25 July 1956

“It may be said that a complete act of divine love and worship has in it three parts that are the expressions of a single whole, — a practical worship of the Divine in the act, a symbol of worship in the form of the act expressing some vision and seeking or some relation with the Divine, an inner adoration and longing for oneness or feeling of oneness in the heart and soul and spirit.”


I have not understood the first two parts very well.

There is a purely physical form of the act, like those forms in cults in which a particular gesture, a particular movement is meant to express the consecration. That is purely material, as for example, lighting incense, arranging offerings, or even looking after a temple, decorating an idol, indeed all such purely physical acts.

The second part is a sort of mental consecration which makes the act that is performed a symbol. One is not satisfied with merely lighting the incense, but while lighting the incense one makes this gesture symbolic — for example, of the aspiration burning in the body or of self-giving in a dissolution, in the purification of the fire. That is to say, first the act, then the symbol in this act and the symbolic understanding of what is done.

And finally, behind these two, an aspiration for union; that all this, these acts and the symbol you make of them, may be only a means of drawing closer and closer to the Divine and making yourself fit to unite with Him.

These three things must be there for the act to be complete: that is, something purely material, something mental, and something psychic, the psychic aspiration. If one of the three is there
without the other two, it is incomplete. As a rule, very rarely are the three consciously combined. That produces beings of exceptional sincerity and consecration: the entire being, in all its parts, participates in the action.

(Silence)

(Mother shows a packet of written questions.) Well, there was a time we had some difficulty in finding questions; now we have gone to the other extreme! I have so many that they would keep us at least till midnight if they were all to be answered! So I shall have to make a selection.... There is one at once very common and very practical which seems to me quite appropriate.

I have noted — much too often, I must say — that most of you do not listen to what I say, so much so that many a time I have answered a question in detail and immediately afterwards someone or other among you asks me exactly the same question, as though I had not said anything! And the phenomenon is explicable: each one is shut up in his own thought, just as, I suppose, you are in the habit of doing at school where you repeat your lesson to yourself if you are attentive and hardworking, and don’t listen to what the teacher is asking or what the other students are answering, and thus lose three-quarters of the advantage of not being alone in the class. Here, it is more serious, for I never give a personal, individual answer, I reply for everybody to profit by it and if, instead of listening, you continue thinking of what is in your head, it is quite obvious that you lose the opportunity of learning something. That’s the first point. If you are here, well, first listen, don’t think of something else.... But that too is not enough, that’s just the beginning: there is one good way of listening and many bad ways of listening.

I don’t know if any of you are so fond of music as to know how to hear it. But if you want to listen to music, you must create an absolute silence in your head, you must not follow or accept a single thought, and must be entirely concentrated, like
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a sort of screen which receives, without movement or noise, the vibration of the music. That is the only way, there is no other, the only way of hearing music and understanding it. If you admit in the least the movements and fancies of your thought, the whole value of the music escapes you. Well, to understand a teaching which is not quite of the ordinary material kind but implies an opening to something more deep within, this necessity of silence is far greater still. If, instead of listening to what you are told, you begin to jump on the idea in order to ask another question or even to discuss what is said under the false pretext of understanding better, all that you are told passes like smoke without leaving any effect.

Similarly, when you have an experience, you must never, during the period of the experience, try to understand what it is, for you immediately cause it to vanish, or you deform it and take away its purity; in the same way, if you want a spiritual teaching to enter into you, you must be absolutely immobile in your head, immobile like a mirror which not only reflects but absorbs the ray of light, lets it enter and go deep within, so that from the depths of your consciousness it may spring up again, some day or other, in the form of knowledge.

If you don’t do that, you are wasting your time, and, into the bargain, wasting mine. That’s a proved fact. I thought I had already told you this several times, but still perhaps I didn’t tell you clearly enough. If you come here, come with the intention of listening in silence. What happens you will know later; the effect of this silent attitude you will recognise later; but for the moment, the only thing to do is to be like this (gesture), silent, immobile, attentive, concentrated.

That is all.

The second question is of an altogether external kind — relatively. But it seems quite indispensable, for it concerns our sports education and also, generally, the psychological basis on which we have founded our activity here. These things have been
written by Sri Aurobindo, I have written them very often, have explained them to you many a time, but I am really sorry I am obliged to state that it has not entered your consciousness.

I don’t want to start a war against what you feel and do, but I should like you at least to understand why things are done here as they are, instead of letting yourselves go in a retrograde impulsiveness and copying all that is done elsewhere under the pretext that it is “like that” that things are done, under the pretext that your parents and great-grandparents, your relatives and friends, and the grandparents of your friends, all those who stay outside continue to do things in this way and consider it the normal, natural way of doing them.

I don’t dispute the fact, in the sense that humanity was created by Nature for a special purpose and special ends, and in order to realise her ends she has produced beings and also given them special habits and special functions. Therefore, if you speak of “natural” things, I cannot tell you that this is not “natural”, for that is the way of Nature. But still, I believe I have told you — not only once but many times, and Sri Aurobindo also has written this, not once but many a time — that we are not here to recommence, perpetuate, continue what is done elsewhere. And we have given a concrete form to this fact specially in our education; for I must say, without offending anyone, that those who come here after having already seen much of life, those who have quite a heavy past behind them, may find it difficult to change their attitude and point of view immediately, but if you take very young children who have not yet been too spoiled — they are always spoiled — but those who have not yet been too spoiled by ordinary education, the ideas of their family, the atavism of their parents, etc., you have a chance of orientating the consciousness on the right path and getting a tangible and concrete result.

To tell the truth, we have nothing to complain about, for we have had striking proofs that if one knows how to do it, what we claim is possible.
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What we claim is this, that in similar conditions, with the same education and the same possibilities, there is no reason to make a categorical distinction, final and imperative, between what we call men and women. For us, human beings are the expression of a single soul. It is true, as I said at the beginning, that Nature has differentiated her expressions for the satisfaction of her needs and the realisation of her purpose, but if our needs and purposes are of another kind and we don’t recognise the physical ends conceived by Nature as final, and absolute, then we can try to develop consciousness on another line.

Unfortunately, we have noticed one thing. As the years pass and the little girls grow up into big girls, suddenly we find that they begin to remember that they are girls, that they must be pretty, they must please, must dress up in a special way, put on little affectations to attract attention — and the whole result of our work collapses.

There are some — there are always exceptions to the rule — who have understood and who try to realise. But even among these there is still in the background that kind of little satisfaction of not being quite “like the others”, of being able to do what the others cannot, and for this to be clearly seen, well, they must compare themselves with the others!

So that is exactly the occasion of what I have just told you. It is a question from one of you which has given rise to another question, and I hope that if I explain to you once more in detail, insisting on the fact, we shall perhaps be able to start anew and realise something more complete and more clear.

We come down altogether to earthly things: somebody has been very successful in athletics and has come first in one event. This somebody is a “she”, for convenience in speaking. And so, ah! besides the satisfaction of having done well, there was a little satisfaction in having done better than the others, and she came to ask:

“Why are women’s records not announced?”
We have, I believe, repeated and reiterated that there are no “women’s” and no “men’s” records, there are only group records. There is the green group — the various green groups — there is the red group, the grey group, the blue group, the khaki group, the white group. You may tell me that some of these groups are exclusively men’s or women’s. I shall answer what I have just said, that unless one comes here very young, it is difficult to change one’s habits, and that is what has made this separation necessary — but it is not the ideal. And if we made it a habit to announce gloriously: “This very remarkable girl has done what no other girl could do before”, oh, la, la, what a fall it would be! Not to mention that this encourages vanity — which is not good — it is also an assertion that this fact is remarkable because it is a girl; now it is not at all a remarkable fact that it is a girl: it is remarkable because she has done very well, and there are many boys who have not done so well. But if one wants to magnify this fine fact by comparing her with other girls who have not done as well, it becomes deplorable.

So this question was brought to me. I believe that person has been given the answer which I have just told you, that there are only group records and no records of sexes.

But that is not all. I am told that some have heard — not once but hundreds of times, especially from those who come from outside with all the ideas of the world outside — this question:

“Why do you have the same programme of physical education for boys and girls?”

There are some who consider it a scandal; some consider it a glaring error from the physical, material point of view. “Why aren’t girls treated in a special way and quite differently from boys?” — then the great argument — “as it is done everywhere.”

Ah! thank you. Then why do we have an Ashram? Why do we have a Centre of Education? If everywhere the same things
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are done, we don’t need to repeat them, we won’t do them any better than others.

And when they put this argument in my way, they couldn’t tell me anything that appears more utterly stupid to me. It is done everywhere? That is just the reason for not doing it; for if we do what others do, it is not worth the trouble doing anything at all. We want precisely to introduce into the world something which is not there; but if we keep all the habits of the world, all the preferences of the world, all the constructions of the world, I don’t see how we can get out of the rut and do something new.

My children, I have told you, repeated it in every tone, in every way: if you really want to profit by your stay here, try to look at things and understand them with a new vision and a new understanding based on something higher, something deeper, vaster, something more true, something which is not yet but will be one day. And it is because we want to build this future that we have taken this special stand.

I tell you that we have had quite material proofs of the correctness and truth of our position, but... they are not lasting. Why? Because it is extremely easy to fall back into the ordinary consciousness, and there is nothing more difficult than to always stand on the top of the ladder and try to look at the world from up there.

We don’t want to obey the orders of Nature, even if these orders have millions of years of habits behind them. And one thing is certain, the argument of Nature when she is opposed to things changing, is: “It has always been thus.” I claim this is not true. Whether she likes it or not, things change, and a day will come when it will be said: “Ah! yes, there was a time when it was like that, but now it is different.”

Well, grant only for some time, in a way which is still that of faith and trust, that we are in fact bringing about this change, that we have come to a point where things are going to take a turn and a new orientation. You are simply asked to have just a little faith and trust and allow yourselves to be guided.
Otherwise, well, you will lose the advantage of being here, that’s all. And you will go back with the same weaknesses and same habits one sees in life as it is outside. There you are.

You thought I was a little severe, a little hard, and that after all it was not easy to satisfy me! That is why you tie pretty little pink ribbons in your hair or on pigtails hanging at the back. I say, perhaps a little uncharitably: “You look ridiculous!” For you think you are very fine to look at, but truly this makes you ridiculous. If you want to go out into the world and preen yourselves as girls do in the world and give yourselves airs in order to please because that is your sole defense and sole weapon, to attract attention and to please, and be quite pretty, quite seductive, you are quite free to do so, it’s no longer my concern. But indeed to do all that here is ridiculous. It is ridiculous and you also bring yourselves down immediately to a level which is not very pretty.

Naturally, you may blame me for telling you all this in front of “the other sex”. But I include him in the ridicule, for if he did not think as he does, if he did not feel as he does and did not act as he does, you would have long ago been disgusted with these childish little affectations. There we are.

Now I have told you all I wanted to say. I think this is enough for today, isn’t it? You have really had it!

With this talk we are publishing a few extracts from a brochure of Mother’s entitled “To Women About Their Body”. These are answers to questions on the sports education of women.

The brochure opens with the following lines:

For God’s sake, can’t you forget that you are a girl or a boy, and try to become a human being?

What is the ideal for a girl, from the point of view of physical education?

I don’t see why there should be one special ideal for the physical
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...education of girls and another for the education of boys.

Physical education aims at developing all the possibilities of the human body — possibilities of harmony, strength, suppleness, skill, endurance — and increasing the mastery of the functions of its members and organs, making the body a perfect instrument at the disposal of the conscious will. This programme is excellent for all human beings equally; there is no reason for wanting to have another one for girls.

What part will man and woman play in the new life? What relations will they have?

Why make a distinction between the two? They are both human beings trying to become fit instruments for the divine work, above questions of sex, caste, creed and nationality; they are all children of the same infinite Mother and aspirants to the one and eternal Godhead.

What is the ideal of physical beauty for a woman?

Perfect harmony of proportions, suppleness and strength, grace and force, plasticity, endurance and, above all, an excellent health, unvarying, unchanging, the result of a pure soul, of a joyful trust in life and an unshakable faith in the divine Grace.

The brochure ends with the following words:

One word more to finish:

I have told you these things because you needed to hear them. But don't make an absolute dogma from them, for that takes away all their truth.