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“There is a true movement of the intellect and there is a wrong movement: one helps, the other hinders.”

Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (5 May 1929)

What is the true movement of the intellect?

What exactly do you understand by intellect? Is it a function of the mind or is it a part of the human being? How do you understand it?

A function of the mind.

A function of the mind? Then it is that part of the mind which deals with ideas; is that what you mean?

Not ideas, Mother.

Not ideas? What else, then?

Ideas, but...

There is a part of the mind which receives ideas, ideas that are formed in a higher mind. Still, I don’t know, it is a question of definition and one must know what exactly you mean to say.

It is intellect that puts ideas in the form of thoughts, gathering and organising the thoughts at the same time. There are great ideas which lie beyond the ordinary human mentality, which can put on all possible forms. These great ideas tend to descend, they want to manifest themselves in precise forms. These precise forms are the thoughts; and generally it is this, I believe, that is meant by intellect: it is this that gives thought-form to the ideas.
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And then, there is also the organisation of the thoughts among themselves. All that has to be put in a certain order, otherwise one becomes incoherent. And after that, there is the putting of these thoughts to use for action; that is still another movement.

To be able to say what the true movement is, one must know first of all which movement is being spoken about. You have a body, well, you don’t expect your body to walk on its head or its hands nor to crawl flat on its belly nor indeed that the head should be down and the legs up in the air. You give to each limb a particular occupation which is its own. This appears to you quite natural because that is the habit; otherwise, the very little ones do not know what to do, neither with their legs nor with their hands nor with their heads; it is only little by little that they learn that. Well, it is the same thing with the mind’s functions. You must know which part of the mind you are speaking about, what its own function is, and then only can you say what its true movement is and what is not its true movement. For example, for the part which has to receive the master ideas and change them into thought, its true movement is to be open to the master ideas, receive them and change them into as exact, as precise, as expressive a thought as possible. For the part of the mind which has the charge of organising all these thoughts among themselves so that they might form a coherent and classified whole, not a chaos, the true movement is just to make the classification according to a higher logic and in a thoroughly clear, precise and expressive order which may be serviceable each time a thought is referred to, so that one may know where to look for it and not put quite contradictory things together. There are people whose mind does not work like that; all the ideas that come into it, without their being even aware of what the idea is, are translated into confused thoughts which remain in a kind of inner chaos. I have known people who, from the philosophical point of view — although there is nothing philosophical in it — could put side by side the most contradictory things, like ideas
of hierarchic order and at the same time ideas of the absolute independence of the individual and of anarchism, and both were accepted with equal sympathy, knocked against each other in the head in the midst of a wild disorder, and these people were not even aware of it!... You know the saying: “A question well put is three-fourths solved.” So now, put your question. What do you want to speak about? I am stretching out a helping hand, you have only to catch it. What is it you are speaking about, what is it that you call intellect? Do you know the difference between an idea and a thought?

Not quite.

Ah! That is the first hurdle. Can anybody here tell me? (To a child) You, do you know the difference between an idea and a thought?

A thought is something vague, more vague than an idea.

No, it is not a question of a vague thought in a vague mind or a clear thought when the mind is clear. It is not like that.

You said just now that ideas came from above and were translated into thoughts.

Yes, but how do they come from above?

From the higher parts of the mind.

Yes, but could you give me an idea and the thoughts in which it can be expressed? That is what I am asking. Can anyone give me an example? (Looking at a disciple) He is longing to speak. Tell us something, we shall see.
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*The manifestation of the Divine upon earth is an idea and the transformation is a thought.*

Ah, you are a monist? If I am not mistaken, this is the principle of monism.

It is a thought of God that has made the universe, but now instead of a thought, we say an idea.

Has anyone something interesting to say?

(A teacher) *In logic, it is said: “Mortality” is an idea, and “man is mortal”, is a thought.*

Now, have you understood the difference between idea and thought? It is clear. The idea is translated into all kinds of thoughts. They may be the most contradictory thoughts and the whole thing is to organise them in a coherent way. I think I have told you many times that contradictory thoughts may be found in union if one rises high enough, climbs towards the idea…. One could perhaps play at this little game, it would be very interesting. We have a thesis, we are going to find an antithesis, and then we shall find the synthesis.

Who will propose the thesis?... Ah! I am going to propose this immediately: “Man is mortal.” The antithesis is: “Man is immortal.” Now find the place where the two agree: the synthesis.

*It is ignorance that prevents man from uniting with immortality.*

It is a rather vague way of putting the thing. One could say it more intellectually. One could say: in his reality, man is immortal; and because of ignorance or of unconsciousness, he has become mortal. That’s better? And then one can go a little further: Why is he immortal? Why is he mortal? And how being mortal can he become immortal?
Whatever the part of the being, whether it be the intellect or any other part, whether it is in the mind or the vital or anywhere else, the true movement is a double movement: first, it must not intercept the divine Truth in its manifestation, and secondly, it must help in its manifestation. A negative side, consisting in not being a screen, not intercepting anything, not blocking the passage of the divine force seeking to express itself; on the other side, to be sufficiently clear and pure to be able to help this manifestation.

One can apply this everywhere, it is very convenient. Voilà. Now, any other question?

If men did not die, with age their body would become useless?

Ah! No. You are looking from the wrong side. They could escape dying only if their body did not decay. It is just because their body decays that they die. It is because their body becomes useless that they die. If they are not to die, their body should not become useless. This is just the contrary. It is precisely because the body decays, declines and ends in a complete degradation that death becomes necessary. But if the body followed the progressive movement of the inner being, if it had the same sense of progress and perfection as the psychic being, there would be no necessity for it to die. One year added to another need not bring a deterioration. It is only a habit of Nature. It is only a habit of what is happening at this moment. And that is exactly the cause of death. One can foresee quite well, on the contrary, that the movement for perfection which is at the beginning of life might continue under another form. I have already told you that one does not foresee an uninterrupted growth, for that would need changing the height of the houses after some time! But this growth in height may be changed into a growth in perfection: the perfection of the form. All the imperfections of the form may be gradually corrected, all the weaknesses replaced by strength,
all the incapacities by skill. Why should it not be like this? You
do not think in that way because you have the habit of seeing
things otherwise. But there is no reason why this should not
happen.

Have you ever seen a tree growing, a palm tree? There is one
in the Ashram courtyard, in the Samadhi courtyard, quite close
to the door by which you come up every day, have you never
seen how it grows? This tree, you know, is some forty, forty-
five or fifty years old perhaps. You see how small it is. These
trees can become even much taller than the building. They can
live several hundred years, easily, in their natural state, if there
is no accident. Have you never seen what it does? I see it from
above. It is quite pretty. It happens once a year. At first, you see
a kind of small brown ball. Then this small brown ball begins
to grow and becomes slightly lighter in colour, less deep. Little
by little, you see that it is made of a mass of somewhat complex
small lines, with their tips bent inward, as though turned back
upon themselves; and that begins to grow, it comes out, becomes
more and more limpid, until it begins to turn green, a little pale
yellowish green and it takes the form of the bishop’s cross. Then
you see it multiplying and separating; it is yet a little brown, a
little queer (almost like you), something like a caterpillar. And
suddenly, it is as though it sprang out, it leaps forth. It is pale
green; it is frail. It has a delightful colour. It lengthens out. This
lasts for a day or two; and then on the following day there
are leaves. These leaves I have never counted, I do not know
how many they are. Every time there is a new range of leaves.
They remain very pale; they are exquisite. They are like a little
child, with that something tender, pretty and graceful a child
has. And you have still the feeling that it is fragile; and indeed,
if it receives a blow, it is spoilt for life. It is very frail, but it is
delightfully tender. It has its charm and you say: “But why does
not Nature remain like that?” The following morning... pluff!
they are separated, they are bright green, they look wonderful
with all the strength and force of youth, a magnificent brilliant
green. It should stop there — not at all. It continues. Then comes the dust, the deterioration from people who pass by. So it begins to fall, to become yellowish, another kind of yellow, the yellow of dryness until it is completely withered and falls away. It is replaced by the trunk. Every year the trunk increases a little. And it will take several hundred years to reach the end. But every year, it repeats the same thing, passes through all the stages of beauty, charm, attractiveness and you say: “But why does it not stop there?” And the next minute, it is something else. You cannot say it is better, but it is different. And so it passes from one thing to another through all the stages of flowering. Then the accidents begin; with the accidents comes deterioration, and with deterioration there is death.

It is like that. But accidents are not indispensable. And even what looks like death helps in the growth of the tree. One sheds off something, but it's in order to grow again and have something more. One must be able to keep the harmony and the beauty till the end. There is no reason why one should have a body which has no longer any purpose in being, in existing; because it would no longer be good for anything. To be no longer good for anything, that is exactly what makes it disappear. One could have a body that grows from perfection to perfection. There are many things in the body that make you say: “Ah, if it were like that! Ah, I would like it to be thus!” (I am not speaking of your character, for there are so many things that need changing; I am speaking only of your physical appearance). You see some disharmony somewhere and you say: “If this disharmony disappeared, how much better would it be!”... But why don’t you think that it could be done? If you look at yourself in quite an objective way — not with that sort of attachment one has for one’s little person, but quite objectively, — you look at yourself as you would look at another person and tell yourself: “But this thing is not altogether in harmony with that”, and if you look yet more closely, it becomes very interesting: you discover that this disharmony is the expression
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of a defect in your character. It is because in your character there is something a bit twisted, not quite harmonious, and in your body this is reproduced somewhere. You try to arrange it in your body and you find out that to get back to the source of this physical disharmony, you have to find out the defect in your inner being. And then you begin to work and the result is obtained.

You don’t know to what an extent the body is plastic! From another standpoint, I would say it is terribly rigid and that is why the body deteriorates. But that is because we do not know how to make use of it. We do not know, when we are still fresh like little leaves, how to will for a luxuriant, magnificent, faultless flowering. And instead of telling oneself with a somewhat miserable look: “It is a pity my arms are too thin or my legs are too long or my back is not straight or my head is not quite harmonious”, if one said: “It must be otherwise, my arms must be proportionate, my body harmonious, every form in me must express a higher beauty”, then one will succeed. And you will succeed if you know how to do it with the true will that is persistent, tranquil, that is not impatient, does not care for appearances of defeat, continues its work quietly, very quietly, continues to will that it be so, to look for the inner reason, to discover it, to work with energy. Immediately, as soon as you see a little black worm somewhere, which does not look pretty and makes a small rather unpleasant, disgusting stain, you pick it up, pull it out and throw it away and put a lovely light in its place. And after a time you discover: “Why! that disharmony I had in my face is disappearing; that sign of brutality, unconsciousness which was in my expression, it is going away.” And then ten years later you don’t recognise yourself any longer.

You are all, here, youthful matter; you must know how to profit by it — and not for petty, selfish and stupid reasons but for the love of beauty, for the need of harmony.

If the body is to last, it must not deteriorate. There must not
be any decay. It must win on one side: it must be a transformation, it must not be a decay. With decay there is no possibility of immortality.

Where does one go after death?

Ah, my child, you need a book! It is not one question! Well, it will be for next time. Besides, I believe there is a chapter which speaks about it, if I remember well. We shall have occasion to speak about it.... I shall tell you one thing immediately: when you are born upon earth, do you know where you are going? And all the people on earth, do they all go to the same place? Tell me that!

Everyone follows his way. Everyone has a different destiny. Why should it be the same for all when they are dead? For each one it is a different thing.

Good night.