February 4, 1961

Here, I have brought you two flowers. They have two different yet very typically Indian fragrances: this one is Straightforwardness\(^1\), and this is SIMPLICITY\(^2\). I have always found that this one \((\text{Mother holds out the Simplicity})\) has a cleansing fragrance: when you breathe it, ah, everything becomes clean — it's wonderful! \((\text{Mother breathes in the flower's fragrance.})\) Once I cured myself of the onset of a cold with it — this can be done when you catch it at the very beginning. It fills you completely, the nose, the throat.... And this [Straightforwardness] is right at the other end of the spectrum. I find it very, very powerful — strange, isn't it?

\textit{It's not at all sweet-smelling.}

Oh, no! It's quite strong.

It's largely the fragrances that have made me give flowers their significance.... I find these studies quite interesting; it corresponds to something really TRUE in Nature.

Once, without telling me anything, someone brought me a sprig of tulsi\(^3\). I smelled it and said, “Oh, Devotion!” It was absolutely a ... a vibration of devotion. Afterwards, I was told it's the plant of devotion to Krishna, consecrated to Krishna.

Another time, I was brought one of those big flowers \((\text{which are not really flowers})\) somewhat resembling corn, with long, very strongly scented stalks\(^4\). I smelled it and said, “Ascetic Purity!” Just like that, from the odor alone. I was later told it was Shiva's flower when he was doing his \textit{tapasya}\(^5\).

These people have an age-old knowledge — the ancient Vedic knowledge which they have preserved. In other words, it is something CONCRETELY TRUE: it doesn't depend at all on the mind, on thought or even on feelings — it's a vibration.

\textit{What about this flower, this long corn-like stalk?}

Yes, this flower is Shiva, doing his \textit{tapasya}.

And interestingly enough, its smell is fantastically attractive to snakes; it makes them come from far away to nest in the shrubs. And as you know, the serpent is the power of evolution, it is Shiva's own creature; he always puts them on his head and around his neck because they symbolize the power of evolution and transformation. And snakes like this flower; it often grows near rivers, and wherever there is a cluster of the plants you are sure to discover snake nests.

I find this very interesting, for WE didn't decide it should be like this: these are conscious vibrations in Nature. The fragrance, the color, the shape, are simply the spontaneous expressions of a true movement.

\(^1\) \textit{Ixora arborea} (Torch Tree).
\(^2\) \textit{Hymenantherum}, a tiny yellow flower like a miniature daisy.
\(^3\) \textit{Ocimum sanctum} (Holy basil).
\(^4\) \textit{Pandanus tectorius} (Keora or Screw Pine). Subsequently, Mother named this flower ‘Spiritual Perfume’.
\(^5\) \textit{Tapasya}: ascetic or yogic discipline.
What does the serpent represent physically? What does it embody in the material world?

The vibration of evolution.

I don't mean symbolically, but physically, materially: the animal itself.

A formidable concentration of vitality — of all animals, the serpent has the most vitality. It's tremendous! And energy ... progressive energy, energy of movement (progressive in the mechanical sense). Its meaning has been changed to a psychological one, but it's a force of movement.

Then why do these creatures always seem so evil to us?

The Christians say it's the spirit of evil, but this is due to a lack of understanding. Théon always told me that the true interpretation of the Biblical story of the serpent in the Garden of Eden is that humanity wanted to pass from a state of animal-like divinity to the state of conscious divinity by means of mental development, symbolized by eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. And this serpent, which Théon always said was iridescent, reflecting all the colors of the prism, was not at all the spirit of evil, but the power of evolution — the force, the power of evolution. And it was natural that this power of evolution would make them taste the fruit of knowledge.

Now, according to Théon, Jehovah was the chief of the Asuras⁶, the supreme Asura, the egoistic God who wanted to dominate everything and keep everything under his control. And of course this act made him furious, for it enabled mankind to become gods through the power of an evolution of consciousness. And that's why he banished them from Paradise.

Although told in a childish manner, there's a great deal of truth in this story, a great deal.

(silence)

One could almost say that of all animals, the serpent is the most sensitive to hypnotic or magnetic power. If you have it (magnetic power comes from the most material vital), you can easily gain a mastery over snakes; all the people who like snakes have it and use it to make snakes obey them.... That's how I got out of my encounter with the cobra at Tlemcen⁷ — do you know the story? Théon had told me about this power and I was aware of it in myself, so I was able to make the cobra obey and he left. Afterwards (I've told this story, too), I was visited by the King of Serpents — I mean the spirit of the species. He came to me in Tlemcen after this and another incident when I helped a cat overpower a little asp (there are asps over there like Cleopatra's, very dangerous) — a big russet angora cat. At first it started to play with the asp, but then naturally grew furious. The asp struck at the cat, but the cat leapt aside with such swiftness that the asp missed it (I watched this going on for more than ten minutes, it was extraordinary). Just as the snake darted by, the cat would swat at it with all his claws out — and the asp got scratched each time, so that little by little it ran out of energy, and at the end.... I stopped the cat from eating it — that part was disgusting!

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⁶ Asura: demon of the mental plane embodying the forces of division and darkness.
⁷ Tlemcen: a town in northern Algeria.
Then after these two incidents, I received a visit one night from the King of Serpents. He was wearing a superb crown on his head — symbolic, of course, but anyway, he was the spirit of the species He had the appearance of a cobra, and he was wonderful! A formidable beast, and ... wonderful! He said he had come to make a pact with me: I had demonstrated my power over his species, so he wanted to come to an understanding. “All right,” I said, “what do you propose?” “I not only promise that serpents won't harm you,” he replied, “but that they will obey you. But you must promise me something in return: never to kill one of them.” I thought it over and said, “No, I can't make this promise, because if ever one of yours attacks one of mine (a being that depends upon me), my pact with you could not stop me from protecting him. I can assure you that I have no bad feelings and no intention of killing — killing is not on my program! But I can't commit myself, because it would restrict my freedom of decision.” He left without replying, so it remains status quo.

I have had several experiences demonstrating my power over snakes (not so much as over cats — with cats it's extraordinary!). Long ago, I often used to take a drive and then stop somewhere for a walk. One day after my walk, as I was getting back into the car to drive away (the door was still open), a very large snake came out, right from the spot I had just left. He was furious and heading straight towards the open door, ready to strike (luckily I was alone, neither the driver nor Pavitra were there, otherwise ...). When the snake had come quite near, I looked at him closely and said, “What do you want? Why have you come here?” There was a pause. Then he fell down flat and off he went. I hadn't made a move, only asked him, “What do you want? Why have you come here?” You know, they have a way of suddenly falling back, going limp, and prrt! Gone!

How many, many experiences there were during those days at Tlemcen! Surely you've heard them.... Were you there when I told the story about the big toad? A huge toad, covered with warts. No?... The sitting room was upstairs in Théon's house (the house was built on a hillside) and it was connected by large open doors to a small terrace that sat almost on top of the hill. I played the piano in this room every day. And one day, what did I see hopping in through the open bay windows but an enormous black toad — enormous! He sat down on his backside right in the entrance and puffed up his throat: poff! poff! And for the whole time I played, he stayed there going “Poff! poff!”, as though in a state of delight! When I finished, I turned around and he gave me one last “Poff!” and hopped away. It was comical!

Théon also taught me how to turn aside lightning.

*Is it possible*?!

Ah, yes — he used to do it.

*But it must take a formidable power!*

Oh (*laughing*), he had a formidable power! Théon had a formidable power.... One stormy day (there were terrible thunderstorms there), he climbed to the high terrace above the sitting room. “It's a strange time to be going up there,” I said to him. He laughed, “Come along, don't be afraid!” So I joined him. He began some invocations and then I clearly saw a bolt of lightning that had been heading straight towards us suddenly swerve IN THE MIDST OF ITS COURSE. You will say it's impossible, but I saw it turn aside and strike a tree farther away. I asked Théon, “Did you do that?” He nodded.

Oh, that man was terrible — he had a terrible power. But quite a good external appearance!
Have you seen his photo? No? I'll have to show it to you. He was a handsome man, about sixty years old — between fifty and sixty.

And do you know how he received me when I arrived there?... It was the first time in my life I had traveled alone and the first time I had crossed the Mediterranean. Then there was a fairly long train ride between Oran and Tlemcen — anyway, I managed rather well: I got there. He met me at the station and we set off for his place by car (it was rather far away). Finally we reached his estate — a wonder! It spread across the hillside overlooking the whole valley of Tlemcen. We arrived from below and had to climb up some wide pathways. I said nothing — it was truly an experience from a material standpoint. When we came in sight of the house, he stopped: “That's my house.” It was red! Painted red! And he added, “When Barley came here, he asked me, 'Why did you paint your house red?'” (Barley was a French occultist who put Théon in touch with France and was his first disciple.) There was a mischievous gleam in Théon's eyes and he smiled sardonically: “I told Barley, ‘Because red goes well with green!’” With that, I began to understand the gentleman.... We continued on our way uphill when suddenly, without warning, he spun around, planted himself in front of me, and said, “Now you are at my mercy. Aren't you afraid?” Just like that. So I looked at him, smiled and replied, “I'm never afraid. I have the Divine here.” (Mother touches her heart.) Well, he really went pale.

There were all kinds of stories in the countryside, terrible stories....

One day I will find his photo and show it to you; he is there with a big dog he called ‘Little Boy’, a dog that could exteriorize — he would dream and go out of his body! This dog had a kind of adoration for me. (I should mention that at a fixed time in the afternoons I used to meditate and go into trance. When it was finished I would go out walking with Théon, and the dog always came with us, usually coming to fetch me in my room.) One day I was lying on a divan in trance when I felt his cold muzzle nudging my hand to wake me. I opened my eyes ... no dog. Yet I had positively, clearly felt his cold muzzle. So I got ready, went downstairs, and who did I find fast asleep on the landing but Little Boy — he was in trance as well! He had come to wake me in his sleep. When I reached the landing he woke up, shook himself and trotted off.

It was an interesting life....

We used to go for walks in the nearby countryside to see the tombs (it was a Muslim country). I no longer recall their Arabic name, but there is always a guardian at Muslim tombs — a sage, like the fakirs of India, a kind of priest responsible for the tomb. Pilgrims go there as well. Théon was friendly with one particular sage, and would speak with him and tell him things (at these times I would see the mischief in Théon's eyes). One day, Théon took me along. (According to Islamic tradition I should have been fully covered, but I always went out in a type of kimono!) Théon addressed the sage in Arabic; I didn't understand what he said, but the sage rose, bowed to me very ceremoniously and went off into another room, returning with three cups of sweetened mint tea (not teacups, they put it in special little glasses — extremely sweet tea, almost like mint syrup). The sage was watching me, I was obliged to take it ....

The pine tree story is also from Tlemcen.

Someone had wanted to plant pine trees Scotch firs, I think — and by mistake Norway spruce were sent instead. And it began to snow! It had never snowed there before, as you can imagine — it was only a few kilometers from the Sahara and boiling hot: 113° in the shade and 130° in the sun in summer. Well, one night Madame Théon, asleep in her bed, was awakened by a little gnome-like being — a Norwegian gnome with a pointed cap and pointed

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8 The story doesn't seem to end here, but perhaps Mother did not wish to say anything further.
slippers turned up at the toes! From head to foot he was covered with snow, and it began melting onto the floor of her room, so she glared at him and said:

“What are You doing here? You're dripping wet! You're making a mess of my floor!”
“I'm here to tell you that we were called to this mountain and so we have come.”
“What are you?”
“The Lord of the Snow.”
“Very well,” replied Madame Théon, “I shall see about that when I get up. Now go away, you're spoiling my room!”
So the little gnome left.
But when she awoke, there was a puddle of water on the floor, so it couldn't have been a dream. And when she looked out the window, all the hills were snow-covered!

It was the first time. They had lived there for years but had never seen snow. And every winter after that, the hillsides would be covered with snow.

(silence)

You see, when people are in this occult consciousness, everything is possible — it creates an atmosphere where ALL, all is possible. What to our European common sense seems impossible ... is all possible.

She was English and he... I don't know whether he was Polish or Russian (he was of Jewish origin and had to leave his country for that reason). But they were both European.

It was a very interesting world. Really, what I saw there.... Well, once you left, you would ask yourself, “Was I dreaming??” It all seemed so fantastic!

But when I recounted these experiences to Sri Aurobindo, he told me it was quite natural: when you have the power, you live in and create around yourself an atmosphere where these things are possible.

Because it is all here, it just hasn't been brought to the surface.

So, it's time to go and we still haven't worked — once again I've been talking away! Don't bother noting it all down; I've told it just for you, for your personal entertainment!

But many things here will interest everyone!

No. Besides, there are things.... There are things I don't want to speak of because ... (and I haven't said them, either) because, after all, he taught me a lot.

(long silence)

So, mon petit.... Sri Aurobindo always said the greatest obstacle to true understanding and participation in the Work is common sense. He said that's why Nature creates madmen from time to time! They are people not strong enough to bear the dismantling of this petty stupidity called common sense.

It's time to go now. Do you have anything to say?
Sometimes I am a little troubled because I don't feel I am advancing much or having any experiences.... Nothing seems to be happening. It's rather discouraging and at times I wonder why...

Lately, the nights are being spent in a subconscious realm that absolutely must be clarified; it's precisely the realm where one feels helpless, foolish, ignorant, utterly unprogressive, bound up in all sorts of stupidities. It all must be clarified.

These nights, I have been having experiences which, if I didn't know what I do or hadn't had the experiences I've had, would be very discouraging: how to get out of it? Seekers have always had the very same impression: that we are all incurable imbeciles. And always the same solution, to flee life and escape this folly. Now I see it from another angle....

But it's truly a burden.

Well, I am going on with the work, and what I would recommend to all those with the capacity and possibility to follow me is to remain very calm, don't fret, don't be troubled. And if you feel a little depressed, don't pay any attention to it; live quietly from minute to minute, without worrying about anything — it will pass. It will pass....

Naturally, the more calm and confident you are, the more quickly it will pass. That's all.

I can assure you that you are well fastened, very well indeed; you are automatically caught up in my whole forward movement. So don't worry. Begin your book on Sri Aurobindo.

But first I would have to reread everything!

Haven't you done that already?

In ten months I've had time to read two books!

It doesn't matter! Put your ideas down on paper. There are things you already know you want to say. Put it all on paper. I assure you it will do you good. I have seen it several times recently and I wanted to tell you: begin your book on Sri Aurobindo! Begin anywhere at all, at any point — the middle, the end, the beginning — it doesn't matter! Whatever you feel you have to say, write it down. It's good to keep yourself occupied like that now, during this period. And for our next meetings you can work a little on The Synthesis of Yoga and we will look at it together instead of you always making me talk! ... I have increased your work, there will be no end to it. If it goes on like this, there will never be an end!

Fortunately!

So, mon petit, don't worry. You are SURE, sure not only to advance but to reach the goal. And as for this troubled mind, keep it occupied with the book on Sri Aurobindo.

Good-bye now, petit. Don't worry.