Mother reads a question asked during her talk in 1929:

“In the initial stages of Yoga, is it well for the Sadhaka to read ordinary books?”

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It is a question I have been asked many times. If someone can tell me the effect on him of the reading of ordinary books, it will interest me very much.

Ordinary books tire me.

It is a good sign.

They give rest to the mind and have no effect on me.

No! The subconscious records everything, and if you have the impression that an ordinary book leaves no effect, it means that you are not conscious of what goes on within you. Each time you read a book in which the consciousness is very low, it strengthens your subconscious and inconscient — it prevents your consciousness from rising upward. It is as if you threw buckets of dirty water on the efforts you had made to purify your subconscious.

It is inevitable, but there are people who are not even aware that their consciousness has fallen very low.

There is a state in which a simple conversation which obliges you to remain on the level of ordinary life gives you a headache, turns your stomach and, if it continues, may give you a fever. I am speaking of course about the gossip-type of conversations. I believe that apart from a few exceptions, everybody
indulges in this exercise and talks of things about which he
should keep silent or chatters about other things. It becomes
so natural that you are not troubled by it. But if you continue
in this way, you hinder your consciousness completely from
rising up; you bind yourself with iron chains to the ordinary
consciousness and the work in the subconscious is not done
or has not even begun. Those who want to rise up have al-
ready enough difficulties without looking for encouragements
outside.

Naturally, the effort to keep the consciousness at a high level
is tiring in the beginning, like the exercises you do to develop
your muscles. But you do not give up gymnastics because of
that! So mentally also you must do the same thing. You must
not allow your mind to stoop low: gossiping degrades you and,
if you want to do Yoga, you must abstain from it, that’s all.

“You can read sacred books and yet be far away from the
Divine; and you can read the most stupid productions
and be in touch with the Divine.... There is a way of
consciousness in union with the Divine in which you can
enjoy all you read, as you can all you observe.... For there
is nothing in the world which has not its ultimate truth
and support in the Divine. And if you are not stopped
by the appearance, physical or moral or aesthetic... you
can reach beauty and delight even through what affects
the ordinary sense only as something ugly, poor, painful
or discordant.”

Ibid.

The state of consciousness of which I speak here is very difficult
to attain; it is a discipline which needs years and it is a realisation
which is not within everybody’s reach. There is, however, an
intermediate state through which one has to pass: a state in
which one cuts the connection between oneself and all that one
does not want to hear or see.
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“Obviously, what has happened had to happen; it would not have been, if it had not been intended. Even the mistakes that we have committed and the adversities that fell upon us had to be, because there was some necessity in them, some utility for our lives. But in truth these things cannot be explained mentally and should not be. For all that happened was necessary, not for any mental reason, but to lead us to something beyond what the mind imagines. But is there any need to explain after all? The whole universe explains everything at every moment and a particular thing happens because the whole universe is what it is.”

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The whole universe explains each thing at each moment. That is very important.

If one wants to learn a language, is it not necessary to read ordinary books like those of Alexandre Dumas, for instance?

Yes, if one reads to study the language, to understand how an author expresses himself, it is quite all right. But this should not be made an excuse for reading anything whatever.

Haven’t imaginary stories any value?

That depends on the quality of the imagination. If you say that it is a good thing to develop one’s imagination, this is true, only you must take care not to develop an untruthful imagination.

Do not imaginary stories put you in contact with life, with truth?

Not always! And what does “contact with truth” mean? — there is a truth in a grain of sand. That means nothing.
Don’t you think there are enough ugly things in the world without one’s giving a picture of them in books? This is something which always used to surprise me, even when I was a child — life is so ugly, so full of mean, miserable, even at times repulsive things, what is the use of imagining yet worse things than are already there? If you imagined something more beautiful, a more beautiful life, that would be worth the trouble. People who take pleasure in writing ugly things show a great poverty of mind — it is always a sign of a poverty of mind. It is infinitely more difficult to tell a story beautiful from beginning to end than to write a story ending with a sensational event or a catastrophe. Many authors, if they had to write a story which ends happily, beautifully, would not be able to do it — they do not have enough imagination for that. Very few stories have an uplifting ending, almost all end in a failure — for a very simple reason, it is much more easy to fall than to rise. It is much more difficult to end one’s story on a note of greatness and splendour, to make one’s hero a genius seeking to transcend himself, because for that one must be a genius oneself, and this is not given to everybody.

When one reads ordinary books, one has the impression of entering into the mind of the author and that is not always pleasant. I have also noticed that when one talks about business or work with an outsider, the conversation can be good and interesting, but as soon as one talks with the same person about his private life, the conversation immediately becomes painful.

Yes, because work, especially if it is technical work, is the expression of the best in the man, while in his private life he comes down to a lower level, with very few exceptions. So many remarkable scholars, writers, artists who produce remarkable things, once they enter their homes, become detestable husbands, unpleasant fathers, intolerable people for those who are
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around them. And I am speaking of an élite, those who make
special studies, discoveries, who run big institutions: outside,
you are uncommon people, men of great abilities; back home
they become commonplace and often unbearable — they have a
good time, they take rest, relax themselves. And if they begin to
amuse themselves, that’s the end of it all! I knew people of great
intelligence, admirable artists who, as soon as they began to
“relax”, became utterly foolish! They did the most vulgar things,
behaved like ill-bred children — they were relaxing. Everything
comes from this “need” of relaxation; and what does that mean
for most men? It means, always, coming down to a lower level.
They do not know that for a true relaxation one must rise one
degree higher, one must rise above oneself. If one goes down, it
adds to one’s fatigue and brings a kind of stupor. Besides, each
time one comes down, one increases the load of the subconscient
— this huge subconscient load which one must clean and clean
if one wants to mount, and which is like fetters on the feet. But
it is difficult to teach that, for one must know it oneself before
one can teach it to others.

This is never told to children, they are allowed to commit
all the stupidities in the world under the pretext that they need
relaxation.

It is not by sinking below oneself that one removes fatigue.
One must climb the ladder and there one has true rest, because
one has the inner peace, the light, the universal energy. And little
by little one puts oneself in touch with the truth which is the very
reason of one’s existence.

If you contact that definitively, it removes completely all
fatigue.

*When one recognises one’s faults, one can’t commit them
again, can one?*

If one is sincere, no. If you repeat the same errors several times,
you may be sure you are not sincere somewhere. When one
recognises one’s mistake and yet repeats it, it means that only
a superficial part of the consciousness has recognised it and the
rest is perfectly satisfied with it and generally justifies it. You
may tell yourself without the risk of making a mistake: “If I
repeat the same fault, I am not sincere.” So try to be sincere.

When one speaks to others, one rarely comes to an agree-
ment, for people do not see things in the same way. Or
if I see the other’s point of view, I cannot accept it.

That means you are not plastic. You may be sure that if you find
a person boring, he will also find you boring. You will never
arrive at anything if you do not take the attitude of putting
yourself in the place of the other, this is indispensable. When
someone tells you something you do not understand, you must
not say, “He knows nothing”, but you must try to understand.
If you want to be quite sincere, even when a child comes and
tells you something you do not understand, you must not say,
“This child is stupid”, but “It is I who am stupid, because I do
not understand!”

There are a hundred ways of looking at a problem. If you
want to find the solution, you must take up all the elements one
after another, rise above them and see how they harmonise.

There is a state of consciousness which may be called “gnos-
tic”, in which you are able to see at the same time all the theories,
all the beliefs, all the ideas men have expressed in their highest
consciousness — the most contradictory notions, like the Bud-
dhistic, the Vedantic, the Christian theories, all the philosophical
theories, all the expressions of the human mind when it has man-
aged to catch a little corner of the Truth — and in that state, not
only do you put each thing in its place, but everything appears to
you marvellously true and quite indispensable in order to be able
to understand anything at all about anything whatsoever. There
is a state of consciousness... Oh, I was going to tell you things
you cannot yet understand. I shall give you a simpler example.
Anatole France said in one of his books: “So long as men did not try to make the world progress, all went well and everybody was satisfied — no worry about perfecting oneself or perfecting the world, consequently all went well. Therefore the worst thing is to want to make others progress; let them do what they like and don’t bother about anything, that will be much more wise.” On the contrary, others tell you: “There is a Truth to be attained; the world is in a state of ignorance and one must at all costs, in spite of the difficulty of the way, enlighten man’s consciousness and pull him out of his ignorance.” But I tell you that there is a state of consciousness in which both the ways of seeing are absolutely equally true. Naturally, if you take only two aspects, it is difficult to see clearly; one must be able to see all the aspects of the truth glimpsed by the human intelligence and... something more. And then, in that state, nothing is absolutely false, nothing is absolutely bad. In that state one is free from all problems, all difficulties, all battles and everything appears to you wonderfully harmonious.

But if you try to imitate this condition mentally — do you understand? To make a mental imitation of it — you may be sure of doing stupid things; you will be one of those who have a chaos in their head and can say the most contradictory things without even being aware of it.

In that condition there is no contradiction — it is a totality and a totality in which one has the full knowledge of all the truths expressed (which are not sufficient to express the total Truth), in which one knows the respective places of all things, why and of what the universe is formed. Only — I hasten to tell you this — it is not by a personal effort that one reaches this condition; it is not because one tries to obtain it that one obtains it. You become that, spontaneously. It is, if you like, the crowning of an absolute mental sincerity, when you no longer have any partiality, any preference, any attachment to an idea, when you do not even try any longer to know the truth.

You are simply open in the Light, that’s all.
I am telling you this, this evening, because what is done, what has been realised by one can be realised by others. It is enough that one body has been able to realise that, one human body, to have the assurance that it *can* be done. You may consider it still very far off, but you can say, “Yes, the gnostic life is certain, because it has begun to be realised.”