they met her in the street, now turn their heads the other way and walk right past her without a glance — this has happened even here in the Ashram! I do not want to give any details, but anyway, several times something happened which contravened accepted social laws, and people who had shown so much affection and sympathy — oh, they would sometimes say, “This person is lost!”

When such things happen in the world at large, I find it quite natural, but when it happens here, I always get a little shock, in the sense that I say to myself: “Well, well, they haven’t gone beyond that!”

Even people who profess to be broad-minded, to be above all these “conventions”, fall straight into the trap, immediately. Then to protect their conscience, they say: “Mother does not allow it. Mother does not permit it. Mother does not tolerate it!” — adding one more stupidity to all the others.

It is very difficult to get out of this state. This is truly self-righteousness, this sense of social dignity. But it is narrow-mindedness, because a person with a little intelligence is not going to be caught out by something like that. For example, people who have travelled the world and seen that all these social rules depend entirely on climate, race, custom, and even more on time and period, can smile at all that. But right-minded people — phew!

It is an elementary stage. Until you come out of this state you are unfit for yoga. Because, truly, you are not ready for yoga when you are in that state. It is a rudimentary state.

January 1961

51 – When I hear of a righteous wrath, I wonder at man’s capacity for self-deception.

*When one deceives oneself, one always does it in good faith. One is always acting for the good of others or for*
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the welfare of humanity and to serve you — that goes without saying! How does one deceive oneself?\(^{13}\)

I feel like asking you a question myself! Because your question can be understood in two ways. One can take it in the same spirit of irony and humour that Sri Aurobindo has put in his aphorism, when he marvels at man's capacity for self-deception. That is to say, you are putting yourself in the place of someone who is deceiving himself and you say, “But I am acting in good faith! I always want the good of others, etc. — the welfare of humanity, to serve the Divine, that goes without saying! And how can I be deceiving myself?”

But actually there are two ways of deceiving oneself, which are very different. For example, you may very well be shocked by certain things, not for personal reasons, but precisely in your good-will and eagerness to serve the Divine, when you see people behaving badly, being selfish, unfaithful and treacherous. There is a stage where you have overcome these things and no longer allow them to manifest in yourself, but to the extent that you are linked to the ordinary consciousness, the ordinary point of view, the ordinary life, the ordinary way of thinking, they are still possible, they exist latently because they are the reverse of the qualities that you are striving to attain. And this opposition still exists — until you rise above it and no longer have either the quality or the defect. So long as you have the virtue, its opposite is always latent in you; it is only when you are above both the virtue and the defect that it disappears.

So this kind of indignation that you feel comes from the fact that you are not altogether above it; you are at the stage where you thoroughly disapprove and could not do it yourself. Up to that point there is nothing to say, unless you give a violent outer expression to your indignation. If anger intervenes, it is because there is a complete contradiction between the feeling you want

\(^{13}\) Oral question and answer.
to have and how you react to others. Because anger is a deformation of the vital power, an obscure and wholly unregenerated vital, a vital that is still subject to all the ordinary actions and reactions. When this vital power is used by an ignorant and egoistic individual will and this will meets with opposition from other individual wills around it, this power, under the pressure of opposition, changes into anger and tries to obtain by violence what cannot be achieved solely by the pressure of the force itself.

Besides, anger, like every other kind of violence, is always a sign of weakness, impotence and incapacity.

And here self-deception comes solely from the approval given to it or the flattering epithet attached to it — because anger can only be something blind, ignorant and asuric, that is to say, contrary to the light.

But this is still the best case.

There is another one. There are people who without knowing it — or because they want to ignore it — always follow their personal interest, their preferences, their attachments, their conceptions; people who are not wholly consecrated to the Divine and who make use of moral and yogic ideas to conceal their personal impulses. But these people are deceiving themselves doubly; not only do they deceive themselves in their external activities, in their relation with others, but they also deceive themselves in their own personal movement; instead of serving the Divine, they serve their own egoism. And this happens constantly, constantly! They serve their own personality, their own egoism, while pretending to serve God. Then it is no longer even self-deception, it is hypocrisy.

This mental habit of always endowing everything with a very favourable appearance, of giving a favourable explanation to all movements — sometimes it is rather subtle, but sometimes it is so crude that nobody is deceived except oneself. It is a habit of excusing oneself, the habit of giving a favourable mental excuse, a favourable mental explanation to everything one does, to everything one says, to everything one feels. For example,
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those who have no self-control and slap someone’s face in great indignation would call that an almost divine wrath!

It is amazing, amazing — this power of self-deception, the mind’s skill in finding an admirable justification for any ignorance, any stupidity whatsoever.

This is not an experience that comes only now and then. It is something which you can observe from minute to minute. And you usually see it much more easily in others! But if you look at yourself closely, you catch yourself a thousand times a day, looking at yourself just a little indulgently: “Oh! But it is not the same thing.” Besides, it is never the same for you as it is for your neighbour!

January 1961

52 – This is a miracle that men can love God, yet fail to love humanity. With whom are they in love then?

*Is it possible to reach the Divine through philanthropy?*

It depends on what you mean by philanthropy. Normally, we call philanthropists those who do charitable works.

Here Sri Aurobindo does not use the word philanthropy, for, as it is usually understood, philanthropy is a social and conventional attitude, a kind of magnified egoism which is not love but a condescending pity which assumes a patronising air.

In this aphorism Sri Aurobindo refers to those who follow the ascetic path in solitary search of a solitary God, by trying to cut themselves off completely from the world and men.

But for Sri Aurobindo men form part of the Divine; and if you truly love the Divine, how can you not love men, since they are an aspect of Himself?

18 January 1961

14 Written question and answer.