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“An aimless life is always a miserable life.”
“The Science of Living”, On Education

Why?

*If one has an aim, one can follow quietly the way which leads to the goal.*

It is not necessary to have a goal in order to follow the way quietly. So many men who have no goal follow quite calmly the course of their daily round without making any effort!

*An aim gives joy.*

Sometimes it takes an entire lifetime to attain one’s aim; one would then find joy only at the end of one’s life!

*An aim is an ideal and an ideal is an enrichment.*

Yes, but one may have an altogether material ideal; it is not the ideal which gives joy.

*An aim gives a meaning, a purpose to life, and this purpose implies an effort; and it is in effort that one finds joy.*

Exactly. It is the effort which gives joy; a human being who does not know how to make an effort will never find joy. Those who are essentially lazy will never find joy — they do not have the strength to be joyful! It is effort which gives joy. Effort makes the being vibrate at a certain degree of tension which makes it possible for you to feel the joy.
But is the effort which brings joy an effort imposed by circumstances or an effort which makes for progress?

You are mixing up two things: one physical, the other psychological. It is quite obvious that an act done because one has decided to do it and an act imposed by circumstances, more or less favourable, do not have at all the same result. It is known, for instance, that people who follow yogic discipline often fast. Many yogic disciplines require very long fastings and those who practise them are generally very happy to do so, for that is their own choice. But take this very person and put him in circumstances where food is scarce, either because it cannot be had or because this person has no money, and you will see him in a lamentable state, complaining that life is terrible, though the conditions may be identically the same; but in one case there was the decision not to eat, whilst in the other the man did not eat because he could not do otherwise. That is obvious, but this is not the only reason.

It is only effort, in whatever domain it be — material effort, moral effort, intellectual effort — which creates in the being certain vibrations which enable you to get connected with universal vibrations; and it is this which gives joy. It is effort which pulls you out of inertia; it is effort which makes you receptive to the universal forces. And the one thing above all which spontaneously gives joy, even to those who do not practise yoga, who have no spiritual aspiration, who lead quite an ordinary life, is the exchange of forces with universal forces. People do not know this, they would not be able to tell you that it is due to this, but so it is.

There are people who are just like beautiful animals — all their movements are harmonious, their energies are spent harmoniously, their uncalculating efforts call in energies all the time and they are always happy; but sometimes they have no thoughts in their head, sometimes they have no feelings in their heart, they live an altogether animalish life. I have known people
like that: beautiful animals. They were handsome, their gestures were harmonious, their forces quite balanced and they spent without reckoning and received without measure. They were in harmony with the material universal forces and they lived in joy. They could not perhaps have told you that they were happy — joy with them was so spontaneous that it was natural — and they would have been still less able to tell you why, for their intelligence was not very developed. I have known such people, who were capable of making the necessary effort (not a prudent and calculated effort but a spontaneous one) in no matter what field: material, vital, intellectual, etc., and in this effort there was always joy. For example, a man sits down to write a book, he makes an effort which sets vibrating something in his brain to attract ideas; well, suddenly, this man experiences joy. It is quite certain that, whatever you do, even the most material work, like sweeping a room or cooking, if you make the necessary effort to do this work to the maximum of your ability, you will feel joy, even if what you do is against your nature. When you want to realise something, you make quite spontaneously the necessary effort; this concentrates your energies on the thing to be realised and that gives a meaning to your life. This compels you to a sort of organisation of yourself, a sort of concentration of your energies, because it is this that you wish to do and not fifty other things which contradict it. And it is in this concentration, this intensity of the will, that lies the origin of joy. This gives you the power to receive energies in exchange for those you spend.

“To work for your perfection the first step is to become conscious of yourself.”

“The Science of Living”, On Education

“To know oneself and control oneself”, what does this mean?

1 “The Science of Living”, On Education.
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This means to be conscious of one’s inner truth, conscious of the different parts of one’s being and their respective functions. You must know why you do this, why you do that; you must know your thoughts, know your feelings, all your activities, all your movements, of what you are capable, etc. And to know oneself is not enough: this knowledge must bring a conscious control. To know oneself perfectly is to control oneself perfectly.

But there must be an aspiration at every moment. It is never too early to begin, never too late to continue. That is, even when you are quite young, you can begin to study yourself and know yourself and gradually to control yourself. And even when you are what is called “old”, when you are quite aged, it is not too late to make the effort to know yourself better and better and control yourself better and better. That is the Science of Living.

To perfect oneself, one must first become conscious of oneself. I am sure, for instance, that the following situation has arisen many times in your life: someone asks you suddenly, “Why have you done that?” Well, the spontaneous reply is, “I don’t know.” If someone asks you, “What are you thinking of?” You reply, “I don’t know.” “Why are you tired?” — “I don’t know.” “Why are you happy?” — “I don’t know”, and so on. I can take indeed fifty people and ask them suddenly, without preparation, “Why have you done that?” and if they are not inwardly “awake”, they will all answer, “I don’t know.” (Of course I am not speaking here of those who have practised a discipline of self-knowledge and of following up their movements to the extreme limits; these people can, naturally, collect themselves, concentrate and give the right answer, but only after a little while.) You will see that it is like that if you look well at your whole day. You say something and you don’t know why you say it — it is only after the words are out of your mouth that you notice that this was not quite what you wanted to say. For instance, you go to see someone, you prepare beforehand the words you are going to speak, but once you are in front of the person in question, you say nothing or it is other words which
come from your mouth. Are you able to say to what extent the atmosphere of the other person has influenced you and stopped you from saying what you had prepared? How many people can say that? They do not even observe that the person was in such or such a state and that it was because of this that they could not tell him what they had prepared. Of course, there are very obvious instances when you find people in such a bad mood that you can ask nothing of them. I am not speaking of these. I am speaking of the clear perception of reciprocal influences: what acts and reacts on your nature; it is this one does not have. For example, one becomes suddenly uneasy or happy, but how many people can say, “It is this”? And it is difficult to know, it is not at all easy. One must be quite “awake”; one must be constantly in a very attentive state of observation.

There are people who sleep twelve hours a day and say the rest of the time, “I am awake”! There are people who sleep twenty hours a day and the rest of the time are but half awake!

To be in this state of attentive observation, you must have, so to say, antennae everywhere which are in constant contact with your true centre of consciousness. You register everything, you organise everything and, in this way, you cannot be taken unawares, you cannot be deceived, mistaken, and you cannot say anything other than what you wanted to say. But how many people normally live in this state? It is this I mean, precisely, when I speak of “becoming conscious”. If you want to benefit most from the conditions and circumstances in which you find yourself, you must be fully awake: you must not be taken by surprise, you must not do things without knowing why, you must not say things without knowing why. You must be constantly awake.

You must also understand that you are not separate individualities, that life is a constant exchange of forces, of consciousnesses, of vibrations, of movements of all kinds. It is as in a crowd, you see: when everyone pushes all go forward, and when all recede, everyone recedes. It is the same thing in the inner world, in your consciousness. There are all the time forces
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and influences acting and reacting upon you, it is like a gas in the atmosphere, and unless you are quite awake, these things enter into you, and it is only when they have gone well in and come out as if they came from you, that you become aware of them. How many times people meet those who are nervous, angry, in a bad mood, and themselves become nervous, angry, moody, just like that, without quite knowing why. Why is it that when you play against certain people you play very well, but when you play against others you cannot play? And those very quiet people, not at all wicked, who suddenly become furious when they are in a furious crowd! And no one knows who has started it: it is something that went past and swept off the consciousness. There are people who can let out vibrations like this and others respond without knowing why. Everything is like that, from the smallest to the biggest things.

To be individualised in a collectivity, one must be absolutely conscious of oneself. And of which self? — the Self which is above all intermixture, that is, what I call the Truth of your being. And as long as you are not conscious of the Truth of your being, you are moved by all kinds of things, without taking any note of it at all. Collective thought, collective suggestions are a formidable influence which act constantly on individual thought. And what is extraordinary is that one does not notice it. One believes that one thinks “like that”, but in truth it is the collectivity which thinks “like that”. The mass is always inferior to the individual. Take individuals with similar qualities, of similar categories, well, when they are alone these individuals are at least two degrees better than people of the same category in a crowd. There is a mixture of obscurities, a mixture of unconsciousness, and inevitably you slip into this unconsciousness. To escape this there is but one means: to become conscious of oneself, more and more conscious and more and more attentive.

Try this little exercise: at the beginning of the day, say: “I won’t speak without thinking of what I say.” You believe, don’t you, that you think all that you say! It is not at all true, you will
see that so many times the word you do not want to say is ready to come out, and that you are compelled to make a conscious effort to stop it from coming out.

I have known people who were very scrupulous about not telling lies, but all of a sudden, when together in a group, instead of speaking the truth they would spontaneously tell a lie; they did not have the intention of doing so, they did not think of it a minute before doing it, but it came “like that”. Why? — because they were in the company of liars; there was an atmosphere of falsehood and they had quite simply caught the malady!

It is thus that gradually, slowly, with perseverance, first of all with great care and much attention, one becomes conscious, learns to know oneself and then to become master of oneself.