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“The spiritual life reveals the one essence in all, but reveals too its infinite diversity; it works for diversity in oneness and for perfection in that diversity.”

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This is the very motive of the creation of the universe, that is to say, all are one, all is one in its origin, but each thing, each element, each being has as its mission the revealing of one part of this unity to itself, and it is this particularity which must be developed in everyone, while awakening at the same time the sense of the original unity. This is “to work for unity in diversity”. And the perfection in that diversity lies in everyone’s being perfectly what he ought to be.

You have said: “Men have the impression that their desires are born within; they feel as if they come out of themselves or arise in themselves; but it is a false impression. Desires are waves of the vast sea of the obscure lower nature and they pass from one person to another. Men do not generate desire in themselves, but are invaded by these waves; whoever is open and without defence is caught in them and tossed about.”

Ibid.

Can the protective envelope also feel the waves of desire, the impulsions from others, etc.?

You mean whether the protective envelope of which I spoke from a physical point of view can serve also from a moral, a psychological point of view? It is not the same envelope, it is another domain. A man may have this subtle-physical envelope
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quite intact and it may work marvellously to protect him from all illnesses and accidents, and yet at the same time he may be full of desires, because desires belong to another sphere. Desire is not a physical thing, desire is something vital, and this envelope is more material than the vital: it cannot prevent the vital from entering into contact with the vital world and receiving from there all its impulsions. Naturally he who has mastered himself, who has found his psychic being, who lives constantly in the consciousness of this psychic being, who has established a perfect relation or at least a constant relation with the inner divine Presence is enveloped in an atmosphere of knowledge, light, beauty, purity, which is the best of all protections against desires, but all the same it is possible for desire to intrude if one is not always on one’s guard, because we say that it comes from outside. One may have overcome a desire within oneself, and yet it may come from outside as a contagion; but through this envelope of light, knowledge and purity, the desire loses its force and instead of coming like a movement which evokes a blind and immediate response, one perceives what is happening, becomes aware of the force which wants to enter and one can quietly — when it is not wanted — make an inner movement and reject the incoming desire. This is the only true defence: a wakeful consciousness, pure and alert, so to say, which does not sleep, does not let things enter without being aware of them. The worst thing is that people are quite unconscious and that it is only after the contagion has entered that they notice it, and it is a little late to react — it is not impossible, but it is more difficult — while if one sees it coming, if in the surrounding atmosphere it comes making a kind of little black mark, one can chase it off as one would something disagreeable. But the protective envelope on the material plane has no effect in this instance.

This is indeed something very interesting.... I have seen that material things are arranged in such a way at present that one could reach a high degree of perfection of the physical instrument in any field whatever, no matter what may be the degree of
inner or psychic development. This was what I thought yesterday evening about the talkies. It is evidently a great progress in the cinematographic art and it can't be called in itself bad or good. It so happened that I had always seen only talkies of idiotic, vulgar, crude stories, indeed all the stupidities generally shown in cinemas, and this perfection of the instrument had made the crudity yet more crude, the stupidity yet more stupid, and this kind of impression of degradation yet more strong. But yesterday, when we saw that documentary with the beautiful birds singing... Those who made this film have taken great pains, one can't imagine how much of effort and work it entails to film birds in their nests without disturbing them, then to record the sound accurately enough to be able to amplify it and make it perceptible to all. It is a very big work they have done there. And it is the same perfecting of the same instrument which permitted the production of the lovely thing we saw yesterday evening and that ignoble thing we saw sometime ago.... This makes us reflect deeply on material things.

Physical perfection does not at all prove, not in the least, that one has taken one step farther towards spirituality. Physical perfection means that the instrument the force will use — any force whatever — will be sufficiently perfected to be remarkably expressive. But the important point, the essential point is the force which will use the instrument, and it is there that the choice is necessary. If you perfect your body and make of it a remarkable instrument, you must not at all think that because of that you are nearer to the spiritual life. You prepare a remarkable instrument so that this spiritual life may manifest in it, if it manifests itself. But it is for you always to choose what will be manifested. There are people who perfect their body, who build a strong, solid, energetic, agile, capable body, and all this simply to be able to better affirm their ego and the strength of their ego. Others may prepare the body to be sure that when the spiritual light manifests, it will find an instrument capable of doing all that is asked of it. Whatever the work required, the instrument
will be so perfected as to be able to do it without difficulty, spontaneously, immediately.... This is to arouse your attention to the most important fact which is the choice of the force you will allow to manifest in your body. Perfect your body, make it a remarkable instrument, but never forget that there is a choice to be made and that this choice ought to be made constantly — one doesn’t make it once for all, it must always be renewed. Because, before one reaches the total union, the total expression, there will always be this invasion of external things which will try to enter you and spoil all the work. So, the necessary, indispensable condition is a constant vigilance. Do not sleep with satisfaction under the pretext that you have once made your choice: “Oh! Now it is all right, everything is all right.” In principle everything is all right; in the sincerity of your choice lies also the guarantee of its duration. But for the sincerity to be perfect and the choice unshakable, one must never sleep — I don’t mean you must not sleep physically, I mean the consciousness must not sleep! And this is an introduction to what I shall read to you next time, a letter Sri Aurobindo wrote quite a long time ago; if I remember rightly, it was in 1928, October 1928. You see, things do not change very quickly.

How should one express the particularity of one’s being?

You must live it, that is to say, live according to the inner law, the truth of your being. I have explained this at some length in “The Science of Living”, I have said that this truth of the being is precisely the particularity of every one.

But it differs with every one, doesn’t it?

The law of each being is different, yes, otherwise how would a distinction be made? From top to bottom, the nature, appearance, actions, all would be the same. If there were only one law, there would be only one law and every one would repeat the
same thing. There would be no need at all to manifest a universe because it would be one single law. The very characteristic of the universe is an infinite multiplicity of laws which altogether, in their totality, reproduce the One. And it is this which is particularly marvellous in the physical world (in man and in the physical world, for it is proper to the terrestrial being), that it can be one of the innumerable elements which in their totality reproduce the One, and yet at the same time have a personal relation with the One — that is to say, contain in itself the consciousness of the One and the relation with the One, and at the same time be an element of the whole. But if the fact of becoming conscious of the One and identifying oneself with it stopped one from being particular, one would cease existing as a personality. This is precisely what the Buddhists and the disciples of Shankara try to realise; they wish to abolish totally their personality, their individuality, abolish the truth of their being, the special law of their being. This is what they consider to be a fusion with the Divine. But this is the negation of this creation. And as I was saying, the miracle of this creation, as far as the terrestrial individuality goes, is that we may achieve this union, this complete identification with the Supreme, the One, and at the same time keep the consciousness of our diversity, of the particular law we have to express. It is more difficult but infinitely more complete, and it is the very truth of this universe. The universe has not been made for anything else but that, to unite these two poles, the two extremes of consciousness. And when they are united, one understands that these two extremes are exactly the same thing — a whole, at once one and innumerable.

But one feels very different from others!

Externally, this is evident.

It is ignorance.

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No, the ignorance is to deny the essential identity, the one origin. And I consider it an ignorant absurdity to want to deny the external differences of the manifestation. Why should there be a manifestation then? What purpose would it serve? This would mean there has been an absurdity at the beginning of creation. If this had not been done on purpose, it would mean that things are not made on purpose or that He has made a mistake or even that He has not understood what He wanted to do! that He thought of doing one thing and did another! Besides, I hasten to tell you that if there were a universe in which all the elements were identical, truly one would immediately ask why it existed. If all of you in front of me, all, were all the same, speaking in the same way, thinking in the same way, reacting in the same way, I believe I would immediately run away!

You said that if there were a third world war, it would be the end of the present civilisation. Would the terrestrial condition be affected favourably by it or adversely?

Listen. Would you ask whether a fatal illness is favourable to health or not? It is exactly that. A civilisation, whatever it may be, is the result of very long efforts to become conscious of oneself, of Nature, and to master this Nature and draw the best possible advantage from it. We were saying a while ago that the training of the physical being consists in preparing an instrument so that the Divine may manifest Himself. A civilisation prepares an instrument so that the Divine may manifest in that instrument. The more slowly, carefully, minutely the civilisation is worked out, and succeeds in conquering the laws of Nature, the more favourable is the instrument to the manifestation of the Divine. That is why we also have this idea of the prolongation of life, it is to be able to perfect the instrument so as to manifest the divine Force which wants to manifest. Otherwise, it would evidently be much easier, as soon as the body became a little ill or a little old or incapable of reacting as it did when young, to
do what one does with an old torn dress — one throws it away and gets another. Unfortunately, it is not like that. All the fruit of the work, all the accumulated effort to become conscious is lost. If, for instance, this civilisation we have built, which in a way has so considerably mastered the forces of Nature, which has succeeded in understanding laws of an altogether unique order and has accumulated so many experiences of all kinds to reach self-understanding and self-expression, if all this disappeared, it would be necessary, naturally, to begin all over again. And then, for a new-born child, how many years of slow and insipid education are needed for its brain to be ready to express even a simple general idea, for its movements to be conscious instead of being absolutely unconscious, how many years! For a civilisation, how many years would be necessary simply to get back all that is lost? There have been many civilisations on the earth, there are scientists trying to rediscover what has been, but nobody can say with certitude exactly what was there: the major part of these civilisations is completely lost (I am speaking of civilisations preceding this one which for us is historical). Well, if thousands of years are yet needed to begin another, obviously.... In any case, for our external human consciousness, it is a loss of time. But we are told that the Work to be done, the promised Realisation is going to take place now. It is going to take place now because the framework of this civilisation seems to be favourable as a platform or a base for building up. But if this civilisation is destroyed, upon what are we going to build? First a foundation platform must be made in order to be able to build. If five or ten thousand years are still needed to make this platform, this proves that it is not now that things will be done — they will be done, that is well understood, they will be done, but... How many lives have you all had? What do you remember of your past lives? What is the good of all the efforts you have made in your past lives to perfect yourselves, to try to understand yourselves, to master yourselves a little, simply to make use of the instrument which has been given to you? What
remains to you of all that? Will you tell me? Who here can tell me that he is consciously profiting by the experiences of his past lives — unconsciously there is something which remains but not much — but consciously?... No one will answer?

No, precisely, one has the impression that after having lived so long, one is only beginning to know a very little.

Yes, exactly, it is just like that. This is because the farther one goes, the more does one realise that there is everything to understand and everything to learn. And consequently, if one has behind him some sixty years, it is nothing. One would like to have hundreds and hundreds of years behind oneself to be able to do the work. It is like that, you are all little children, you see, so the years seem to you long, because you have not lived much; but you will see, the more one advances, the more does one realise that there is a long road in front, long, very long, and one would not like to have to begin all over again, for it is so much more time lost.