This talk is based upon Mother’s essay “The Four Austerities and the Four Liberations”, Part I.

*Here you have said:* “The avowed purpose of such [ascetic] practices is to abolish all sensation so that the body may no longer stand in the way of one’s flight towards the Spirit.”

In the old spiritual doctrines, the body was always considered incapable of being transformed and only as something inert and useless obstructing the path — the spirit had to be made to go out of its body so that, free, it could have all possible experiences. And so they ill-treated the body as much as they could to take away from it its vitality and strength, to keep it very quiet like something utterly useless.

The physical consciousness was for them something to be done away with.

That was it. I am speaking as they themselves spoke. I am putting myself in their place.

*Last time, in the text it was said:* “They [those who have faith in a God, their God] belong to him integrally; all the events of their lives are an expression of the divine will and they accept them not merely with calm submission but with gratitude, for they are convinced that whatever happens to them is always for their own good.”

What is the difference between a calm and a grateful submission?

A calm and a grateful submission?... When you receive an order, you may carry it out with resignation because you
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have resolved to submit; so you carry out this order without any joy or pleasure, just very drily and superficially, and you tell yourself, “I was told to do this and I am doing it.” This means that you do not try to understand and make no effort to adhere willingly to what is asked. This is resigned submission. You accept your fate and if you do not complain it is because you have determined not to complain, it is because of this determination, otherwise you would complain.

The other instance is of understanding why an order was given, of grasping its inner value and wanting to express what has been asked with all one’s strength, with the knowledge and joy that it is something that’s bound to bring the Divine closer and give you full satisfaction. Then you are happy, you are satisfied and you collaborate. That makes quite a considerable difference.

In a calm submission, doesn’t one feel happy?

Usually one is very proud of oneself! One becomes vain, tells oneself that one is doing something remarkable. One doesn’t question, doesn’t try to understand: one obeys, and besides is resigned. One doesn’t even ask oneself if it is good or not: one is too superior! One is puffed up with pride. There are many people of this kind here.

So it is not a true submission, is it?

I think the other one is better. At least here one has the satisfaction of understanding why he does things; one does them with joy and feels strengthened through the very fact of doing them, while in the first instance one bends the head lower and lower and feels as though one were a poor victim of some despotic authority crushing one with its omnipotence.
In the temples people offer animals to the Divine. In this case can it be called cruelty?

This comes much closer to ignorance and unconsciousness than to cruelty. They don’t do it because they are cruel — there are exceptions — but still, generally speaking, it is not that they feel a special pleasure in killing but they are afraid of a particular god and think that by such killing they will win his favour.

Close by here, near the seashore, there is a fishermen’s temple — Virampatnam, I think; when you go as far as Ariancouppam and from there turn to the left and go towards the sea, at the end of the road there is a temple. It is the temple of a strange godhead... it is one of the Kalis. Well, extraordinary stories are told about this Kali, but in any case, the custom is to kill a fairly large number of chickens every year in her honour. I happened to go down there — I believe it was the day after the festival had been celebrated: one could still see all the feathers scattered on the sands — and, above all, there was in that place an atmosphere of creepy dread and total ignorance, and also (I don’t know the practice — who eats the chickens? whether it is the one who kills them or the priests — but here truly there were too many! If the priests ate all that they would be quite sick! So it must probably have been also the people who had killed the chickens), there was that atmosphere of greed, not only greed but of gluttony, of people who think about eating. And there was that Kali who was particularly satisfied with all the vital forces of all those poor little chickens; they had been killed off by hundreds and each one had a little vital force which escaped when its throat was cut, and so that Kali was feeding upon all that: she was very happy. And there was evidently — I don’t know if it could be called cruelty, it was rather greed, — greed of vital forces, of a very unconscious vital force, for these poor chickens don’t have anything very conscious. And the whole thing created a very low, very heavy, very unconscious and painful atmosphere, yet not of the intensity of cruelty. So it
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can’t be said that this practice is due to cruelty, I don’t think so. Perhaps some of these people, had they to sacrifice a little kid, a little lamb they loved, perhaps they would even find this a little sad. It is rather a great unconsciousness and a great fear. Oh, fear! In religions there is so much fear! Fear: “If I don’t do this or that, if I don’t cut the throat of a dozen chickens, disastrous things will happen to me all my life through or at least the whole of this year. My children will be ill, I shall lose my job, I won’t be able to earn my living; very, very unpleasant things will happen to me.”... And so, let us sacrifice the dozen chickens. But it is not from the desire to kill. It can’t be said that it’s through cruelty: it’s through unconsciousness.

What did that Kali do when you went to see her?

You know the story, don’t you?... I did not know the place, but there is a bit of a road between Ariancouppam and this temple. And so, half-way, I was seated quietly in my car knowing nothing — I knew nothing, neither the story of that Kali nor of the chickens nor anything — I was seated in my car when suddenly I saw a black being coming, with hair all dishevelled, who asked me to make a pact. And she assumed a tone of great supplication and told me, “Ah! If you wish, if you wish to adopt me and come to help me, how many people would come, how very glorious this place would become.” She was a funny little creature. She was black, dishevelled, quite thin, she didn’t seem to be flourishing much! Later I was told — I don’t know the story exactly, I can’t say — that some misfortune had befallen her: her head had been cut off, wasn’t that it? Something like that. (Turning to a disciple) Amrita, do you know the story of the Kali of Virampatnam?... No, you don’t? Someone had related it to me, anyway it was not very interesting, it was an unfortunate Kali. I told her to remain quiet and that I did not understand what she wanted of me, that I came... that if she had a sincere aspiration, well, there would be a response to her aspiration. The
next moment we reached the temple; then I began to understand that this was the person for whom the temple had been built. Later we went to walk on the seashore under the casuarina trees, and there we saw all the feathers and drops of blood and the remains of the fire — the fire on which, evidently, people had cooked their chickens. And we asked for the story. And I knew then the story of that Kali and how, for that festival, chickens were massacred in great numbers.

So, that’s it. I don’t suppose that creature felt any considerable satisfaction in seeing the chickens killed — I know nothing about it. As I said, all the profit she could get out of it was the absorption of some vital forces coming out of the chicken. But it was evident that she felt an enormous satisfaction in seeing a large crowd — the more people came there and the more chickens were killed, the greater was the sign of success. This proved that she had become a person of considerable importance! And so in her ingenuousness she came to ask my help, telling me that if I wanted to help her and give her something of my vital force and vital presence, there would be still more people and more chickens! Then that would be a very great success. I replied that as things stood it was quite enough, that she should remain quiet.

*To what plane did she belong, Mother?*

The most material vital.

*Why is she called Kali?*

I don’t know. It is one of the Kalis — I have a vague impression that her head was cut off or that she was buried up to the neck or I don’t know what. Something like that. There is a story of a head which comes out of the sand, buried up to the neck. But that, anyone in this country will tell you the story, I don’t remember it. It is a form of Kali — there are countless forms
of Kali. Each believer has his image, has his particular relation with a certain Kali. Sometimes it is their own Kali: there are family Kalis — lots of family Kalis. I knew families who had very dangerous Kalis. If what they wanted was not done, always some misfortune befell the family members. There was a very strong formation. I suppose it was the family members who were still more responsible than their Kali. And I knew people who, when the misfortune came, a real misfortune in the family — someone’s death — took the image of Kali and went and threw it into the Ganges.

This Kali has no connection with Mahakali, has she?

No. She has a very close connection with the human mind. I believe these are almost exclusively constructions of the human mind.... But I have found that there is really a Ganapati — something I didn’t believe. I used to think it was a purely human formation, that story of the elephant head — but there is a being like that. I saw it, it is quite alive, and it is not a formation. So too there is a black Kali with her garland of skulls and her huge hanging tongue. I have seen her. I saw her entering my room with her eyes wide open. So I am sure she exists. And it was not a human formation: it was a being — a real being. Now, it is possible that some of the details may have been added by human thought. But still the being was a real being, it was not purely a formation.

What does that black Kali do?

Well, I believe she does fairly bad things! It is obvious that she takes a great pleasure in destruction.

That one — it was at the time of the First World War, the early days of the First War. I was here. I was staying in the house on Dupleix Street, Dupleix House. From the terrace of that house could be seen Sri Aurobindo’s room, the one in the Guest
House. Sri Aurobindo was staying there. He had two rooms and the small terrace. And from the terrace of Dupleix House the terrace of the Guest House could be seen. I don’t know if it can still be seen; that depends on the houses in between, but at that time it could. And I used to sit on the terrace to meditate every morning, facing Sri Aurobindo’s room. That day I was in my room, but looking at Sri Aurobindo’s room through a small window. I was in meditation but my eyes were open. I saw this Kali entering through my door; I asked her, “What do you want?” And she was dancing, a truly savage dance. She told me, “Paris is taken, Paris will be destroyed.” We used to have no news, it was just at the beginning of the war. I was in meditation. I turned towards her and told her, “No, Paris will not be taken, Paris will be saved”, quietly, just like this, but with a certain force. She made a face and went away. And the next day, we received the “dispatch”. In those days there were no radios yet, we had telegraph messages, “dispatches”, which were proclaimed, posted on the gate of the Government House. We got the news that the Germans had been marching upon Paris, that Paris was not defended; the way was quite open, they had to advance only a few kilometres more and they would have entered the city. But when they saw that the road was clear, that there was nobody to oppose them, they felt convinced that it was an ambush, that a trap had been set for them. So they turned round and went back! (Laughter) And when the French armies saw that, naturally they gave chase and caught them, and there was a battle. It was the decisive battle: they were stopped. Well, evidently it was that. It took this form: When I said to Kali, “No”, they were panic-stricken. They turned back. Otherwise, if they had continued to advance it would have been all over.

*What is Mahakali like?*

Well, my children, when you see her, you can tell me! She is not like that Kali. All I can tell you is that she is not black, she
doesn’t stick out a big tongue, and she doesn’t wear a necklace of human heads!

_Here you have said: “The sadhu’s recourse to the bed of nails or the Christian anchorite’s resort to the whip and the hair shirt are the result of a more or less veiled sadistic tendency, unavowed and unavowable; it is an unhealthy seeking or a subconscious need for violent sensations.”_

Ah! You know there are ascetics who sleep on nails. Have you never seen them? I have seen some photographs myself. This sort of thing is done; they sleep upon a nail-bed. Even quite recently I saw a photograph like that. Well, they do that for... I don’t know if it is to prove their saintliness. You know, when they do this in public, one always suspects that it is a bit of histrionics. But still there are those who can do it sincerely, in the sense that they don’t do it for display. And so these, if they are asked why they do it, say that it is to prove to themselves that they are detached from the body. And there are others who go still farther: they say that the body must be made to suffer in order to liberate the spirit. Well, if you ask me, I would say that behind this there is a vital taste for suffering which imposes suffering on the body because the vital takes a very perverse pleasure in suffering. I have known children who had hurt themselves somewhere or other and who pressed as hard as they could on the injury to make it hurt still more! And they took pleasure in it. I have known grown-ups also. Morally, it is a very well-known fact. I spend my time telling people, “If you are unhappy, it is because you want to be. If you suffer, it is because you like suffering, otherwise you would not suffer.” This sort of thing I call unhealthy, for it is against harmony and beauty, it is a kind of morbid need for strong sensations.

I don’t know if you know that China is a country where the most frightful tortures have been invented, unthinkable things.
When I was in Japan I asked a Japanese, who liked the Chinese very much (which is very rare) and always spoke very highly about China, why this was so. He told me, “It is because all the peoples of the Far East, including the Japanese themselves, have a very blunted sensitivity. They feel very little; unless the suffering is extremely strong, they feel nothing. And so this has compelled them to use their intelligence to invent extremely acute sufferings.” Well, all these people who are unconscious, the more unconscious they are, the more tamasic they are; the more blunted their sensibility, the more do they need strong sensations to feel something. And usually this is what makes people cruel, for cruelty gives very strong sensations. That kind of nervous tension obtained through suffering imposed upon somebody, that gives a sensation, and they need it in order to feel; otherwise they feel nothing. And that is why entire races are particularly cruel. They are very unconscious — vitally unconscious. They may not be unconscious mentally or otherwise, but they are unconscious vitally or physically — above all, physically.

*Can those who have a sense of beauty also become cruel?*

That’s a psychological problem. It depends on where their sense of beauty is located. One may have a physical sense of beauty, a vital sense of beauty, a mental sense of beauty. If one has a moral sense of beauty — a sense of moral beauty and nobility — one will never be cruel. One will always be generous and magnanimous in all circumstances. But as men are made of many different pieces... For instance, I was thinking about all the artists I knew — I knew all the greatest artists of the last century or the beginning of this century, and they truly had a sense of beauty, but morally, some of them were very cruel. When the artist was seen at his work, he lived in a magnificent beauty but when you saw the gentleman at home, he had only a very limited contact with the artist in himself and usually he became someone very vulgar, very ordinary. Many of them did,
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I am sure of it. But those who were unified, in the sense that they truly lived their art — those, no; they were generous and good.

I remember a very amusing story that Rodin told me. You know Rodin — not the man but what he has done? Rodin put a question to me one day; he asked me, “How can one prevent two women from being jealous of each other?” (Laughter) I said to him, “Ah, here’s a problem indeed! But won’t you please tell me why?” Then he told me, “It’s like this: most of my work I do in clay, at least much of it, before sculpting it in stone or casting it in bronze. And so this is what happens: at times I go away for a day or two or more. I leave my clay models covered with wet cloth because if it dries up it cracks and all the work is lost, I have to do it over again.” All sculptors know this. And this is what happened to that poor man: he had a wife, and he had his favourite model who was quite... very intimate in the house, she came in when she liked — she was the model he used for his sculptures. Now, the wife wanted to be the wife. And when Rodin was absent, she came early every morning to the studio and sprinkled water on all the cloths, all the heads or bodies, everything. It was all covered up, wrapped in wet cloth. Water is sprinkled upon it as on plants. So she came and sprayed them. And then, after a while, two or three hours later, there came the model who had the key to the studio. She opened the studio and she sprayed them. She saw very well that it was all wet, but she had the privilege of looking after the sculpture of her sculptor — and so she sprayed it. “And so,” said Rodin to me, “the result is that when I return from my travels, all my sculpture is melting and nothing of what I had done is any longer there!”

He was an old man, already old at that time. He was magnificent. He had a faun’s head, like a Greek faun. He was short, quite thick-set, solid; he had shrewd eyes. He was remarkably ironical and a little... He laughed at it, but still he would have preferred to find his sculpture intact!

And what was your reply? (Laughter)
I don’t remember now. (Laughter) Perhaps I answered by a joke. No, I remember one thing, I asked him, “But why don’t you say: this one will sprinkle the water?” He then pulled at the little hair that was left on his head and said, “But that would be a fight with knives.” (Laughter) 

Voilà, good night.