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*There is a common idea that visions are a sign of high spirituality. Is this true?*

Not necessarily. Moreover, to see is one thing but to understand and interpret what is seen is quite another thing and much more difficult. Generally, those who see are misled because they give the meaning or interpretation they wish to give according to their desires, hopes and prepossessions. And then, too, there are many different planes in which you can see. There is a mental seeing, a vital seeing, and there are some visions that are seen in a plane very close to the most material. The visions that belong to the last category appear in forms and symbols that seem to be absolutely material, so clear and real and tangible they are. And if you know how to interpret them you can have very exact indications of circumstances and of the inner condition of people.

Let us illustrate. Here is a vision that someone actually had. A road climbs up a steep and precipitous hillside, bathed in full bright sunlight. On the road a heavy coach drawn by six strong horses is proceeding with great difficulty; it is advancing slowly but steadily. Arrives a man who looks over the situation, takes his position behind the coach and begins to push it or tries to push it up the hill. Then someone comes who has knowledge and says to him, "Why do you labour in vain? Do you think your effort can have any effect? For you it is an impossible task. Even the horses find it difficult."

Now the clue to the meaning of the vision lies in the image of the six horses. Horses are symbols of power and the number six represents divine creation; so the six horses signify the powers of divine creation. The coach stands for realisation, for the thing that has to be realised, achieved, brought up to the

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summit, to the height where dwells the Light. Although these powers of creation are divine, it is a hard labour even for them to consummate the realisation; for they have to work against heavy odds, against the whole downward pull of nature. Then comes in the human being in his arrogance and ignorance, with his small fund of mental powers and thinks that he is somebody and can do something. The best thing he can do is to step inside the coach, sit down comfortably and let the horses carry him.

Dreams are quite a different thing. They are more difficult to interpret, since each person has his own world of dream-imagery peculiar to himself. Of course, there are dreams that do not signify much, those that are connected with the most superficial and physical layer of consciousness, those that are the result of stray thoughts, random impressions, mechanical reactions or reflex activities. These have no regular or organised form and shape and meaning; they are hardly remembered and leave almost no trace in the consciousness. But even dreams that have a somewhat deeper origin are still obscure, since they are peculiarly personal, in this sense that they depend for their make-up almost entirely upon the experiences and idiosyncrasies of the individual. Visions also are made up of symbols that do not necessarily obtain universal currency. The symbols vary according to race and tradition and religion. One symbol may be peculiarly Christian, another peculiarly Hindu, a third may be common to all the East and a fourth only to the West. Dreams, on the other hand, are exclusively personal; they depend upon everyday occurrences and impressions. It is exceedingly difficult for one man to explain or interpret another's dream. Each man is like a closed circle to every other man. But everyone can study for himself his own dreams, unravel them and find out their meaning.

Now the procedure to deal with dreams and the dreamland. First become conscious — conscious of your dreams. Observe the relation between them and the happenings of your waking hours. If you remember your night, you will be able to trace

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back very often the condition of your day to the condition of your night. In sleep some action or other is always going on in your mental or vital or other plane; things happen there and they govern your waking consciousness. For instance, some are very anxious to perfect themselves and make a great effort during the day. They go to sleep and, when they rise the next day, they find no trace of the gains of their previous day's effort; they have to go over the same ground once again. This means that the effort and whatever achievement there was belonged to the more superficial or wakeful parts of the being, but there were deeper and dormant parts that were not touched. In sleep you fell into the grip of these unconscious regions and they opened and swallowed all that you had laboriously built up in your conscious hours.

Be conscious! Be conscious of the night as well as of the day. First you have to get consciousness, afterwards, control. You who remember your dreams may have had this experience that, even while dreaming, you knew it was a dream; you knew that it was an experience that did not belong to the material world. When once you know, you can act there in the same way as in the material world; even in the dreaming, you can exercise your conscious will and change the whole course of your dream-experience.

And as you become more and more conscious, you will begin to have the same control over your being at night as you have in the day, perhaps even more. For at night you are free, at least partially, from slavery to the mechanism of the body. The control over the processes of the body-consciousness is more difficult, since they are more rigid, less amenable to change than are the mental or the vital processes.

In the night the mental and vital, especially the vital, are very active. During the day they are under check, the physical consciousness automatically represses their free play and expression. In sleep this check is removed and they come out with their natural and free movements.

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*What is the nature of dreamless sleep?*

Generally, when you have what you call dreamless sleep, it is one of two things; either you do not remember what you dreamt or you fell into absolute unconsciousness which is almost death—a taste of death. But there is the possibility of a sleep in which you enter into an absolute silence, immobility and peace in all parts of your being and your consciousness merges into Sachchidananda. You can hardly call it sleep, for it is extremely conscious. In that condition you may remain for a few minutes, but these few minutes give you more rest and refreshment than hours of ordinary sleep. You cannot have it by chance; it requires a long training.

*How is it that in dreams one meets and knows people whom one meets and knows afterwards in the outer world?*

It is because of the affinities that draw certain people together, affinities in the mental or the vital world. People often meet in these planes before they meet upon earth. They may join there, speak to each other and have all the relations you can have upon earth. Some know of these relationships, some do not know. Some, as are indeed most, are unconscious of the inner being and the inner intercourse, and yet it will happen that, when they meet the new face in the outer world, they find it somehow very familiar, quite well-known.

*Are there no false visions?*

There are what in appearance are false visions. There are, for instance, hundreds or thousands of people who say that they have seen the Christ. Of that number those who have actually seen Him are perhaps less than a dozen, and even with them there is much to say about what they have seen. What the others saw

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may be an emanation; or it may be a thought or even an image remembered by the mind. There are, too, those who are strong believers in the Christ and have had a vision of some Force or Being or some remembered image that is very luminous and makes upon them a strong impression. They have seen something which they feel belongs to another world, to a supernatural order, and it has created in them an emotion of fear, awe or joy; and as they believe in the Christ, they can think of nothing else and say it is He. But the same vision or experience if it comes to one who believes in the Hindu, the Mohammedan or some other religion, will take a different name and form. The thing seen or experienced may be fundamentally the same, but it is formulated differently according to the different make-up of the apprehending mind. It is only those that can go beyond beliefs and faiths and myths and traditions who are able to say what it really is; but these are few, very few. You must be free from every mental construction, you must divest yourself of all that is merely local or temporal, before you can know what you have seen.

Spiritual experience means the contact with the Divine in oneself (or without, which comes to the same thing in that domain). And it is an experience identical everywhere in all countries, among all peoples and even in all ages. If you meet the Divine, you meet it always and everywhere in the same way. Difference comes in because between the experience and its formulation there is almost an abyss. Directly you have spiritual experience, which takes place always in the inner consciousness, it is translated into your external consciousness and defined there in one way or another according to your education, your faith, your mental predisposition. There is only one truth, one reality; but the forms through which it may be expressed are many.

*What was the nature of Jeanne d'Arc's vision?*

Jeanne d'Arc was evidently in relation with some entities belonging to what we call the world of the Gods (or as the Catholics

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say, the world of the Saints, though it is not quite the same). The beings she saw she called archangels. These beings belong to the intermediate world between the higher mind and the supramental, the world that Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind. It is the world of the creators, the “Formateurs”.

The two beings who were always appearing and speaking to Jeanne d’Arc would, if seen by an Indian, have a quite different appearance; for when one sees, one projects the forms of one’s mind. To what you see you give the form of that which you expect to see. If the same being appeared simultaneously in a group where there were Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Shintoists, it would be named by absolutely different names. Each would say, in reference to the appearance of the being, that he was like this or like that, all differing and yet it would be one and the same manifestation. You have the vision of one in India whom you call the Divine Mother, the Catholics say it is the Virgin Mary, and the Japanese call it Kwannon, the Goddess of Mercy, and others would give other names. It is the same Force, the same Power, but the images made of it are different in different faiths.

*What is the place of training or discipline in surrender?  
If one surrenders, can he not be without discipline? Does  
not discipline sometimes hamper?*

Maybe. But a distinction must be made between a method of development or discipline and a willed action. Discipline is different; I am speaking of willed action. If you surrender you have to give up effort, but that does not mean that you have to abandon also all willed action. On the contrary, you can hasten the realisation by lending your will to the Divine Will. That too is surrender in another form.

What is required of you is not a passive surrender, in which you become like a block, but to put your will at the disposal of the Divine Will.

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*But how can one do this before the union has been effected?*

You have a will and you can offer that will. Take the example of becoming conscious of your nights. If you take the attitude of passive surrender, you would say, "When it is the Divine Will that I should become conscious, then I shall become conscious." On the other hand, if you offer your will to the Divine, you begin to will, you say, "I will become conscious of my nights." You have the will that it should be done; you do not sit down idle and wait. The surrender comes in when you take the attitude that says, "I give my will to the Divine. I intensely want to become conscious of my nights, I have not the knowledge, let the Divine Will work it out for me." Your will must continue to act steadily, not in the way of choosing a particular action or demanding a particular object, but as an ardent aspiration concentrated upon the end to be achieved. This is the first step. If you are vigilant, if your attention is alert, you will certainly receive something in the form of an inspiration of what is to be done and that you must forthwith proceed to do. Only, you must remember that to surrender is to accept whatever is the result of your action, though the result may be quite different from what you expect. On the other hand, if your surrender is passive, you will do nothing and try nothing; you will simply go to sleep and wait for a miracle.

Now to know whether your will or desire is in agreement with the Divine Will or not, you must look and see whether you have an answer or have no answer, whether you feel supported or contradicted, not by the mind or the vital or the body, but by that something which is always there deep in the inner being, in your heart.

*Is not an increasing effort of meditation needed and is it not true that the more hours you meditate the greater progress you make?*

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The number of hours spent in meditation is no proof of spiritual progress. It is a proof of your progress when you no longer have to make an effort to meditate. Then you have rather to make an effort to stop meditating: it becomes difficult to stop meditation, difficult to stop thinking of the Divine, difficult to come down to the ordinary consciousness. Then you are sure of progress, then you have made real progress when concentration in the Divine is the necessity of your life, when you cannot do without it, when it continues naturally from morning to night whatever you may be engaged in doing. Whether you sit down to meditation or go about and do things and work, what is required of you is consciousness; that is the one need, — to be constantly conscious of the Divine.

*But is not sitting down to meditation an indispensable discipline, and does it not give a more intense and concentrated union with the Divine?*

That may be. But a discipline in itself is not what we are seeking. What we are seeking is to be concentrated on the Divine in all that we do, at all times, in all our acts and in every movement. There are some here who have been told to meditate; but also there are others who have not been asked to do any meditation at all. But it must not be thought that they are not progressing. They too follow a discipline, but it is of another nature. To work, to act with devotion and an inner consecration is also a spiritual discipline. The final aim is to be in constant union with the Divine, not only in meditation but in all circumstances and in all the active life.

There are some who, when they are sitting in meditation, get into a state which they think very fine and delightful. They sit self-complacent in it and forget the world; but if they are disturbed, they come out of it angry and restless, because their meditation was interrupted. This is not a sign of spiritual progress or discipline. There are some people who act and seem to feel as



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if their meditation were a debt they have to pay to the Divine; they are like men who go to church once a week and think they have paid what they owe to God.

If you need to make an effort to go into meditation, you are still very far from being able to live the spiritual life. When it takes an effort to come out of it, then indeed your meditation can be an indication that you are in the spiritual life.

There are disciplines such as Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga that one can practise and yet have nothing to do with the spiritual life; the former arrives mostly at body control, the latter at mind control. But to enter the spiritual life means to take a plunge into the Divine, as you would jump into the sea. And that is not the end but the very beginning; for after you have taken the plunge, you must learn to live in the Divine. How are you to do it? You have simply to jump straight in and not to think, "Where shall I fall? What will happen to me?" It is the hesitation of your mind that prevents you. You must simply let yourself go. If you wish to dive into the sea and are thinking all the time, "Ah, but there may be a stone here or a stone there", you cannot dive.

*But you see the sea and so you can jump straight into it.  
But how are you to jump into the spiritual life?*

Of course, you must have had some glimpse of the Divine Reality, as you must see the sea and know something of it before you can jump into it. That glimpse is usually the awakening of the psychic consciousness. But some realisation you must have — a strong mental or vital, if not a deep psychic or integral contact. You must have felt strongly the Divine Presence in or about you; you must have felt the breath of the Divine world. And you must have felt too as a suffocating pressure the opposite breath of the ordinary world, drawing you to an endeavour to come out of that oppressive atmosphere. If you have that, then you have only to seek refuge unreservedly in the Divine Reality and live in its help and protection, in it alone. What you may

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have done in the course of your ordinary life only partially or in some parts of your being or at times and on occasions, you must do completely and for good. That is the plunge you have to take, and unless you do it, you may do Yoga for years and yet know nothing of a true spiritual living. Take the whole and entire plunge and you will be free from this outer confusion and get the true experience of the spiritual life.