

15 December 1954

This talk is based upon Sri Aurobindo's *Bases of Yoga*, Chapter 3, "In Difficulty".

What is the meaning of "the mental witness"?

The witness we have spoken about several times already, only here it is in the mind.

There are witnesses everywhere. It is a capacity of the being to detach itself, to stand back and look at what is happening, as when one looks at something happening in the street or when one looks at others playing and does not himself play, one remains seated, looking at the others moving but does not move. That's how it is.

In all the parts of the being there is one side which can do this: put itself at the back, remain quiet and look, without participating. This is what is called the witness. One has many witnesses inside oneself, and often one is a witness without even being aware of it. And if you develop this, it always gives you the possibility of being quiet and not being affected by things. One detaches oneself from them, looks at them as at a dramatic scene, without participating in it. This does not change things very much.

Sweet Mother, here we have the opportunity of learning many things; however, we don't use this opportunity.

No, because it has come to you too easily, all this. One appreciates those things for which one has made a great effort. But you see, this has come to you in this way because it happens that your parents came here; it is not you who have chosen to come. You were brought and put in this atmosphere... some of

15 December 1954

you from the time you were very small, and you see, you are accustomed to this, it seems relatively natural to you because you have always been here, and you are not even aware of the difference between the conditions we are in here and those found elsewhere, outside. Perhaps if most of you were suddenly transplanted into the outer world, you would be completely lost. All the ways of life are absolutely different. Now here, you are so much accustomed to things that it seems quite natural to you, and certainly you don't draw as much profit as possible from the opportunities you have. For to profit by things one must appreciate them, you see. But this seems too natural for you to appreciate it. That's how it is. And as human nature is never constantly satisfied, you can even find many occasions for not being content, without even realising that if you were in other circumstances, they would be much more serious and[. . .]¹ occasions. You do not have any means of comparing, most of you. It is not that I wish that you have them. I don't wish such a thing to anybody. But still, this is the reason. You ask me why: this is it, this is the reason. It is because all this has come to you too naturally, without your thinking about it.

I don't understand this: "The disadvantage [of trance or samadhi] is that trance becomes indispensable and the problem of the waking consciousness is not solved; it remains imperfect." "Waking consciousness is not solved"?

And naturally! Because if in order to have a meditation or a relation with the inner world, you are obliged to enter into *samadhi*, your waking consciousness always remains what it is, without ever changing. That's what I said in other words, you see, when I said that people have a higher consciousness only in very deep meditation. When they come out of their meditation they are no

¹ Words missing in transcript.

Questions and Answers

better than they were before. All their defects are there which come back as soon as they come back into their waking consciousness; and they never make any progress because they do not establish a relation between their deeper consciousness, the truth of their being, and their outer being. You see, they take off their outer being as though they were taking off a cloak, and they put it in a corner: "Come now, don't trouble me, keep quiet. You are a nuisance." And then they enter into contemplation, their meditation, into their deep experience; and then they come back, put on the cloak which of course has not changed — which perhaps is dirtier still than before — and they remain exactly as they were without any meditation.

If you want the outer being to change, it is while remaining conscious of it that you should have the other experiences; and you must not lose contact with your ordinary outer consciousness if you want it to profit by the experience. There are many people... I knew people like that, who used to meditate for hours, almost all the time... they spent their time meditating, and then if by chance... if someone disturbed them in their meditation, if they had to do something, they flew into a rage, a fury, they abused everybody, they became more intolerable than if they had never meditated, than any ordinary person. This happened because they neglected making their outer being participate in their deeper life. They cut themselves into two, so there is a portion inside which progresses and a portion outside which becomes worse and worse, because it is completely neglected.

Mother, for self-mastery are not the ascetic methods useful sometimes?

No! You cure nothing. You only give yourself the illusion that you have progressed, but you cure nothing. The proof is that if you stop your ascetic methods, the thing is even stronger than before; it comes back with a vengeance. It depends upon what you call ascetic methods. If it is not to indulge in satisfying all

your desires, this indeed is not asceticism, it is common sense. It is something else. Ascetic methods are things like repeated fasting, compelling yourself to endure the cold... in fact, to torture your body a little. This indeed gives you only a spiritual pride, nothing more. It masters nothing at all. It is infinitely easier. People do it because it is very easy, it is simple. Just because the pride is quite satisfied and the vanity can get puffed up, it becomes very easy. One makes a great demonstration of one's ascetic virtues, and so considers oneself an extremely important personage, and that helps one to endure many things.

It is much more difficult to master one's impulses quietly, composedly, and to prevent them from showing themselves — much more! — without taking ascetic measures. It is much more difficult not to be attached to the things you possess than to possess nothing. This is something that has been known for centuries. It requires a much greater quality not to be attached to the things one possesses than to be without any possessions or to reduce one's possessions to a strict minimum. It is much more difficult. It is a much higher degree of moral worth. Simply this attitude: when a thing comes to you, to take it, use it; when for one reason or another it goes away, to let it go and not regret it. Not to refuse it when it comes, to know how to adapt yourself and not to regret it when it goes.

Even if defects come?

It is not a question of defects, I am speaking of material things. Defects are not things which come, they are things one carries in oneself. I am speaking of material things. I am speaking of asceticism, you understand.

Asceticism is an altogether material discipline. Defects — don't think they come from outside; one has enough of them inside one without needing to borrow them from elsewhere. And in fact, if one did not carry them in oneself, one could not become aware of them in others. It is because the seed of all

Questions and Answers

this is in oneself that one is in contact with them. And when we say that great waves of passion pass through people, and that they are not generated in them but pass through them, it is perfectly true. But if there was someone absolutely immune from all possibility of passion, they could pass by for centuries, he wouldn't even feel them. He could see them, see them passing, as one sees a storm passing in the sky, but he would feel nothing at all. When the vibrations inside oneself answer the vibrations from outside, it means that they are there; otherwise no vibration can enter.

There are examples like this. For instance, a crowd is seized by panic. Well, it is always possible that there are one or two persons who resist the panic, who are not touched, are outside it: they can save the situation. This has happened many a time. The reason why a movement, a vibration, a forceful movement is contagious is because the ground for contagion is there.

You said that because we are here and have everything, it seems very natural to us. Why doesn't effort also come naturally?

It is because the physical nature in ordinary men is, as Sri Aurobindo writes, rather tamasic. Naturally it does not make any effort. But the vital makes an effort. Only, it makes the effort usually for its own satisfaction. Yet it is quite capable of making an effort because that is in its nature. In fact, I can't say that you don't make any effort, you make a lot of effort for many things, when it pleases you or when you have understood that it is necessary for one reason or another. What you mean is to make a continuous effort for yoga. There are even people who have come here for yoga or at least thinking that they came for yoga and who don't make much effort, who take things easy, as they come. I don't think that the physical nature, left to itself, is spontaneously pushed into any effort. It needs a certain amount of activity, but it is very little. You see, the great thing here is that

the principle of education is a principle of freedom, and to put it briefly, the whole life is organised on the maximum possible freedom in movement; that is, the rules, regulations, restrictions are reduced absolutely to the minimum. If you compare this with the way in which parents usually educate their children, with a constant “Don’t do this”, “You can’t do that”, “Do this”, “Go and do that”, and, you know, orders and rules, there is a considerable difference.

In schools and colleges everywhere there are infinitely more strict rules than what we have here. So, as one doesn’t impose on you the absolute condition of making progress, you make it when it pleases you, you don’t when it doesn’t, and then you take things as easy as you can. There are some — I do not say this absolutely — there are some who try, but they try spontaneously. Of course from the spiritual point of view this is infinitely more valuable. The progress you will make because you feel within yourself the need to make it, because it is an impulsion that pushes you forward spontaneously, and not because it is something imposed on you like a rule — this progress, from the spiritual point of view, is infinitely greater. All in you that tries to do things well, tries to do it spontaneously and sincerely; it is something that comes from within you, and not because you have been promised rewards if you do well and punishments if you do badly. Our system is not based on this.

It is possible that at a certain moment something comes along to give you the impression that your effort has been appreciated, but the effort was not made in view of that; that is, these promises are not made beforehand nor are they balanced by equivalent punishments. This is not the practice here. Usually things are such, arranged in such a way, that the satisfaction of having done well seems to be the best of rewards and one punishes oneself when one does badly, in the sense that one feels miserable and unhappy and ill at ease, and this is indeed the most concrete punishment one has. And so, all these movements, from the point of view of the inner spiritual growth, have

Questions and Answers

an infinitely greater value than when they are the result of an outer rule.

You speak of spiritual experience. What is an experience and how can one have it?

It is something which puts you in contact with a consciousness higher than the one you usually have. You have a certain feeling about yourself, you are not even aware of it, it is for you your ordinary condition, you understand. Well, if suddenly you become conscious within of something very different and much higher, then, whatever it may be, this will be a spiritual experience. You may formulate it with a mental idea, you may not formulate it; you may explain it to yourself, you may not; it may last, it may not, it may be instantaneous. But when there is this essential difference in the consciousness and when, naturally, the quality that comes is very... much higher, clearer, purer than what one usually has, then one can call this a spiritual experience; this means that there are thousands of different things which can be called spiritual experiences.

Should we aspire to have a spiritual experience?

I think it is wiser to aspire to make progress or to be more conscious or to be better or do better than aspire for a spiritual experience; because that might open the door to more or less imaginary and falsified experiences, to movements of the vital which take on the appearance of higher things. One may deceive oneself by having an aspiration for experiences. In fact, the experience must come spontaneously, as the result of inner progress, but not for itself or in itself.

There were some persons in history who were not evolutionary beings...

15 December 1954

Who were not...?

... evolutionary beings... who came...

You knew them, did you?

No, someone...

Who? Who told you that?

Our English teacher says this.

(Gestures) I can say nothing. I don't say anything now. If it is a teacher, I don't say anything any more. *(Laughter)*

He spoke about Sri Aurobindo... in reference to Sri Aurobindo...

Don't ever speak to me about what your teachers tell you, because I won't contradict them, and I refuse to comment on what they say. Teachers are people who should be respected. And besides, for your information, I can say that you have put the question badly.

If you wanted me to answer, you could have put the question in an absolutely different way. Now I won't reply. *(Laughter)* But if you had said, "Are there beings who...", I would have quite naturally answered you. Perhaps not what you wanted to hear, but I would have said something. But you asked the question badly. You made a statement to begin with, so...

Good. Then, that's all?