Sweet Mother, I don't understand “the strong immobility of an immortal spirit”.
Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, SABCL, Vol. 20, p. 95

What is it you don't understand? That an immortal spirit has a strong immobility? It says what it means. An immortal spirit is necessarily immobile and strong, by the very fact of its being immortal.

But then Sri Aurobindo says about the Gita: “Not the mind’s control of vital impulse is its rule, but the strong immobility of an immortal spirit.”

Yes. But this is a conclusion, my child; you must read the beginning of the sentence if you want to understand.... Ah! (Turning to a disciple) Give me the light and the book. (Mother searches). Here it is, he says, “The Gita... aims at something absolute, unmitigated, uncompromising, a turn, an attitude that will change the whole poise of the soul. Not the mind’s control of vital impulse is its rule, but the strong immobility of an immortal spirit.”

This is as clear as daylight. The Gita demands the strong immobility of an immortal spirit — all the rest is secondary. What the Gita wants is that the spirit should be conscious of its immortality and thus have a strong immobility.

For this is a fact, it’s like that. When the spirit is conscious of immortality, it becomes an immobility all made of strength. Immobility — that is to say, it doesn’t move any longer, but it is a strong immobility, it is not an immobility of inertia or impotence; it is a strong immobility which is a basis for action, that is, all one does founds itself upon this powerful — all-powerful — immobility of the spirit that is immortal.
But you see, there is no explanation which can give you that; you must have the experience. As long as one has not had the experience, one can’t understand what this means.... And it is the same for everything: the head, the little brain, cannot understand. The minute one has the experience, one understands — not before. One may have a sort of imaginative idea, but this is not understanding. To understand, one must live it. When you become conscious of your immortal spirit, you will know what its strong immobility is — but not before. Otherwise, these are mere words.

You don’t understand how one can be immobile and strong at the same time, is that what is bothering you? Well, I reply that the greatest strength is in immobility. That is the sovereign power.

And there is a very small superficial application of this which perhaps you will understand. Someone comes and insults you or says unpleasant things to you; and if you begin to vibrate in unison with this anger or this ill-will, you feel quite weak and powerless and usually you make a fool of yourself. But if you manage to keep within yourself, especially in your head, a complete immobility which refuses to receive these vibrations, then at the same time you feel a great strength, and the other person cannot disturb you. If you remain very quiet, even physically, and when violence is directed at you, you are able to remain very quiet, very silent, very still, well, that has a power not only over you but over the other person also. If you don’t have all these vibrations of inner response, if you can remain absolutely immobile within yourself, everywhere, this has an almost immediate effect upon the other person.

That gives you an idea of the power of immobility. And it is a very common fact which can occur every day; it is not a great event of spiritual life, it is something of the outer, material life.

There is a tremendous power in immobility: mental immobility, sensorial immobility, physical immobility. If you can remain like a wall, absolutely motionless, everything the other
Questions and Answers

person sends you will immediately fall back upon him. And it has an immediate action. It can stop the arm of the assassin, you understand, it has that strength. Only, one must not just appear to be immobile and yet be boiling inside! That’s not what I mean. I mean an integral immobility.

Mother, is this the same as the equality of soul Sri Aurobindo has spoken about?

Equality of soul is a way. It is a means, it is a way — it can be a goal also. But it is not the consummation.

For example, there are those who say, who profess that everything that happens is the expression of the divine Will (I spoke about this last time, I think), there is an entire way of looking at life, understanding life, which is like that, which says, “All that is, the world as it is, all that happens, is the expression of the divine Will; therefore wisdom wants us, if we want to be in relation with the Divine, to accept without flinching and without the slightest emotion or reaction all that happens, since it is the expression of the divine Will, and it is understood that we should bow down before it.” This is a conception which tends precisely to help people to acquire this equality of soul. But if you adopt this idea without adopting its opposite and making a synthesis of the two, well, naturally, you have only to sit through life and do nothing — or, in any case, never try to make the world progress.

I remember having read in a class, before our present class started — a class which also used to be held on Wednesdays, perhaps, I don’t quite know, in which I used to read books — I read a book by Anatole France, who had a very subtle wit — I think it was Le Livre de Jerome Coignard but I am not absolutely sure — where he says that men would be perfectly happy if they were not so anxious to improve life. I am not quoting the exact words but the idea. Unhappiness begins with this will to make men and things better!... (Mother laughs) That is his way of
saying exactly the same thing I was just telling you in another form. If you want to be peaceful, happy, always satisfied, to have perfect equality of soul, you must tell yourself, “Things are as they should be,” and if you are religious you should tell yourself, “They are as they should be because they are the expression of the divine Will”, and we have only one thing to do, that is to accept them as they are and be very quiet, because it is better to be quiet than to be restless. He turns the thing round and puts it in another way; he says life is very comfortable and very tolerable and very acceptable, if men don’t begin to wish that it should be different. And the minute they are not happy, naturally nobody is happy! Since they find that it is not what it should be, well, they begin to be unhappy — and others too.

But if everyone had the good sense to say, “Things are as they should be; one dies because one has to die, and one is ill because one has to be ill, one is separated from those one loves because one has to be separated, and then, etc... and one is in poverty because one has to be poor, one...”, you know, there is no end to it. Well, if completely, totally, one says, “Things are as they should be”, it makes no sense to grieve or to revolt, it’s foolish!... Ah! one must be logical. So we say that misery begins with the will to make things better than they are. Why do you not want to be ill when you are ill? You are much more ill when, being ill, you don’t want to be ill, than if you tell yourself, “All right, it is God’s Will, I accept my illness!” At least you are quiet, that helps you to recover, perhaps.... And poor people — why do they want to be rich? And people who lose their children or their parents — why don’t they want it to be like that? If everybody wanted things to be as they are, everybody would be happy.

This is one point of view. Only it happens that perhaps — perhaps, the divine Will is not quite like that. And perhaps it is as in that story — you all know the story of the elephant and its mahout? — the elephant, its mahout and the Brahmin on the road who refused to get out of the way of the elephant and, when the mahout told him, “Go away”, he replied, “No, God
in me wants to stay here”, and the mahout answered, “Pardon me, but God in me tells you to go away!”

So the reply to Anatole France is perhaps just this that there is a will higher than that of man which wants things to change. And so there is nothing to do but obey and make them change.

There we are. Is that all?

Sweet Mother, it is written here: “In the path of works action is the knot we have first to loosen.”

The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 94

Why is action a knot?

Because one is attached to action. The knot is the knot of the ego. You act because of desire. Sri Aurobindo says this, doesn’t he? The ordinary way of acting is tied to desire in one form or another—a desire, a need—so that is the knot. If you act only to satisfy desire—a desire which you call a need or a necessity or anything else, but in truth, if you go to the very root of the thing, you see that it is the impulse of a desire which makes you act—well, if you act only under the effect of the impulse of desire, you will no longer be able to act when you eliminate the desire.

And this is the first answer people give you. When they are told, “Act without being attached to the result of action, have this consciousness that it is not you who are acting, it is the Divine who is acting”, the reply which ninety-nine and a half per cent give is, “But if I feel like that, I don’t move any longer! I don’t do anything any more; it is always a need, a desire, a personal impulse which makes me act in one way or another.”

So Sri Aurobindo says, if you want to realise this teaching of the Gita, the first thing to do is to loosen this knot, the knot binding action to desire—so firmly tied are they that if you take away one you take away the other. He says the knot must be loosened in order to be able to remove desire and yet continue to act.
And this is a fact, this is what must be done. The knot must be loosened. It is a small inner operation which you can very easily perform; and when it has been performed, you realise that you act absolutely without any personal motive, but moved by a Force higher than your egoistic force, and also more powerful. And then you act, but the consequences of action no longer return upon you.

This is a wonderful phenomenon of consciousness, and quite concrete. In life you do something — whatever you do, good, bad, indifferent, it doesn’t matter — whatever it may be, it immediately has a series of consequences. In fact you do it to obtain a certain result, that is why you act, with an eye to the result. For example, if I stretch out my hand like this to take the mike, I am looking for the result, you see, to make sounds in the mike. And there is always a consequence, always. But if you loosen the knot and let a Force coming from above — or elsewhere — act through you and make you do things, though there are consequences of your action, they don’t come to you any longer, for it was not you who initiated the action, it was the Force from above. And the consequences pass above, or else they are guided, willed, directed, controlled by the Force which made you act. And you feel absolutely free, nothing comes back to you of the result of what you have done.

There are people who have had this experience — but these things come first in a flash, for a moment, and then withdraw; it is only when one is quite ready for the transformation that this comes and is established — well, some people have had this experience once, perhaps for a few seconds in their lives, they have had the experience; and then the movement has been withdrawn, the state of consciousness has withdrawn; but the memory remains. And they imitate that. And if by chance they happen to be people who know how to make speeches, like certain gurus who have disciples to whom they teach the path, they tell them this, “When it is the Divine who acts through you and when you have loosened the knot of desire, you no longer
Questions and Answers

suffer any moral or other consequences of what you do. And you can do anything whatever: you can kill your neighbour, you can violate a woman, you can do everything the Divine wants in you — and you will never suffer any consequences."

And indeed they do it! Yes, they take the experience as a cloak to cover all their excesses.... This is just by the way, to put you on your guard against people who pretend to be what they are not.

But, as a matter of fact, the result is very simple, for immediately they suffer the consequences of their pretences — they say they don’t, but they suffer them.... I knew of a very striking case of a sannyasin who was furious with someone who did not want to be his disciple — already this proved that he was far from having realised this state — and who wished to take revenge. And indeed he had some powers, he had made a very powerful formation to kill this person who had refused to be his disciple. It so happened that this person was in contact with Sri Aurobindo. He told him his story and Sri Aurobindo told it to me. And the result was that the formation made by that man, who was acting with his so-called divine Will, fell back on him in such a way that it was he who died!

And it was simply the fact of re-establishing the truth. There was nothing else to do.

So the moral of the story is that one must not pretend, one must be; that one must be absolutely sincere and not cover up one’s desires with fine theories.

I have met many people who claimed they had perfect equality of soul and perfect freedom, and hid themselves behind these theories: “All is the divine Will”, and who, in fact, in their thought, were substituting their own will for the divine Will, and were very far from realising what they claimed. They were idlers who didn’t want to make any effort and preferred keeping their nature as it was, rather than working to transform it. Voilà!

_Sweet Mother, do these people have powers?_
Yes! There are some who have great powers. But these powers come from the vital and from an association with vital entities. There are all kinds of powers. Only, those powers don’t hold out before the true divine Power — they can’t resist. But over ordinary human beings they have much power.

Then, they can do harm?

Much. Not only they can, they do it. They do a lot of harm. The number of people who are tormented because they had the misfortune of meeting a so-called sannyasin,¹ is considerable, considerable. I am not telling you this to frighten you, because here you are protected, but it is a fact. While receiving initiation these men have received the imposition of a force from the vital world, which is extremely dangerous.... This is not always the case, but most often this is what happens.

Because sincerity is so rare a virtue in the world, one ought to bow down before it with respect when one meets it. Sincerity — what we call sincerity, that is to say, a perfect honesty and transparency: that there may be nowhere in the being anything which pretends, hides or wants to pass itself off for what it is not.

¹ Later the Mother added the following commentary: “Of course, this refers only to those who put on the orange robe with the sole purpose of hiding their egoistic passions behind the veil of a dress which is generally respected. There can be no question about those who have a pure heart and whose dress is simply the outer sign of their integral consecration to the spiritual life.”