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“Ambition has been the undoing of many Yogis. That canker can hide long. Many people start on the Path without any sense of it. But when they get powers, their ambition rises up, all the more violently because it had not been thrown out in the beginning.”

Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (14 April 1929)

What do you call a “canker”?

It is an image, as of a fine mango, very beautiful to look at, and when one opens it, there is a worm inside. That is because the fly laid an egg before the fruit was formed; outside there is no trace. Everything seems candid, disinterested. But within, right at the bottom, there is a great ambition, the desire to have an exceptional position, to be respected by everybody… that is, the ego. This is the canker, it remains very quiet, but it is there. When the power comes, instead of realising that one is nothing, does not deserve anything and that all that one has to do is to remain as passive as possible, one deceives oneself, feels the need of others taking note of it also. It is this I call the canker. It eats up all that is inside and leaves the appearance intact.

You say that it is necessary to establish “homogeneity in our being”?

Ibid.

Don’t you know what a homogeneous thing is, made up of all similar parts? That means the whole being must be under the same influence, same consciousness, same tendency, same will. We are formed of all kinds of different pieces. They become active one after another. According to the part that is active, one
is quite another person, becomes almost another personality. For instance, one had an aspiration at first, felt that everything existed only for the Divine, then something happens, somebody comes along, one has to do something, and everything disappears. One tries to recall the experience, not even the memory of the experience remains. One is completely under another influence, one wonders how this could have happened. There are examples of double, triple, quadruple personalities, altogether unconscious of themselves.... But it is not about this I am speaking; I am speaking about something which has happened to all of you: you have had an experience, and for some time you have felt, understood that this experience was the only thing that was important, that had an absolute value — half an hour later you try to recall it, it is like a smoke that vanishes. The experience has disappeared. And yet half an hour ago it was there and so powerful.... It is because one is made of all kinds of different things. The body is like a bag with pebbles and pearls all mixed up, and it is only the bag which keeps all that together. This is not a homogeneous, uniform consciousness but a heterogeneous one.

You can be a different person at different moments in your life. I know people who took decisions, had a strong will, knew what they wanted and prepared to do it. Then there was a little reversal in the being; another part came up and spoiled all the work in ten minutes. What had been accomplished in two months was all undone. When the first part comes back it is in dismay, it says: “What!...” Then the whole work has to be started again, slowly. Hence it is evident that it is very important to become aware of the psychic being; one must have a kind of signpost or a mirror in which all things are reflected and show themselves as they truly are. And then, according to what they are, one puts them in one place or another; one begins to explain, to organise. That takes time. The same part comes back three or four times and every part that comes up says: “Put me in the first place; what the others do is not important, not at all
important, it is I who will decide, for I am the most important.” I
am sure that if you look at yourself, you will see that there’s
not one among you who has not had the experience. You want
to become conscious, to have goodwill, you have understood,
your aspiration is shining—all is brilliant, illuminated; but all
of a sudden something happens, a useless conversation, some
unfortunate reading, and that upsets everything. Then one thinks
that it was an illusion one lived in, that all things were seen from
a certain angle.

This is life. One stumbles and falls at the first occasion. One
tells oneself: “Oh! One can’t always be so serious”, and when
the other part returns, once again, one repents bitterly: “I was a
fool, I have wasted my time, now I must begin again....” At times
there is one part that’s ill-humoured, in revolt, full of worries,
and another which is progressive, full of surrender. All that, one
after the other.

There is but one remedy: that signpost must always be there,
a mirror well placed in one’s feelings, impulses, all one’s sensa-
tions. One sees them in this mirror. There are some which are not
very beautiful or pleasant to look at; there are others which are
beautiful, pleasant, and must be kept. This one does a hundred
times a day if necessary. And it is very interesting. One draws a
kind of big circle around the psychic mirror and arranges all the
elements around it. If there is something that is not all right, it
casts a sort of grey shadow upon the mirror: this element must
be shifted, organised. It must be spoken to, made to understand,
one must come out of that darkness. If you do that, you never
get bored. When people are not kind, when one has a cold in
the head, when one doesn’t know one’s lessons, and so on, one
begins to look into this mirror. It is very interesting, one sees the
canker. “I thought I was sincere!” — not at all.

Not a thing happens in life which is not interesting. This
mirror is very, very well made. Do that for two years, three, four
years, at times one must do it for twenty years. Then at the end
of a few years, look back, turn your gaze upon what you were
three years ago: “How I have changed!... Was I like that?...” It is very entertaining. “I could speak like that? I could talk like that, think like that?... But I was indeed stupid! How I have changed!” It’s very interesting, isn’t it?