, it is better to leave it all”, and so on. This happens very often, but at times there is a little glimmer of reason somewhere which tells you, “Ah, enough of this comedy!”

But if this becomes very strong and you do not react in time, then you fall into despair: “Really this life is not made for people like me; I would be happier elsewhere, in heaven where everybody is very nice and one can do whatever one wants”, etc., whence paradisiac conceptions — indeed I think it is these two accomplices, the mind and the vital, who have invented paradise! For if life, existence, does not conform to your desires, you begin to lament: “Oh, I have had enough of it, this world is miserable and deceitful, I want to die.” Then there is a moment when this situation becomes serious; discouragement changes into revolt and depression into dissatisfaction: I speak of people who are rather ill-natured — there are people who are ill-natured (it is not their fault!) and there are people who are good-natured (it is not their fault either!) but things are like that — well, those who are ill-natured get angry, revolt, want to break and pull down everything: “You will see, they do not do what I want, they will be punished!” Then this becomes a little more serious, because the mind is always there to serve as the accomplice and it begins to have wonderful ideas of revenge — from discouragement you do one kind of stupid thing, from wickedness you do another. The stupidities of discouragement concern you personally, whilst the stupidities of wickedness concern others; and sometimes these latter stupidities are very serious. If you have a little goodwill, it is better at the time when such fits seize you to make it a rule not to stir, telling yourself, “I am not going to move, I shall wait for the storm to pass”, for in a few moments one can destroy or ruin months of regular effort.

But here I give you a consolation:

“These crises are of less duration and are less dangerous
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in the case of those who have established a contact with their psychic being sufficient to keep alive in them the flame of aspiration and the consciousness of the ideal to be realised. They can, with the help of this consciousness, deal with their vital as one deals with a child in revolt, with patience and perseverance showing it the truth and light, endeavouring to convince it and awaken in it the goodwill which for a moment was veiled.”

“The Science of Living”, On Education

And the last consolation. For those who are truly sincere, truly good-willed, all these fits can be changed into a means for progress. Each time that you have an attack of this kind, a sort of storm, you can change the crisis into a new progress, into one more step towards the goal. If precisely you have the necessary sincerity to look straight in the face, within you, at the cause of the fit — the wrong you have done, the wrong you have thought, the wrong you have felt — if you see the weakness, the violence or the vanity (for I forgot to tell you that the vital is much more full of vanity than the mind), if you look at all that full in the face and if you recognise honestly and sincerely that what has happened is due to your fault, then you are able to put a red-hot iron as it were on the affected spot. You can purify the weakness and turn it into a new consciousness. And you find after the storm that you have grown a little more, you have truly made a progress.

“Progress may be slow, falls may be frequent, but if a courageous will is maintained one is sure to triumph some day and see all difficulties melt and vanish before the radiant consciousness of truth.”

Ibid.

If I lay stress here upon defects and difficulties, it is not to
discourage you from making an effort but to tell you that you must do things with the necessary courage and precisely not be disheartened because you are not successful at once; but if the aspiration is there in you, if the will is there in you, it is absolutely certain that sooner or later you will succeed. And I am saying this for people who live in very ordinary circumstances, less favourable perhaps than yours, but who can, even so, learn to know themselves and conquer themselves, master themselves, control themselves. Therefore, if the conditions are favourable you have a much greater chance of succeeding. One thing is always necessary, not to give up the game — for it is a great game and the result is worth the trouble of playing it through.

“Lastly, we must, by means of a rational and clear-seeing physical education, make our body strong and supple so that it may become in the material world a fit instrument for the truth-force which wills to manifest through us.”

Ibid.

It is much easier to organise the body than the vital, for instance. But the mind and the vital, with the character and temperament they have, what do they not do with this poor slave of a body! After having ill-treated it, perhaps ruined it (it protests a little, falls ill a little), this is what the two accomplices say: “What a beast is this body, it cannot follow us in our movement!” Unhappily, the body obeys its masters, the mind and the vital, blindly, without any discrimination. The mind comes along with its theories: “You must not eat that, it will harm you; you must not do that, it is bad”, and if the mind is not wise and clear-sighted, the poor body suffers the consequences of the orders it receives. I do not speak of the orders it receives from the vital. The mind with its rigid principles and the vital with its excesses and outbursts and passions are quick to destroy the body’s equilibrium and to create a condition of fatigue, exhaustion and illness.
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“It must be freed from this tyranny; that can be done only through a constant union with the psychic centre of the being.”

“The Science of Living”, On Education

That is evidently the cure of all ills.

“The body has a remarkable capacity of adaptation and endurance. It is fit to do so many more things than one can usually imagine. If instead of the ignorant and despotic masters that govern it, it is ruled by the central truth of the being, one will be surprised at what it is capable of doing.”

Ibid.

During the last war, it was proved that the body was capable of enduring such suffering as is normally impossible to endure. You have surely read or heard these stories of war in which the body was made to suffer and endure terrible things, and it withstood all that, it proved that it had almost inexhaustible capacities of endurance. Some people happened to be under conditions that should have killed them; if they survived, it was because they had in them a very strong will to survive and the body obeyed that will.

“In this sound and balanced life a new harmony will manifest in the body, reflecting the harmony of the higher regions, which will give it the perfect proportions and the ideal beauty of form.”

Ibid.

That is the last stage. If you compare the human body as it now is with a higher ideal of beauty, obviously very few would pass the examination. In almost everyone there is a sort of unbalance in the proportions; we are so accustomed to it that
we do not notice it, but if we look from the standpoint of the higher beauty, it becomes visible; very few bodies would bear comparison with perfect beauty. There are a thousand reasons for this unbalance but only one remedy, to instil into the being this instinct, this sense of true beauty, a supreme beauty which will gradually act on the cells and make the body capable of expressing beauty. This is still a thing which is not known: the body is infinitely more plastic than you believe. You must have surely noticed (perhaps very vaguely) that those who live in an inner peace, in an inner beauty, a light, and perfect goodwill, have an expression which is not quite the same as of people who live in bad thoughts, in the lower part of their nature. When the human being is at his best, above his base animality, he reflects something which is not there when he lives in a state of beastiality.

If one tried to change one's form out of egoism or that famous thing, vanity, naturally, one would not succeed, for it is something deeper which has the power to act; but if one could refrain from having at all times bad will, wicked thoughts, one would see a kind of harmony beginning to express itself gradually in the forms and features, for it is a fact that the body expresses the inner states.

But you forget one thing. If you have in the whole day five or six hours of higher consciousness, you feel that it is already much, and the rest of the time you live more or less like a little animal, you let yourself go, you are driven by circumstances. And you forget completely to approach the Thing which is above, which can prevent you from descending into the lower regions of your nature.

You could get much more from your body if you only took the trouble.

You must not despise it nor scold it too much, for it is not the culprit; if you follow a suitable method to train and educate your body, you will have an infinitely greater output than you have now. It is quite recently that men have begun to speak of
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physical culture as an important thing; if you go back a hundred years, it was the privilege of those who had nothing else to do. A hundred years ago it was a luxury. When someone said, “I do not want to send my child to school, he must earn his living”, there were many who answered, “No, pardon me, you make a serious mistake; if you do not prepare your child for his adult life, he will be incapable of doing what he should do.” People said this about the mind but it was not said about the body. So many children lived in more or less good conditions, with a body which was indeed a difficulty, but it used to be said, “That will get corrected, that will be all right....” With training and patience you can acquire a body with which you can get along in life. Nowadays, people recognise the value of a healthy and balanced life. And I have said that this harmony will be progressive:

“This harmony will be progressive, for the truth of the being is never static, it is a continual unfolding of a growing, a more and more global and comprehensive perfection. As soon as the body learns to follow the movement of progressive harmony, it will be possible for it, through a continuous process of transformation, to escape the necessity of disintegration and destruction. Thus the irrevocable law of death will have no reason for existing any more.

“... These four attributes of the Truth will spontaneously express themselves in our being. The psychic will be the vehicle of true and pure love, the mind that of infallible knowledge, the vital will manifest an invincible power and strength and the body will be the expression of a perfect beauty and a perfect harmony.”

“The Science of Living”, On Education

This is a thing very little known among mystics and religious people: in each part of the being the Divine manifests Himself
differently. In the higher parts He manifests as Power, Love, etc.,
but in the physical He manifests as Harmony and Beauty.

Hence, the problem of the expression of physical beauty is
a spiritual problem.