30 September 1953

“There is a plane in the mind where the memory of everything is stored and remains always in existence. All mental movements that belong to the life of the earth are memorised and registered in this plane. Those who are capable of going there and care to take the trouble, can read in it and learn anything they choose. But this region must not be mistaken for the supramental levels. And yet to reach even there you must be able to silence the movements of the material or physical mind; you must be able to leave aside all your sensations and put a stop to your ordinary mental movements, whatever they are; you must get out of the vital; you must become free from the slavery of the body. Then only can you enter into that region and see. But if you are sufficiently interested to make this effort, you can arrive there and read what is written in the earth’s memory.”

Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (23 June 1929)

You have said that in order to go to the place where all mental movements belonging to earthly life are recorded and preserved, one must silence the movements of the material and physical mind... and put a stop to ordinary mental movements. If the movements are stopped, what is going to happen? We have to do something or other the whole day long.

No, just for that moment. Not permanently.

Mother, but if one forgets? There is some work to do: at two o’clock one must do this, and at half past ten one must do that; if one forgets...

277
Questions and Answers

No, you don’t understand. To go to that place, at the time of going you must be able to completely silence the mind (and all the other things I have mentioned), but just for going there. For example, you decide: “Now, I am going to read such and such a chapter of earth’s history”, then you lounge comfortably in an easy-chair, you tell people not to disturb you, you go within yourself and completely stop your mind, and you send your mental messenger to that place.... It is preferable to have someone who can guide you there, because otherwise you can lose your way and go elsewhere! And then you go. It is like a very big library with many many small compartments. So you find the compartment corresponding to the information you wish to have. You press a button and it opens. And inside it you find a scroll as it were, a mental formation which unrolls before you like a parchment, and you read. And then you make a note of what you have read and afterwards return quietly into your body with the new knowledge, and you may transcribe physically, if you can, what you have found, and then you get up and start your life as before.... This may take you ten minutes, it may take one hour, it may take half an hour, it depends upon your capacity, but it is important to know the way, as I said, in order not to make a mistake.

*Why then don’t we do that instead of reading books!*

Because very few people would be able to do it, whereas many can read books (there are not many who understand them, but many can read them!). And this is still more difficult than understanding a book.

*And if it were taught to children when they are quite young?*

It is possible that this might be a better alternative to reading books!
30 September 1953

All that has happened upon earth — from the beginning of
the earth till now, all the movements of the mind have been
exactly inscribed, all of them. So when you need any accurate
information about something, you have only to go there, you
find your way. It is a very strange place; it is made as though of
small cells, they are like small pigeon-holes; and so, following
the shelves and some kind of... how to put it? There are libraries
of that kind. Why, I saw a picture shown to us at the cinema, the
picture of a library in New York. Well, it is arranged somewhat
like that. It is a similar arrangement. It interested me because of
that. But instead of being books, these are like small squares.
They are all closed. You put your finger, press a button and
the thing opens. And then something like a scroll comes out
and you unroll it and can read it — all that is written about a
subject. There are millions and millions and millions of these.
And happily, in the mind, one can go down, one can go up, one
can go right on the top. You do not need a ladder!

How does one read? As one reads a book?

Yes, it is a kind of mental perception. It corresponds to that.
You see quite, quite well all the description or the information
(that depends on what it is). Sometimes they are pictures: it is
as though a picture had been preserved. Sometimes it is a story.
Sometimes it is simply an answer to a question. All possible
and imaginable things recorded mentally are there. You can find
many corrections too (exactly of those facts that have been put
in books and are not correct). And you need not walk on or
climb up: you send along quite simply something like a concen-
trated mental consciousness and that goes forward and touches
the thing. Only, if you do this without completely detaching
yourself from your own mental activity, I am afraid you will see
only what is in your own head! Instead of seeing the thing as
it is, perhaps you take a walk in your own brain and see only
what is there — it is a danger. You must be able to silence your
head absolutely and be completely detached, not to have (for example, when you are looking for the solution of a problem), not to have already in your head the solution that seems to you right or the best or most profitable. That must not be there. You must become absolutely like a blank paper, with nothing on it. And you proceed in that way, with a very sincere aspiration to know the truth, without assuming beforehand that it will be like this or like that; because otherwise you will see only your own formation. The very first condition is that the head must keep completely silent during the time one is observing.

And in order to be more sure (but here one must be fully trained, one must have a very good education), in order to be altogether sure of reporting clearly the knowledge received without deforming it in any way, it is better to say what one sees and what one reads (we say “reads”, but rather it is what one perceives), to say it as one perceives it, and it should be someone else who notes it down.... I repeat: You lie quietly stretched in your easy-chair, without moving and altogether quiet, and you send a messenger from your head. Now, someone should be sitting by your side and when you reach the place and open the door and pull out the manuscript (or whatever you like to call it), you begin, instead of reading only with your eyes that are absent, to describe what you see. You acquire the habit of speaking aloud and as you go on observing up there, you speak here. You narrate precisely your journey through those vast halls and how you reached that place and how it had a small mark that was the sign of what you wanted to see. Then you open that little place and pull out the scroll and start reading. And you read it out aloud. And the person who is there, sitting by your side, goes on noting down what you are reading. In this way there is no danger of the thing getting changed when you return. For, the experience is very clear and precise to that part of your being which is there at the moment, but when you come back into the material world as it is, almost always something escapes and this does not escape when you speak directly at the
time you are at work. So all that means very many conditions to
fulfil: it is not so easy as taking a book in the library and reading
it! This is within the reach of everybody. That is a little more
difficult to accomplish.

What is the theory of relativity?¹

(Mother turns to a disciple and mathematician) Pavitra! Will
you please explain that to these children?

Pavitra: It means that the description of the universe
varies with each observer — to put it in one sentence.

Is that all! Why is there so much fuss over this discovery?

Pavitra: It is a revolution, Mother!

It is a revolution? That what one sees depends on who sees? Ah!
Well...

Pavitra: What one measures depends upon the physical

¹ “Although it may be true in a general way and in a certain sense that a Yogi can know
all things and can answer all questions from his own field of vision and consciousness,
yet it does not follow that there are no questions whatever of any kind to which he would
not or could not answer. A Yogi who has the direct knowledge, the knowledge of the
true truth of things, would not care or perhaps would find it difficult to answer questions
that belong entirely to the domain of human mental constructions. It may be, he could
or would not wish to solve problems and difficulties you might put to him which touch
only the illusions of things and their appearances. The working of his knowledge is not
in the mind; if you put him some silly mental query of that character, he probably would
not answer. The very common conception that you can put any ignorant question to
him as to some superschoolmaster or demand from him any kind of information past,
present or future and that he is bound to answer, is a foolish idea. It is as inept as the
expectation from the spiritual man of feats and miracles that would satisfy the vulgar
external mind and leave it gaping with wonder.”

Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (23 June 1929)
universe, from the point of view of the physical sciences.

Physical sciences, yes. For measuring the universe, each one measures it in his own way.

Pavitra: But then, complementary to that, it has been found that behind there is something independent of the observer.

Ah! they have “discovered” that? (laughter) A still greater revolution!... (loud laughter) Good.

Mother, you have said there are many intermediary planes between the mental and the supramental, and that if an ordinary man came in contact with one of these intermediate planes, he would be dazzled. Why then, since man is in such an undeveloped condition, do we speak of the descent of the supramental plane, instead of the descent of the intermediate planes?

For a very simple reason, because till now the whole physical, material world, the whole earth (let us take the earth) has been ruled by forces and the consciousness that come from what Sri Aurobindo calls the Overmind. Even what men call God is a force, a power coming from the Overmind and the whole universe was under the rule of the Overmind. To get there one has to pass through many intermediate planes and very few people can reach there without getting dazzled. But what Sri Aurobindo

2 “Men are too easily inclined to believe that they have climbed into regions quite divine when they have only gone above the average level. There are many stages between the ordinary human mind and the Supermind, many grades and many intervening planes. If an ordinary man were to get into direct contact even with one of these intermediate planes, he would be dazzled and blinded, would be crushed under the weight of the sense of immensity or would lose his balance; and yet it is not the Supermind.”

Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (23 June 1929)
said is that now the time for the “rule” of the Overmind is coming to its end and is going to be replaced by the rule of the Supermind. All who have had spiritual experiences and have discovered the Divine and become united with Him, know what it is, the Overmind. But what Sri Aurobindo says is that beyond the Overmind there is something and that it is now the turn of this something to come and rule the earth, to manifest upon earth and rule the earth. Therefore, there is no need to speak of the Overmind, for many people have spoken about it already and have had the experience of it; whereas this is something new that is going to manifest itself in a new way and nobody has been aware of it before. That is why. The old accounts — there’s no lack of people who have experienced these things or described them, or of books written on the subject. There is no need to repeat once more what others have said. Sri Aurobindo came to say something new. And it is precisely because people are unable to come out of the experiences they have known and heard being spoken of, that they try to identify this Force which Sri Aurobindo called supramental with their experience of the intermediary worlds including the Overmind. For they cannot conceive that there could be something else.... Sri Aurobindo always said that his Yoga began where the former Yogas ended, that to be able to realise his Yoga it was necessary first of all to have reached the extreme limit of what the older Yogas had realised, that is to say, the perception of the Divine, the union, the identification with the Divine. But that Divine, Sri Aurobindo says, is the Divine of the Overmind which is already something quite unthinkable, in comparison with the human consciousness, because even to reach there one must pass through several planes and in these planes one feels dazzled.

There are beings of the vital, if they appeared to men, or to say things more exactly, whenever they have appeared to men, men have taken them for the supreme God — these vital entities! If you like, we shall call that a disguise but it is a very successful disguise, because those who saw it were thoroughly convinced
that they had seen the supreme Godhead. And yet, they were but beings of the vital. And these entities of the Overmind, these overmental gods are mighty entities in comparison with our humanity. When human beings come in relation with them, they become truly bewildered.

There is however a kind of Grace which makes it possible for us to profit by the experience of others. It is something similar to the way of teaching the sciences. If each scientist had to do all over again all the experiments of the past in order to arrive at a new discovery, go over all that the others had found, he would have to spend his whole life doing that and there would be no time left to make his new discovery! Now one doesn’t need to do all that: one opens a book and sees the results and starting from there can proceed further. Well, Sri Aurobindo wanted to do the same thing. He tells you where you can find the results of what others before him have found — the experiments they made and their results — and where you stand: historically where you stand in the spiritual history of the world. And then he takes you from there, and after the basis has been firmly laid for you, he makes you climb higher up the mountain.

So, in the Ashram, there should be only those who have reached the overmental level? Instead of that...

I don’t want to speak of those who were there at the beginning, what they knew or did not know and their experience. But you all, my children, at what age did you come here? That was not an age to have realised the Overmind!

If you had around you people like Vivekananda, for example, your work would be more easy, wouldn’t it? Instead of having unrefined stuff like us? (laughter)

Probably they would have been more refractory!... For what is most difficult is to convince someone who has already had a
realisation. He believes he is above all progress.

Not necessarily. It is not necessarily someone who has some experience who is most advanced. He lacks an element of simplicity, modesty, and the plasticity that comes from the fact that one is not yet totally developed. As one grows, something crystallises in the head; it gets more and more fixed and unless you try very hard you finish by becoming fossilised. This is what usually happens to people, particularly those who have tried for some realisation and succeeded in it or those who have come to believe they have reached the goal. In any case, it was their personal goal. They have reached it, they have attained. It is done, they remain there; they settle there, they say “that’s it.” And they do no more any more. So, after that they may live ten years more, or twenty or thirty, they will not budge. They are there, they will stay there. Such people lack all the suppleness of stuff that’s necessary for going further and progressing. They are stuck. They are very good objects to be put in a museum, but not for doing work. They are like samples to show what can be done but they are not the stuff to do more. For me personally, I admit I prefer for my work someone who knows very little, has not laboured too much, but who has a great aspiration, much goodwill and who feels in himself this flame, this need for progressing. He may know very little, may have realised still less, but if he has that within him, it is good stuff with which one can go very far, much further. For one must know the way (it is the same thing here as with your library), one must know the way to go. Well, usually in life when you climb a mountain or go to an unknown land, you look for a man who has been there, who is a guide, and you ask him to direct you. It is the same thing. If you follow the guide, you can go much quicker than someone else who has made much effort, found his own way and is usually quite proud of himself and, in any case, has the feeling of having come to the end, reached the goal he aimed at, finally arrived — and he stops, settles down. And he does not move any more.
Questions and Answers

Naturally, at the beginning there were no children here and children were not accepted, children were all refused. It was only after the war that children were taken. But I do not regret that they have been accepted. For I believe there is much more stuff for the future among children who know nothing than among those grown-ups who believe they know everything.... I do not know if you have much knowledge of sculpture. But to do sculpture, you have to take some clay, soak it with water; it must be finely powdered clay, and you soak it with water and make a paste. You have to keep it wet all the time and you make a statue or whatever you want out of that. When it is finished, you fire it so that it sets. And after that — indeed after that — it cannot move any more. If you want to change something, you must break it and make another. For otherwise, as it is, it is rigid, as hard and stiff as stone.... Something similar happens in life. You must not attain something and then remain crystallised, fossilised, immobilised. For otherwise you have to break it, take it to pieces, or else you can do nothing with it any longer.

So long as one remains thus clay-like, very soft, very malleable, not yet formed, not aware of being formed, something can be done. And as long as one remains a child... it is a blissful state. I was saying this yesterday, children have only one idea, to become grown-ups, and they do not know that when they are grown up, they will have lost three-fourths of their worth which consists in being something which can still be developed, formed, something malleable, progressive, which need not be broken into bits so that it may progress. There are people who are compelled to take a whole turn around the mountain, in that way, from the foot to the top, and they take an entire lifetime to reach the top. There are others who know the road, the shortest cut that can be taken by which one can go straight to the top. And then, once up there, they are still full of youthfulness and energy and they can see the horizon and the next mountain. On the contrary, the others are conscious of having done a considerable
work by turning round and round and spending their whole life to reach the summit. But as for you, my children, it is being tried here to take you quite at the bottom and make you go up by the funicular railway right to the top, the shortest cut. And when you are on the top, you will have the vision of the spaces before you and you will be able to choose the mountain you wish to climb.

Above all, do not be in a hurry not to be a child any more! One must be a child all one’s life, as much as one can, as long as one can. Be happy, joyful, content to be a child and remain a child, plastic stuff for shaping. Voilà.

*Can’t you change someone who has already made progress? Can’t one change men who are getting old?*

It can be done, it can be done. It is being done. It can be done but it is much more difficult and the more they are convinced of having attained something, the more difficult it is.

That can be done, it has been done, but it is much more difficult. And sometimes it takes more time.

*Why were children not accepted before the war?*

Ah, my children, it is very simple. Because where there are children, you have to be busy most of the time with them only! Children are very absorbing creatures. Everything must be organised for them, everything must be arranged in view of their welfare, and the whole aspect of life changes. Children are most important personages. When they are there, everything turns around them. And the entire organisation of the Ashram has completely changed. Formerly, it was quite different. First of all there was a kind of austerity that cannot be imposed upon children. There are simplicities and austerities of life that can be imposed upon grown-up people, because they are told: “Take it or leave it: if you cannot bear it, if you do not like it, well,
you may go away. This is what it should be like; if you do not want it, you may leave the place, the door is always open.” But with a child... What right have you to demand of a child things that have no normal relationship with its growth? Children must have reached a certain maturity before they are able to make a choice. You cannot compel them to do a thing before they have the capacity to choose. You have to give them quite naturally all that they need. And this changes life completely. And I knew that very well. I already had the experience of what the life of solitary people or a group of solitary people is like, and of a life in which children are admitted. It is absolutely, totally different. You have no right to demand of a person something when he has no free choice; and so long as a person is not formed, has not attained a certain maturity, you cannot make him choose. When one reaches this maturity, then one chooses. And the children here have not come of themselves. Most of you were not taller than a boot — when you came here, how old were you?... One cannot tell them: “You have chosen, therefore you have to take it or leave it, either you do this or you go away.” They have been brought here, hence it is one’s duty to give them what they need; and the needs of children are not at all the same as those of big people. It is much more complicated.

Now things are different, because now people are not told: “You are going to come here to do yoga”; they are told: “You are going to try to learn about the conditions under which earthly life can be bettered.” So people come and study. When one thinks he knows what he wants to learn, he goes away. It is not the same thing. And it is not the same conditions as when one comes with a definite and single aim like realising the Divine in his physical life and nothing else in the world counts for him but that. In order to choose you must at least know a little the elements to choose from. And for that you must have a certain inner formation, a certain culture. And you certainly do not have that when you are five years old — except some; some among you (more than one would believe) knew very well why they
had come, although they could not formulate it in words. They felt it very intensely. And when their parents tried to take them away, they refused stubbornly, saying: “No, no, I want to remain here.” Even at the age of five, although they could not know in their head the reason why, because the brain was not formed. But the psychic consciousness was there, and they could feel. Well, these children are of an infinitely higher stuff than that of people who have already had three-fourths of their head blunted by the education they have been given in ordinary schools and who come here quite convinced that they know many things, that they are well acquainted with life. They have a formed character and have acquired many bad habits. There, then.

Are remembrance and memory the same thing?

Not necessarily. Memory is a mental phenomenon, purely mental. Remembrance can be a phenomenon of consciousness. One can remember in all the domains of one’s being: one can remember vitally, one can remember physically, one can remember psychically, one can remember mentally also. But memory is a purely mental phenomenon. Memory can, first of all, be deformed and it can also be effaced, one can forget. The phenomenon of consciousness is very precise; if you can take the consciousness back to the state in which it was, things come back exactly as they were. It is as though you relived the same moment. You can relive it once, twice, ten times, a hundred times, but you relive a phenomenon of consciousness. It is very different from the memory of a fact which you inscribe somewhere in your brain. And if the cerebral associations are disturbed in the least (for there are many things in your brain and it is a very delicate instrument), if there is the slightest disturbance, your memory goes out of order. And then holes are formed and you forget. On the other hand, if you know how to bring back a particular state of consciousness in you, it comes back exactly the same as it was. Now, a remembrance can also be purely
Questions and Answers

mental and it may be a continuation of cerebral activities, but that is mental remembrance. And you have remembrances in feeling, remembrances in sensation....

The other day, you said: To enlarge your memory, you must widen your consciousness. Is it the same thing for remembrance?

I meant to say that a phenomenon of memory should be replaced by a phenomenon of consciousness. I do not know in what sense I used the word memory the other day. It can be only in this sense.

Memory in studying.

Well, yes, it is that. That is what I meant: replace a purely mental memory by states of consciousness. That is exactly what I wanted to say. For, if you try to learn a thing by heart, after a time you are sure to forget it. Or else there are holes: you remember one thing and you do not remember another. But if you associate a particular knowledge with a phenomenon of consciousness, you can always bring it back and the knowledge will come back as it was.

Voilà, au revoir my children.