Miscellaneous Matters

*This is a small selection from the many hundreds of letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to his disciples on various matters relating to their outward lives.*

**Household Questions**

What is the “divine life” and what are “petty things”? The divine life is not something lived on romantic heights with no reference to earth and its movements. The Yogic or spiritual attitude has to be applied to the small outward details of life as well as to inner experiences or high ideals on a large scale. You ought to know by this time that the Mother attaches a great importance to the true spirit in the organisation of the material life. It is more often in relation to these petty things that the genuineness of one’s spiritual change is tested — so there is little point in talking of petty things or material or outward things as if they were not worth notice and no inner change with regard to them needed.

There is no objection to the tiffin carrier being washed by a servant. The objection was to the servants being tipped by sadhaks so that they neglect or do not wish to do things for those who do not or cannot tip them. Visitors residing at the Asram for a few days may do so without objection, for these there is extra work; but the servants must not be encouraged in the idea that they can exact tips from resident sadhaks — they have their pay and that should be sufficient.

As for tiffin baskets, if too many have to be carried, it becomes inconvenient for the Departments concerned — the Dining Room arrangements are framed to minimise the inconvenience and make service possible. A minimum number of exceptions can be made, but if everybody who asks is allowed, there will be chaos.
The door is coming off because the sill has been removed, for it was only the sill that upheld it. X's dealings with the door *qua* door were scientifically impeccable—the only thing he forgot was that one of the uses of a door is that people (of various sizes) should pass through it. If you regard the door from the Russelian point of view as an external thing in which you must take pleasure for its own sake, then you will see that it was quite all right; it is only when you bring in irrelevant subjective considerations like people's demands on a door and the pain of stunned heads that objections can be made. However, in spite of philosophy, the Mother will speak to X in the morning and get him to do what has (practically, not philosophically) to be done.

1932

You had promised that the bullocks would not be beaten, but we have been told by more than one eye-witness that they have been beaten by yourself and the servants, and badly beaten too. We strongly disapprove, we are entirely against this kind of maltreatment. It is not by beating, but by patience and a persistent will without getting into a nervous irritation that work can be taught to animals. They are far more intelligent than you believe.

25 April 1932

You had better put up a notice on the slate that whoever has walked off in X's wooden sandals is asked to rectify the mistake by returning them to her.

31 October 1932

X complains of an invasion of his solignumed cot, flytoxed chair and almirah, books, chaddar etc. by bugs. He also fears that the conquering army, if not checked, will proceed to annex other rooms also. As bugs in a solignumed cot are a violation of the law of Nature, Mother proposes to send a Committee of Enquiry composed of Y (who is both scientifically and officially interested in the solignum-bug problem), yourself and Z for investigations.
You have full authority to interview the bugs and demand an explanation of their conduct. Y and yourself are officially informed; you can demi-officially inform Z.  

15 December 1932

The only thing that removes the bugs is a careful flytoxing and cleaning of the bed or furniture where they are. It is usually X who is entrusted with that work as he is practised in it and has freed many rooms. If you like, I can ask him to do it.

5 January 1933

According to your order, the wire for the table-lamp was to be 12 feet long. As it is too short to reach the corner where I have kept my seat for drawing, will you kindly sanction 5 feet more?

The 12 feet are the usual allowance and they were the end of a roll — if you want the 5 feet more, you will have to wait till a new stock comes.

29 January 1934

People are wondering why the Meditation House leaks so much. It is not like that anywhere else in Pondicherry, and I do not know if it is so elsewhere. Even X seems to be quite tired of Y’s fad of using tectine, and his persistence in using it in spite of repeated failures. People even say that there is some crack in Y’s brain which prevents him from dealing with the point correctly. The thing is so glaringly offensive to everyone — apart from your terrible patience.

Pondicherry houses do not leak! Well, that is news. Every house I have lived in leaked. The Govt. House leaks; the Govt. offices leak and our former Mahomedan landlord told me in the Govt. Secretariat they had to run about carrying tables and chairs to any place in the rooms which happened not to be wet. Z’s roof made only a year ago leaks. Vigie House leaks and when A went to him Vigie showed him his own house leaking from many places and said “Every house here leaks! what do you expect?”
It was because of this character of Pondicherry houses that the Mother tried tectine and the first supply was very successful. The Meditation House roof made by B used to leak like a sieve till the tectine was put on, and for years we were dry. Only when new beams had to be put the tectine got displaced and there were cracks over the walls, then there was some leakage, but that was put right and the old tectine up till now has protected us. Unfortunately afterwards a bad supply of almost liquid tectine was sent which could not endure so well and it was this which was used on the NS [New Secretariat] which is leaking because of cracks in the cement, the usual malady of these terrace roofs. People ought to know the facts before making comments, as if it were only our tectined roofs that crack in Pondicherry — and so there must be something wrong with the Asram engineer’s brain. It is rather surprising that X should speak like that, for he knows that it was Mother’s personal order that the remnants of the old tectine should be used this time as there was an emergency. After all the tectine fad, if it is one, was not Y’s; it was the Mother who introduced the tectine as a trial (and, as I say, it was quite successful at first) along with other new things like solignum, Silexore. Some of them succeeded, some failed because of climatic conditions and the inexperience of the masons and painters; the tectine succeeded, then failed because in answer to a complaint that too much had to be used, the firm sent us a bad supply. In all this where is the fad and where is the fault of Y and where is the “terrible patience”?

20 October 1935

What X wrote was correct. There is no more hair-oil and in special cases Mother gave from her own stock; but then everybody began to ask, so it had to stop. If you need, you must ask Mother direct and she will give it, because it can no longer be given from the stores — for it can be given only in special cases where there is a good reason as in yours.

As for the soap, you must not use the bath-soap for hair, for it is very bad for the hair. Mother can give you Golden Grape or more oil or hair lotion for that purpose. She is giving a chit
for the Golden Grape; you must use it only for the hair.

1 February 1936

An electric stove has been ordered from Madras, but the price will not be anything like 50 Rs. I don’t know whether you will have with it all the seraphic peace you expect — for in all electric matters there is the Pondicherry municipality to take into account, — untimely cessations of current, insufficient current, variable current — something for all tastes but for nobody’s convenience.

24 May 1936

The Light went out, the Light went out — and being not fortunate enough to be in line with the Government house, ours remained out. I had no time nor courage to go through a long pencilled poem with my insufficient substitute — so all had to be shoved over to tomorrow. Man proposes, but the Pondicherry Municipality disposes. But there will be Grace tomorrow — P. M. volente.

9 August 1936

Some people here are very glad to know that I was preparing the roof of the house by adopting the old method used by our forefathers for generations. In this case old may be good but to some people all old is gold. Perhaps they would be happy if the new European systems of medicine like homeopathy and naturopathy are rejected and the old Ayurveda only allowed. But I wonder why they cannot see how superior reinforced concrete buildings etc. are to those made by old methods — and for earthquakes, would the Ayurvedic buildings stand the shocks?

Well, if it is done really according to old methods, an Ayurvedic building can stand many earthquakes. I remember at the time of the Bengal earthquake all the new buildings in the place where the Provincial Conference was held went down but an old house of the Raja of the place was the sole thing that survived unmoved
and unshaken. Also when the Guest House roof was being repaired, (it was an old building) the mason (one of the most skilful we have met) said that this roof had been built in a way that astonished him, it was so solid and strong, no houses now were being built like that. So perhaps it is not Ayurveda, but the degenerate ways of the descendants of Charaka that is responsible for the poor and bad building we see around us. I have also seen a remark by an English architect in Madras that it was surprising to see how old ramshackle buildings survived and stood all shocks while others built in the most scientific modern way “sat down” unexpectedly. The really old things whether in India or Europe were always solid; shoddy I think began in between—before the discovery of concrete. We have to leave the old things but progress to equally or more solid new things. 29 March 1937

* Have the stores got any insecticide? Five of the eighteen rose plants I received last week have been demolished by white ants.

You hope to destroy white ants with a harmless insecticide? Optimist! The only defences yet found against them are kerosene (temporary) and solignum (less temporary) on things they have to cross, but here it is impossible as it can’t be put on plants. Tell you what to do. Dig six feet down in the right place (which may be anywhere), find the queen of the white ants and carefully strangle her; then your roses will be safe for a season.

If an insecticide is not available, would it be possible for the bakery people to save me a bucket of soot?

Soot? The white ants will be afraid of becoming black and stay away? 15 September 1938

* 

X and I receive one blade between us every two months. As it does not last us for two months, would it be possible to have one blade each every month?
Do you send the blade for sharpening to the Atelier? If not, it will soon get blunt and useless. If it is sharpened, it can last for months. 26 September 1938

* We shall get the dhotis in January, I hope.

But what is to be done in the meanwhile till January? We shall have to dress the sadhaks in saris or they will have to resort to a state of Nature and Adamic innocence!

**The Behaviour of Ashramites**

You can take your meal in the verandah as indicated by X. I must point out to you that X is in charge of the Cycle Office and the cycles and, if he objected — quite rightly — to your taking your meal in the room and dirtying it, you ought to have paid some attention to his objection instead of treating it with contempt and defiance. Whoever is put in charge of a Dept. is responsible to the Mother for the proper working of that Department and those who are assisting him must help him to keep everything in order and not act according to their own whims and fancies. If there is anything which seems to them not right in his arrangements, they can bring it to his notice or to the Mother’s notice, but not indulge in irresponsible indiscipline. Your behaviour does not justify X’s losing his temper, but neither were you justified in pushing him against the wall. This kind of scene ought not to happen in the Asram. It is besides not only with X you have clashed but with a good many others in the Asram, and it is no use telling me that it was always the other man who misbehaved and that you were an angel of calm and patience and good behaviour. Quarrelsomeness and self-assertion and indiscipline go ill with a claim of Yogic calmness. 10 August 1932

* It appears that there are complaints against you from all sides that you are quarrelling with the servants, upsetting the work,
putting others to inconvenience in order to put your own convenience and arrange things according to your own fancy. This kind of selfishness and quarrelsomeness will not do. You have to consider the convenience of others before yours — especially as you have been given the management of the house. A manager has to consider the convenience of others first and his own last.

5 March 1933

I must say what I have often written to people, that it is impossible for us to take sides in a clash between sadhaks or assume the role of judge and arbiter or of defender of one party against another. Formerly the Mother used to try to intervene or to reconcile, but we found that this only kept discord alive and fed the ego of the sadhaks. In most cases we pass over all quarrels and clashes in silence and almost all sadhaks have ceased to write about their conflicts because they get no answer. I have written to X once or twice, avoiding any discussion of the merits of a dispute, only to influence him to regard things from a general and impersonal standpoint so as to prepare him to give up that of the person and ego. I passed no personal opinion or judgment for or against this or that person. You must not expect me to take any other attitude. This is a place meant for Yoga and sadhana; personal relations of the vital kind with their attractions and repulsions, quarrels and explanations and reconciliations belong to the ordinary life and nature.

All these clashes which arise whenever you mix with X come from his weakness and yours. I have not imposed on you any rule of not meeting with him; but I have advised you not to give any field for the weakness which you yourself have admitted and which is evidently there in you. Both you and X are to me disciples and I have to deal with each in the way best for him or her. I have not pressed on your weaknesses and defects, I have given you time to find them out yourself and overcome them, for that is the best way. I have pointed out his to X when he was ready to recognise them. It is a pity that you should clash whenever you meet together a little, but you know yourself why
it is so. So long as any vital weakness remains it cannot be otherwise. Certainly it cannot be remedied by “submitting to his demands and his ego”. 16 November 1935

* It is perfectly true that the egoistic sense of possession and the habit of falsehood are too common among the sadhaks. You should train yourself however to look at these things in those around you, even when they touch you close, without being disturbed or unquiet. What you must arrive at (of course it cannot be done at once but takes time) is a complete equanimity which sees things and people as they are but is not shaken, angered or grieved by them. We ourselves know what an obstacle all this egoism and falsehood are to our work, but are not impatient because we know also that they are part of human nature and have so much hold that it is difficult for the sadhak to get rid of them even when his mind really wishes to do so. They are with many sadhaks habits stronger than their will. When there is not a strong will to get rid of them or when the sadhak is not fully conscious, then it is all the more difficult. It is only a strong and always increasing awakening of the whole consciousness which can avail and it is that which we try to bring in all without yielding to impatience because of the slowness with which it comes or the imperfect effort of the sadhaks to overcome these defects of their nature. 28 November 1935

* No harmony can be brought about merely by apologising for one’s errors. Unless we change radically and meet each other in the light of the Mother, no harmony is possible.

Quite right. Aggressiveness and bristles on both sides are not likely to go without a luminous modification in the nature. 1 July 1936

* I would like to add two questions:

1. Why do people in the Asram (budding supermen) get
furious against anything merely because it is new and unfamiliar? That is common and natural in animals; but human beings ought to have more open minds.

2. Why are they so ready to pass positive judgments on things about which they have insufficient knowledge? It would be better if they could accustom themselves to wait and learn.

Avoiding Gossip

Is it not true that to look always at others’ faults and criticize them is harmful and an obstacle to one’s progress?

Yes, all that is true. The lower vital takes a mean and petty pleasure in picking out the faults of others and thereby one hampers both one’s own progress and that of the subject of the criticism.

6 July 1933

Is gossiping and making fun of others a hindrance to one’s progress in sadhana?

It can be and very often is. A gossiping spirit is always an obstacle.

10 May 1933

Your attitude to the gossip is quite the right one. A great part of what is talked in the Asram about others is untrue, a great part is distorted or exaggerated and what remains are things that can be left to the Mother and need not be made the subject of small talk among the sadhaks.

16 September 1936

The difficulty you experience exists because speech is a function which in the past has worked much more as an expression of the vital in man than of the mental will. Speech breaks out as the expression of the vital and its habits without caring to wait for the control of the mind; the tongue has been spoken of as the unruly member. In your case the difficulty has been increased
by the habit of talk about others, — gossip, to which your vital was very partial, so much that it cannot even yet give up the pleasure in it. It is therefore this tendency that must cease in the vital itself. Not to be under the control of the impulse to speech, to be able to do without it as a necessity and to speak only when one sees that it is right to do so and only what one sees to be right to say, is a very necessary part of Yogic self-control.

It is only by perseverance and vigilance and a strong resolution that this can be done, but if the resolution is there, it can be done in a short time by the aid of the Force behind.

6 December 1936

Minor Medical Questions

If she is accustomed to enema she can have from the dispensary. But that or laxatives can relieve for the moment but not really cure. It is perhaps the best remedy to drink a big glass of cold water as soon as she wakes in the morning and to do special exercises to strengthen the muscles of the abdomen.

2 February 1933

One of my teeth came out. Two others are moving, and I am afraid they will share the same fate. Is it possible to do something to save them?

It depends on the cause. If it is the gums that are responsible, then by an action upon the gums, the teeth can be tightened again. You can use either a gargle of potassium chlorate and salt (2 grains of the former and one teaspoonful of salt in a medium-sized tumbler of water) or, still better, a gargle of hydrogen peroxide (one-fifth of a glass in a glass of water). The best and surest hydrogen peroxide is German sold in bottles marked Merckozone.

31 December 1934

Bug bites are not usually red — red swellings usually come from
some small flying insects which come into the rooms here and have a rather poisonous bite. 27 January 1934

These bites are like that. I have often had them — they last sometimes for eight days. 30 January 1934

If you cannot get rid of the sciatica by inner means, the medical remedy (not for curing it, but for keeping free as long as possible) is not to fatigue yourself. It comes for periods which may last 8 weeks, then suddenly goes. If you remain quiet physically and are not too active, it may not come for a long time. But that of course means an inactive life, physically incapable. It is what I meant by eternising the sciatica — and the inertia also. 26 July 1935

I suppose the small pimples are what is called the prickly heat; it is rather troublesome, but of no importance. I am putting force so that the pains in the head may go.

As for the biscuits, the Mother wants you to go on taking them in spite of the absence of hunger because you are eating very little — too little. Especially now you are doing more work. It is not good to let disinclination to eat grow in the body, for that weakens the nervous system and when the nervous system is weak, illnesses come in more easily into the body; if it is strong enough, it throws them off. There must be no idea that to eat little is proper for sadhana; that is a superstition. For the body is a needed base for the working of the Force and the stronger it is the better. 20 May 1936

Cooking

A half-boiled egg means simply an egg boiled in water in the shell but for only a very short time — not for a longer time like the hard boiled egg — so that the yolk may remain liquid. It
is the simplest thing in the world to do. What you speak of is something different which is much more difficult.

Mother, how to make vegetable with juice from cabbage, potatoes, and red kolu?

[Answer in Sri Aurobindo’s hand:] Prepare a sauce with saffron and the little black grains (which are put in sweets) and coriander and a little (not too much) pepper. There must be a good amount of cocose, a little dal flour. Make the flour brown in the cocose, then add water slowly stirring all the time and put the spices. This should be done in a separate pan and poured on the vegetables. 1 April 1933

How to make potatoes and brinjals with sauce?

If you can get 2 or 3 piments doux, you can do as for the onion sauce,¹ then cut the piments doux in very small pieces and cook them inside the sauce. It will give a good taste.

Add this sauce so made to the vegetable.

Mother, how to make onion sauce?

Cut the onions very small, fry in cocogem or oil till they get brown; take the water in which the vegetables are cooked, dissolve in that water some flour and pour slowly in the fried onions, stirring all the time. Cook for about 15 minutes, then add to the vegetables. If there are tomatoes, you can add some cut in small pieces. 9 April 1933

**Visiting the Ashram**

I am grateful for being granted permission to attend the Darshan though my application reached you too late. I propose

¹ But here the flour must be thicker, less watery; the onions must be cut and prepared in the same way. No saffron.
to stay here, for the present, for four days. I request you to grant permission to attend Pranam and Soup. I also request you to allow food free, because as a sannyasi, I am unable to pay for it.

You should make the following points clear to the Swami.

1. His request for food free from the Asram is contrary to the rule of the Asram. Food is given free, as a rule, only to members.

2. Only those are allowed to attend Pranam and Soup (save on exceptional occasions) who have entered Sri Aurobindo’s path of Yoga and are accepted as his disciples.

3. The Mother does not give interviews for giving instructions and hints regarding sadhana. Especially, sadhana is given only to those who have a special call to Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga; she never interferes with others (even by way of giving help) who are following a different path.

This is what would have been explained to him already if there had been time for writing a letter before he came. As he came all that way, darshan was given to him; but this does not mean that his other requests can be granted.  

21 February 1930

He seems to be expecting to put up at the Asram? You will have to find a room for him at a hotel.

Reply to him that he can come to Pranam daily. I suppose the meals can be arranged somehow; you will ask Dyuman. He will have to pay as. 8—a day.  

5 November 1932

Tomorrow Mr. X is leaving Pondicherry. Is there any objection to my bringing him to my room for a while? Even his servants have been here — only him I have kept out.

If people from outside are allowed to come in like that, very soon Pondicherry will be invading the Asram and it will not be an Asram, but a public place — that is why the rule is there. Even for servants from outside, the rule is against their coming
inside and upstairs in the Asram houses.

You have permission for darshan in February, but we do not think it would be advisable for you to come so early as the first week in January. You know that after some stay here you become restless and cannot remain longer. Last time it was better because you were in a good internal condition, but even so the pull came to go. Now that you have yielded again in the matter of sex and drink, the restlessness is likely to come more early this time. The best course would be to come a little before the February darshan and stay as long as you can after it.

31 December 1935

He can come for darshan on August 15th, but accommodation in the Asram is very doubtful as there is very little and old habitual visitors and disciples have first claim. As for staying after the darshan that we do not usually decide till we have seen the person. The charge for board and lodging is 1 Re. a day or 30 Rs. a month — 10 as. is the charge for boarding only, as many stay outside but take their food in the Asram. If he lives outside then the question of sanction does not arise (for the one month’s stay); only if he wants to live in the Asram. As to personal instructions, he knows I suppose that I see nobody — Mother also is unable to see people freely — the personal element comes in not so much through verbal instruction as through a spiritual influence and reception between the Guru and disciple.

24 March 1937