8 January 1958

Mother reads a paragraph from *The Life Divine*.

We have decided to read paragraph by paragraph so that we can go into certain detailed explanations, but this method has one drawback: as I have already told you, it is that Sri Aurobindo takes up all the theories and expounds them in all their details, with all their arguments, in order to show later what their defects are and their inability to solve the problem, and to present his own solution; but (laughing), when we stop in the middle of an argument and take a single paragraph, if we read this paragraph without going on to the very end, we may very well imagine or believe that he is giving his own opinion.

In fact there are some unscrupulous people who have done that, and when they wanted to prove that their own theories were correct, they quoted paragraphs from Sri Aurobindo without saying what went before or what came after, in support of their own theory. They said, “You see, Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine* has written that.” He has written that, but that does not mean that it was his own way of seeing. And now we are facing the same difficulty. For the last two lessons, I think, I have been reading the detailed demonstration of one of the modern theories of life, evolution, the purpose of existence — or the purposelessness of existence — and Sri Aurobindo presents this in quite a... conclusive way, as if it were his own theory and own way of seeing. We stop in the middle and are left with a kind of uneasiness and the feeling, “But that is not what he told us! How is it that he is expounding that to us now?...” It is quite a big drawback. But if I were to read to you the whole argument, when we came to the end you wouldn’t remember the beginning and you wouldn’t be able to follow! So the best thing is to go on quietly, one paragraph at a time, trying to understand what
he is saying, but without thinking that he wants to prove to us that it is true. He simply wants to expound the theories with everything that supports them, without telling us that this is the best way of seeing things.

In reality, you should take this reading as an opportunity to develop the philosophical mind in yourself and the capacity to arrange ideas in a logical order and establish an argument on a sound basis. You must take this like dumb-bell exercises for developing muscles: these are dumb-bell exercises for the mind to develop one's brain. And you must not jump to hasty conclusions. If we wait with patience, at the end of the chapter he will tell us — and tell us on a basis of irrefutable argument — why he has come to the conclusion he arrives at.

Now, if there is anything that gives rise to a question...

_Not in the text, Mother._

Something else? What?

_Mother, we sometimes have sudden ideas. Where do they come from and how do they work in the head?_

Where do they come from? — From the mental atmosphere.

Why do they come?... Perhaps you meet them on your way as one meets a passer-by in a public square. Most often it is that; you are on a road where ideas are moving about and it so happens that you meet this particular one and it passes through your head. Obviously, those who are in the habit of meditating, of concentrating, and for whom intellectual problems have a very concrete and tangible reality, by concentrating their minds they attract associated ideas, and a “company of ideas” is formed which they organise so as to solve a problem or clarify the question they are considering. But for this, one must have the habit of mental concentration and precisely that philosophical mind I was speaking about, for which ideas are living entities with their
own life, which are organised on the mental chess-board like pawns in a game of chess: one takes them, moves them, places them, organises them, one makes a coherent whole out of these ideas, which are individual, independent entities with affinities among themselves, and which organise themselves according to inner laws. But for this, one must also have the habit of meditation, reflection, analysis, deduction, mental organisation. Otherwise, if one is just “like that”, if one lives life as it comes, then it is exactly like a public square: there are roads and on the roads people pass by, and then you find yourself at crossroads and it all passes through your head — sometimes even ideas without any connection between them, so much so that if you were to write down what passes through your head, it would make a string of admirable nonsense!

We once said that we could usefully try out a little game: to ask somebody suddenly, “What are you thinking about?” Well, it is not often that he can answer you clearly, “Ah! I was just thinking of that particular thing.” If he says that, you may infer that he is a thoughtful person. Otherwise, the usual spontaneous reply is, “Oh! I don’t know.”

You see, all those who have done ordered and organised physical exercises, have the knowledge, for instance, of the various muscles which must be moved to obtain a particular movement, and the best way to move them and how to obtain the maximum result with the minimum loss of energy. Well, it is the same thing with thought. When you train yourself methodically, there comes a time when you can follow a train of reasoning quite objectively, as you would project a picture on a screen — you can follow the logical deduction of one idea from another, and the normal, logical, organised movement, with the minimum loss of time, from a proposition to its conclusion. Once you have acquired the habit of doing that, just as you have the habit of methodically moving the muscles which must be moved to obtain a certain result, your thought becomes clear. Otherwise, movements of thought, intellectual movements, are
Questions and Answers

vague, imprecise, elusive; all of a sudden something rises up, one doesn’t know why, and something else comes to contradict it, one doesn’t know why either. And if one tries to organise this clearly in order to become aware of the exact relation between ideas, the first few times one does it, one gets a fine headache! And one has the feeling of trying to find one’s way in a very dark virgin forest.

The speculative mind needs discipline for its development. If it is not disciplined methodically, one is always in a sort of a cloud. The vast majority of human beings can harbour the most contradictory ideas in their brains without being in the least troubled by them.

Well, until you try to organise your mind clearly, you risk at the very least having no control over what you think. And very often, you must come down to action before you begin to realise the value of what you think! Or, if not as far as action, at least as far as the feelings: suddenly you become aware that you have feelings which are not very desirable; then you realise you have not controlled your way of thinking at all.

_Sweet Mother, do people have bad thoughts because they have no control over their minds?_

Bad thoughts?.... There can be several reasons for that. In fact there are several reasons. It may be due to a bad nature — if people have nasty feelings, these nasty feelings can be the cause of nasty thoughts. It may be the opposite. Perhaps they are wide open to all sorts of suggestions from outside and, as I said, these suggestions enter them and gradually create nasty feelings. It may be due to subconscious influences which are conflicting precisely because they are uncontrolled. When these influences rise to the surface, instead of being controlled and those which are undesirable refused, everything is allowed to enter as it likes, the doors are open.

You are _bathed_ in all kinds of things — good, bad, neutral,
luminous, dark; it’s all there, and each one’s consciousness should, in principle, act as a filter. You should receive only what you want to receive, you should think only what you want to think; and then, you should not allow these thoughts to be changed into feelings and actions without formal authorisation.

In fact, this is the very purpose of physical existence. Each person is an instrument for controlling a certain set of vibrations which represent his particular field of work; each one must receive only the ones which are in conformity with the divine plan and refuse the rest.

But not one in a thousand does that. You do it a little, half consciously, due to the friction of circumstances and surroundings, but as for doing it deliberately, surely there are very few human beings who do it deliberately; and even when it’s done deliberately, to do it in the true way and with the true knowledge, that indeed is still more exceptional.

Thought-control! Who can control his thoughts? Only those who have trained themselves to it, who have tried hard since their childhood.

There is the whole range, you see, from total lack of control, which for most people comes to this: it is their thoughts which rule them and not they their thoughts. The vast majority of people are troubled by thoughts they cannot get rid of, which literally possess them, and they don’t have the power to close the door of their active consciousness to these thoughts. Their thoughts govern them, rule them. You hear people saying every day, “Oh! That thought, all the time it comes back to me, again and again, and I can’t get rid of it!” So they are assailed by all kinds of things, from anxiety to ill-will and fear. Thoughts which express dread are extremely troublesome; you try to send them away, they return like a rubber band and fall back on you. Who has control? It requires years of labour and such a long practice. And so, to come to something which is not complete control but anyway already represents a stage: to have the ability to do this in your head (Mother moves her hand across her brow), to annul
Questions and Answers

all the movements, to stop the vibrations. And the mental surface becomes smooth. Everything stops, as when you open a book at a blank page — but almost materially, you understand... blank!

Try a little when you are at home, you will see, it is very interesting.

And so, one follows the place in one’s head where the little point is dancing. I have seen — I have seen Sri Aurobindo doing this in somebody’s head, somebody who used to complain of being troubled by thoughts. It was as if his hand reached out and took hold of the little black dancing point and then did this (gesture with the finger-tips), as when one picks up an insect, and he threw it far away. And that was all. All still, quiet, luminous.... It was clearly visible like this, you know, he took it out without saying anything — and it was over.

And things are very closely interdependent: I also saw the case when someone came to him with an acute pain somewhere: “Oh, it hurts here! Oh, it hurts! Oh!...” He said nothing, he remained calm, he looked at the person, and I saw, I saw something like a subtle physical hand which came and took hold of the little point dancing about in disorder and confusion, and he took it like this (same gesture) and there, everything had gone.

“Oh, oh! Look my pain has gone.”

There.