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“There are some who, when they are sitting in meditation, get into a state which they think very fine and delightful.”

Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (21 April 1929)

What is this state?

Whatever it may be, they think their state is delightful and remarkable. They have a very high opinion of themselves. They believe they are remarkable people because they are able to sit quietly without moving; and if they don’t think of anything, that is remarkable. But usually it is a kind of kaleidoscope that is going on in their head, they do not even notice it. Still, those who can remain for a moment without moving, without speaking and thinking, have certainly a very high opinion of themselves. Only, as I have said, if they are pulled out of it, if someone comes and knocks at the door and they are told, “There is somebody waiting for you”, or “Madam, your child is crying”, they immediately get furious and say: “There, my meditation is spoilt! Completely spoilt.” I am telling you things I have seen with my own eyes. People who were very serious in their meditation, and could not be interrupted in their meditation without their getting violently angry.... Naturally this is not a sign of great spiritual progress. They stormed against everybody because they had been pulled out of their beatific meditation.

Among people who meditate there are some who know how to meditate, who concentrate not on an idea, but in silence, in an inner contemplation in which they say they reach even a union with the Divine; and that is perfectly all right. There are others, just a few, who can follow an idea closely and try to find exactly what it means; that too is all right. Most of the time
people try to concentrate and enter into a kind of half sleepy and, in any case, very tamasic state. They become some kind of inert thing; the mind is inert, the feeling is inert, the body is immobile. They can remain like that for hours, for there is nothing more durable than inertia! All this that I am telling you now—these are experiences of people I have met. And these people, when they come out of their meditation, sincerely believe they have done something very great. But they have simply gone down into inertia and unconsciousness. People who know how to meditate are very few in number. Besides, admitting that through much discipline and years of effort you have in your meditation succeeded in coming into conscious relation with the divine Presence, evidently this is a result, and this result should necessarily have an effect upon your character and your life. But this effect is very different according to individuals. There are cases in which the person is split into two in so radical a way that while in meditation such people can enter into contact with the Divine and obtain this supreme felicity of identification, but when they come out of this and lead their normal life, begin to live and act, they can be the most ordinary men with the most ordinary and sometimes even the most vulgar reactions. Indeed, I know people who become altogether ordinary men, and then they do, for example, all the things one should not do, like passing their time in gossiping about others, thinking of themselves only, having all selfish reactions and wanting to organise their life for their petty personal well-being; they do not think of others at all and never do anything for anybody, have no large idea. And yet, in their meditation, they have had this contact. And that is why people who have discovered how very difficult it is to change this petty outer nature that one takes up along with the body, how difficult it is to transcend oneself, to transform one’s movements, say: “It is not possible, it is no use trying; in coming to the world, you have taken a body of dust, you have only to let it fall off and prepare to go away, leaving the world as it is; and the only thing to do is to run away as
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quickly as one can; and if everybody runs away, there will no longer be a world and therefore no more misery.” That’s logical. If they are told: “But perhaps what you propose to do is very selfish, to go away and leave others floundering?” — “Well, they have only to do what I do. If everybody did what I am doing, they would get out of it, there would be no longer any world, no longer any misery.” As though it depended upon the will of individuals who have not even taken any part in the making of the world! How can they hope to stop it? At least if it was they who had made it, they could know how it was made and could try to undo it (although it is not always easy to undo what one has done), but it is not they who have made it, they do not even know how it has been made and they have the presumption to want to undo it, because they imagine that they themselves can run away from it.... I do not think it is possible. One cannot run away, even if one tries. That however is another subject. In any case, for me, my experience (which is sufficiently long, for it is now almost fifty-three years since I have been dealing with people, with their yoga, their inner efforts; I have seen much here and there, a little everywhere in the world); well, I do not believe that it is by meditation that you can transform yourself. I am absolutely convinced of the contrary.

If while doing what you have to do — whatever it may be, whatever work it is — if you do it and while doing it are careful not to forget the Divine, to offer to Him what you do and try so to give yourself to Him that He may change all your reactions — instead of their being selfish, petty, stupid and ignorant, making them luminous, generous — then in that way you will make progress. Not only will you have made some progress but you will have helped in the general progress. I have never seen people who have left everything in order to go and sit down in a more or less empty contemplation (for it is more or less empty), I have never seen such people making any progress, or in any case their progress is very trifling. I have seen persons who had no pretensions of doing yoga, who were simply filled with enthusiasm by
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the idea of terrestrial transformation and of the descent of the Divine into the world and who did their little bit of work with that enthusiasm in the heart, giving themselves wholly, without reserve, without any selfish idea of a personal salvation; these I have seen making magnificent progress, truly magnificent. And sometimes they are wonderful. I have seen sannyasis, I have seen people who live in monasteries, I have seen people who professed to be yogis, well, I would not exchange one of the others for a dozen such people (I mean, from the standpoint of terrestrial transformation and world progress, that is to say, from the standpoint of what we want to do, to try that this world may no longer be what it is and may become truly the instrument of the divine Will, with the divine Consciousness). It is not by running away from the world that you will change it. It is by working there, modestly, humbly but with a fire in the heart, something that burns like an offering. Voilà.

So meditation is of no use?

No, and to the extent it is necessary, it will come spontaneously. All of a sudden, you will be seized by something that makes you still, makes you concentrate in the vision of an idea or of a psychological state. That captures you. You must not resist. Then you make the needed progress. At such a moment you see, you understand something; and then the next minute you start your work again with that something gained in you, but without any pretension. What I most fear are those who believe themselves very exceptional because they sit down and meditate. Of all things this is the most dangerous, because they become so vain and so full of self-satisfaction that they close up in this way all avenues of progress.... There is one thing that has always been said, but always misunderstood, it is the necessity of humility. It is taken in the wrong way, wrongly understood and wrongly used. Be humble, if you can be so in the right way; above all, do not be so in the wrong way, for that leads you nowhere.
But there is one thing: if you can pull out from yourself this weed called vanity, then indeed you will have done something. But if you knew how difficult it is! You cannot do a thing well, cannot have a fine idea, cannot have a right movement, cannot make a little progress without getting puffed up inside (even without being aware of it), with a self-satisfaction full of vanity. And you are obliged then to hammer it hard to break it. And still broken bits remain and these begin to germinate. One must work the whole of one’s life and never forget to work in order to uproot this weed that springs up again and again and again so insidiously that you believe it is gone and you feel very modest and say: “It is not I who have done it, I feel it is the Divine, I am nothing if He is not there”, and then the next minute, you are so satisfied with yourself simply for having thought that!

**What is the right and the wrong way of being humble?**

It is very simple, when people are told “be humble”, they think immediately of “being humble before other men” and that humility is wrong. True humility is humility before the Divine, that is, a precise, exact, *living* sense that one is nothing, one can do nothing, understand nothing without the Divine, that even if one is exceptionally intelligent and capable, this is nothing in comparison with the divine Consciousness, and this sense one must always keep, because then one always has the true attitude of receptivity — a humble receptivity that does not put personal pretensions in opposition to the Divine.

*You have said: “If you surrender you have to give up effort, but that does not mean that you have to abandon also all willed action.”*

*Questions and Answers 1929–1931 (21 April 1929)*

*But if one wants to do something, it means personal*
There is a difference between the will and this feeling of tension, effort, of counting only on oneself, having recourse to oneself alone which personal effort means; this kind of tension, of something very acute and at times very painful; you count only on yourself and you have the feeling that if you do not make an effort every minute, all will be lost. That is personal effort.

But the will is something altogether different. It is the capacity to concentrate on everything one does, do it as best one can and not stop doing it unless one receives a very precise intimation that it is finished. It is difficult to explain it to you. But suppose, for example, through a concurrence of circumstances, a work comes into your hands. Take an artist who has in one way or another got an inspiration and resolved to paint a picture. He knows very well that if he has no inspiration and is not sustained by forces other than his own, he will do nothing much. It will look more like a daub than a painting. He knows this. But it has been settled, the painting is to be done; there may be many reasons for that, but the painting has to be done. Then if he had the passive attitude, well, he would place his palette, his colours, his brushes, his canvas and then sit down in front of it and say to the Divine: “Now you are going to paint.” But the Divine does not do things this way. The painter himself must take up everything and arrange everything, concentrate on his subject, find the forms, the colours that will express it and put his whole will for a more and more perfect execution. His will must be there all the time. But he has to keep the sense that he must be open to the inspiration, he will not forget that in spite of all his knowledge of the technique, in spite of the care he takes to arrange, organise and prepare his colours, his forms, his design, in spite of all that, if he has no inspiration, it will be one picture among a million others and it will not be very interesting. He does not forget. He attempts, he tries to see, to feel what he wants his painting to express and in what way it should be expressed.
He has his colours, he has his brushes, he has his model, he has made his sketch which he will enlarge and make into a picture, he calls his inspiration. There are even some who manage to have a clear, precise vision of what is to be done. But then, day after day, hour after hour, they have this will to work, to study, to do with care all that must be done until they reproduce as perfectly as they can the first inspiration.... That person has worked for the Divine, in communion with Him, but not in a passive way, not with a passive surrender; it is with an active surrender, a dynamic will. The result generally is something very good. Well, the example of the painter is interesting, because a painter who is truly an artist is able to see what he is going to do, he is able to connect himself to the divine Power that is beyond all expression and inspires all expression. For the poet, the writer, it is the same thing and for all people who do something, it is the same.

If you tried that for your lessons, don’t you think it would succeed?

Two days later the Mother took up the subject again in the “Friday Class”.

If you said to yourself, my children, “We want to be as perfect instruments as possible to express the divine Will in the world”, then for this instrument to be perfect, it must be cultivated, educated, trained. It must not be left like a shapeless piece of stone. When you want to build with a stone you chisel it; when you want to make a formless block into a beautiful diamond, you chisel it. Well, it is the same thing. When with your brain and body you want to make a beautiful instrument for the Divine, you must cultivate it, sharpen it, refine it, complete what is missing, perfect what is there.

For example, you go to your class. If you are not in a very good mood, you say, “Oh, how tedious it is going to be!” Supposing it is a professor who does not know how to entertain you (one can be a very good professor without knowing how to
amuse you, for it is not always easy... there are days when one
does not like to be amusing), one would like to be somewhere
else rather than at the school. Still, you go to your class, in that
way, you go because you have to go, for if you go about accord-
ing to your whims, you will never have control over yourself, it
will be your whims that will control you, it won’t be you who
will control yourself. You go to your class. But then, on your
way there, instead of saying, “Oh, how bored I am going to be,
oh, dear! it is not going to be at all interesting”, etc., if you say,
“There is not a minute in life, there is not a circumstance in
one’s existence that cannot bring an opportunity for progress;
what then is the progress that I am going to make today?... I
offer all my little person to the Divine. I want it to be a good
instrument for Him to express Himself, that I may be ready one
day for the transformation. What am I going to do today? I am
going to that class, it is a subject that does not enthuse me; but
if I do not know how to take interest in this work, it is perhaps
because there is something lacking in me, because somewhere
in my brain some cells are missing. But then, if that is so, I am
going to try to find out; I am going to listen properly, concentrate
properly and above all drive away from my mind this kind of
frivolity, this outward levity which makes me feel bored when
there’s something I do not grasp. Why do I get bored?... Because
I do not progress.” When one does not progress, one gets bored
— old and young, everybody — because we are here upon earth
to progress. If we do not progress every minute, well, it is indeed
boring, monotonous; it is not always pleasant, it is far from being
fine. “So I am going to find out today what progress I can make
in this class; there is something I do not know and which I can
learn.”

If you want to learn, you can learn at every moment. As
for me I have learnt even by listening to little children’s chatter.
Every moment something may happen; someone may say
a word to you, even an idiot may say a word that opens you
to something enabling you to make some progress. And then,
if you knew, how life becomes interesting! You can no longer get bored, that is gone, everything is interesting, everything is wonderful — because every minute you can learn, at each step make progress. For example, when you are in the street, instead of being simply there and not knowing what you are doing, if you look around, if you observe... I remember having been thus obliged to be in the street on a shopping errand or going to see someone or to purchase something, that’s not important; indeed, it is not always pleasant to be in the street, but if you begin to observe and to see how this person walks, how that one moves, how this light plays upon that object, how this little bit of a tree there suddenly makes the landscape pretty, how hundreds of things shine... then every minute you can learn something. Not only can you learn, but I remember to have once had — I was just walking in the street — to have had a kind of illumination, because there was a woman walking in front of me and truly she knew how to walk. How lovely it was! Her movement was magnificent! I saw that and suddenly I saw the whole origin of Greek culture, how all these forms descend towards the world to express Beauty — simply because here was a woman who knew how to walk! You understand, this is how all things become interesting. And so, instead of going to the class and doing stupid things there (I hope none of you does that, I am sure all who come here to my class will never go and do stupid things at school, that it is exceptions that prove the rule; however, I know that unfortunately too many go there and do all the idiotic things one might invent), so, instead of that, if you could go to the class in order to make progress, every day a new little progress — even if it be the understanding why your professor bores you — it would be wonderful, for all of a sudden he will no longer be boring to you, all of a sudden you will discover that he is very interesting! It is like that. If you look at life in this way, life becomes something wonderful. That is the only way of making it interesting, because life upon earth is made to be a field for progress and if we progress to
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the maximum we draw the maximum benefit from our life upon earth. And then one feels happy. When one does the best one can, one is happy.

When one is bored, Mother, does that mean one does not progress?

At that time, yes, certainly without a doubt; not only does one not progress, but one misses an opportunity for progressing. There was a concurrence of circumstances which seemed to you dull, boring, stupid and you were in their midst; well, if you get bored, it means that you yourself are as boring as the circumstances! And that is a clear proof that you are simply not in a state of progress. There is nothing more contrary to the very reason of existence than this passing wave of boredom. If you make a little effort within yourself at that time, if you tell yourself: “Wait a bit, what is it that I should learn? What does all that bring to me so that I may learn something? What progress should I make in overcoming myself? What is the weakness that I must overcome? What is the inertia that I must conquer?” If you say that to yourself, you will see the next minute you are no longer bored. You will immediately get interested and you will make progress! This is a commonplace of consciousness.

And then, you know, most people when they get bored, instead of trying to rise a step higher, descend a step lower, they become still worse than what they were, and they do all the stupid things that others do, go in for all the vulgarities, all the meannesses, everything, in order to amuse themselves. They get intoxicated, take poison, ruin their health, ruin their brain, they utter crudities. They do all that because they are bored. Well, if instead of going down, one had risen up, one would have profited by the circumstances. Instead of profiting, one falls a little lower yet than where one was. When people get a big blow in their life, some misfortune (what men call “misfortune”), there are people who do have misfortunes, the first thing they
try to do is to forget it — as though one did not forget quickly enough! And to forget, they do anything whatsoever. When there is something painful, they want to distract themselves — what they call distraction, that is, doing stupid things, that is to say, going down in their consciousness, going down a little instead of rising up.... Has something extremely painful happened to you, something very grievous? Do not become stupefied, do not seek forgetfulness, do not go down into the inconscience; you must go to the end and find the light that is behind, the truth, the force and the joy; and for that you must be strong and refuse to slide down. But that we shall see a little later, my children, when you will be a little older.