8 September 1954

This talk is based upon Sri Aurobindo’s *Bases of Yoga*, Chapter 1. The book is comprised of extracts from letters written in reply to the queries of disciples.

“The forces that stand in the way of sadhana are the forces of the lower mental, vital and physical nature. Behind them are adverse powers of the mental, vital and subtle physical worlds. These can be dealt with only after the mind and heart have become one-pointed and concentrated in the single aspiration to the Divine.”

So ?...

_Sweet Mother, what are the adverse powers of the subtle physical?_

What are the adverse forces? There are as many of them as there are elements in the world. Only, unless they express themselves physically, we do not see them. So we are not aware of them. But I told you the other day that the atmosphere is full of countless formations which are usually made up of thoughts, desires, impulses, wills, and which are as mixed as men’s thoughts. There are good ones, there are bad ones; and behind that there are all the formations of the vital world, a world _essentially_ hostile to the Divine. Only the vital in man, under the psychic influence, can change and become a collaborator in the divine work. Otherwise, the vital world is essentially formed of beings _hostile_ to the divine work, and those who open themselves to these forces without any control are naturally under the influence of the adverse forces. So, one can’t say what these adverse forces are. It would be easier to say what they are _not_.

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(Speaking to the children in the first row) Do you have a question? You have a question? And you? You?

It is outside the text.

Eh? It is outside the text? It is farther on? That will be for next time. (Mother continues questioning.) And you, nothing? Now then, you, you too have nothing to ask?

It comes a little later.

So I have read very little?

Pavitra: No, Mother!

I have received complaints because I read The Mother through too fast. I have been asked to read more slowly; so I read more slowly.

Sweet Mother, what is meant by “the substance of the mental being”?

My child, the substance means... how shall I put it?... it means the stuff of which the mental being is made. It could be said, for instance, that the cells are the substance of your body. It is not exactly matter, the mind is not quite material, but it is the very thing of which the mind is made. If there were no mental substance, there would be no mental being. It would be only a vibration; and even a vibration needs a medium to manifest itself.

But if your body were not made of material substance, you wouldn’t have a body. This is what is called substance. It is the thing of which something is made. And precisely, what is important is that people usually think that mind is just a mode of activity, whereas there is a mental substance as there is a vital
substance and physical substance. And as there is a substance, there is a corresponding world with an autonomous existence, that is to say, there can be a mind without any physical support. The physical body may disappear and the mind can continue to exist. It is here that it is important to understand that there is a mental substance which, obviously, is much more... (silence) how to put it?... immaterial than physical matter.

Some people use a rather unclassical word, “rarefied”, but I don’t think it has exactly this sense. Well, you see, we say that substance has different densities, and the more material it becomes, the denser it is, the farther it moves away from matter, the less dense it is. But it is a substance all the same. There is even an etheric substance. I don’t say that this conforms with scientific theories; I don’t guarantee that I am not talking scientific heresies! But this is a cosmic fact. (Mother laughs.) It is exactly — I think I said this when I spoke about occultism — I said the first thing one must know before being able to practise occultism is that the different states of being have a different density, and they have an individual independent existence of their own, that they are existing realities, that they are truly real substances, that it is not just a way of being. There can be a mental being and mental activity and, for instance, a thought that is completely independent of the brain, whereas the materialistic theories say that it is the brain which creates mental activity. But this is not correct. The brain is the material transcription of the mental activity, and mental activity has its own domain; the mental domain has its reality, its own substance. One can think outside one’s brain, think, act, make formations outside one’s brain. One can even live, move, go from one place to another, have a direct knowledge of mental things in the mental world, in a word, absolutely independent of a body which, indeed, can be in a state of complete inertia, not only asleep but also in a cataleptic state. And moreover, it is quite certain that so long as one has not understood that one is made up of different states of being which have their own independent life, one can’t have a complete
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control over one’s being. There will always be something that escapes you.

(To a child) Do you have something to ask?

*It is outside the book.*

Eh? Not from the book? If it is interesting it doesn’t matter!

*Mother, what is the significance of this abrupt change in the programme?*

Oh, but that — it is something altogether personal!

Well, I can tell you: it is different for each one and it is for you to find it out in yourself. And if you find it you will have made some progress....

(Silence)

(To a child) Something to say?

No.

(To another) You, do you have something to ask? No? No! You are dreaming! (Laughter) Nobody has a question? (To another) You?

*When one wants to concentrate, why do all kinds of thoughts come, which never come otherwise?*

What did you say?

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1 The reference is to Mother’s having stopped the morning “Blessings” which she used to give to the students and to some disciples.

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When one wants to concentrate, why do all kinds of thoughts come which never came before?

Perhaps they came and you did not know it! Perhaps it is because you want to concentrate that you become aware that they are there. It may also happen that there is an element of contradiction in the consciousness and that when you want to be silent, something says, “No, I won’t be silent!”

I think that many of you have an inner contradiction like this. When you have resolved to be good, there is something which would like to push you into being wicked, and when you want to be quiet, there is something which pushes you into being agitated, and when you want to be silent, immediately thoughts begin to wander. It is a contradiction inherent in man’s nature. It may be this; it may be what I said: that all these thoughts are there but as you were not paying any attention to them, you were not aware of them.

It is quite certain that to create absolute silence is of all things the most difficult, for many things of which one was not aware, become enormous! There were all kinds of suggestions, movements, thoughts, formations which went on as though automatically in the outer consciousness, almost outside the consciousness, on the frontiers of consciousness; and as soon as one wants to be absolutely silent, one becomes aware of all these things which go on moving, moving, moving and make a lot of noise and prevent you from being silent. That is why it is better to remain very quiet, very calm and at the same time very attentive to something which is above you and to which you aspire, and if there is this kind of noise passing like that around you (Mother moves her hands around her head), not to pay attention, not to look, not to heed it. If there are thoughts which go round and round and round like this (gestures), which come and go, do not look, do not pay attention, but concentrate upwards in a great aspiration which one may even formulate — because often it helps the concentration — towards the light, the peace,
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the quietude, towards a kind of inner impassiveness, so that the concentration may be strong enough for you not to attend to all that continues to whirl about all around. But if suddenly you say, “Ah, there’s some noise! Oh, here is a thought!”, then it is finished. You will never succeed in being quiet. Have you never seen those people who try to stop a quarrel by shouting still louder than the ones who are quarrelling? Well, it is something like that. (Mother laughs.)

*Sweet Mother, may I ask you a question outside the subject?*

What question?

*In “The Brain of India” Sri Aurobindo has written that the Bengalis can think with their hearts...*

Who can think with his heart? I can’t hear! The Bengalis can think with their hearts? That’s a poetic way of saying it. (*Laughter*) Where has he written this? It is indeed a very poetic description. That’s to say that they are essentially emotive beings and that their heart is conscious even in their thought, that their thought is not purely intellectual and dry, and that their heart is aware of their thought. That’s what he meant.

But I can also tell you that when I was in Japan I met a man who had formed a group, for... It can’t be said that it was for sadhana, but for a kind of discipline. He had a theory and it was on this theory that he had founded his group: that one can think in any part of one’s being whatever if one concentrates there. That is to say, instead of thinking in your head, you can think in your chest. And he said that one could think here (*gesture*) in the stomach. He took the stomach as the seat of prāṇa, the vital force. He used certain Sanskrit words, you know, half-digested, and all that.... But still, this does not matter, he was full of goodwill and he said that most human miseries come
from the fact that men think in their heads, that this makes the head ache, tires you and takes away your mental clarity. On the other hand, if you learn how to think here (gesture indicating the stomach), it gives you power, strength and calmness. And the most remarkable thing is that he had attained a kind of ability to bring down the mental power, the mental force exactly here (gesture); the mental activity was generated there, and no longer in the head. And he had cured a considerable number of people, considerable, some hundreds, who used to suffer from terrible headaches; he had cured them in this way.

I have tried it, it is quite easy, precisely because, as I told you a while ago, the mental force, mental activity is independent of the brain. We are in the habit of using the brain but we can use something else or rather, concentrate the mental force elsewhere, and have the impression that our mental activity comes from there. One can concentrate one’s mental force in the solar plexus, here (gesture), and feel the mental activity coming out from there.

That man used to say, “Haven’t you noticed that all men who have great power have a big belly? (Laughter)—Because they concentrate their forces there, so this makes their stomach big!” He always used to give the example of Napoleon; and he said, “These people stand up quite straight, always straight with their head erect, never like this (Mother bends the head forward), never like this (Mother bends the head to the right), never like this (Mother bends the head to the left); always quite straight up but with all their force here (pointing to the stomach), and so this makes them very powerful!” And he always spoke of Napoleon. He used to say, “Napoleon, you see...” (Mother shows that Napoleon had a big stomach.) And he had a visit from Tagore when Tagore was in Japan and he told me, “Have you observed how Tagore stands quite upright, like this, with his head erect?” Then I told him, “But he doesn’t have a big stomach!” He said to me, “It will come.” (Laughter)

There were hundreds of people at his meetings. They would
all sit on their knees as one does in Japan. He struck a table
with a stick and everyone brought down his mental force to the
stomach; and then they remained like that for... oh! at least half
an hour. And after half an hour he struck the table a second time
and they released their mental force and began chatting... not
very much, for the Japanese do not chat much, but nevertheless
they talk.

There now! But mark that there was something very true, in
the sense that if ever you have a headache I advise you to do this:
to take the thought-force, the mental force — and even if you can
draw a little of your vital force, that too — and make it come
down, like this (gesture of very slowly sliding both hands from
the top of the head downwards). Well, if you have a headache or
a congestion, if you have caught a touch of the sun, for instance,
indeed if anything has happened to you, well, if you know how
to do this and bring down the force here, like this, here (showing
the centre of the chest), or even lower down (showing the
stomach), well, it will disappear. It will disappear. You will be
able to do this in five minutes. You can try, the next time you
have a headache.... I hope you won't have a headache but the
next time you have it, try this. Sit upright, like this (movement
showing an āsana posture). The Japanese say you should sit on
your heels — but that might disturb your meditation, sitting like
that — they call it sitting at ease. The Indian fashion is like this
(gesture), otherwise you must sit like this (gesture); this is harder
when you are not accustomed to it.

So, sit quite at ease and then take all your force as though
you were taking, you see... all the energy in your head, take it
and then make it come down, down, down, like this, slowly, very
carefully, right down here, down to the navel. And you will see
that your headache will disappear. I have made the experiment
many times.... It is a very good remedy, very easy; there is no
need to take pills or injections; it gets cured in this way. So there
you are!

Any other question? Yes!
How can we establish a settled peace and silence in the
mind?

First of all, you must want it.

And then you must try and must persevere, keep on trying. What I have just told you is a very good means. Yet there are others also. You sit quietly, to begin with; and then, instead of thinking of fifty things, you begin saying to yourself, “Peace, peace, peace, peace, peace, calm, peace!” You imagine peace and calm. You aspire, ask that it may come: “Peace, peace, calm.” And then, when something comes and touches you and acts, say quietly, like this, “Peace, peace, peace.” Do not look at the thoughts, do not listen to the thoughts, you understand. You must not pay attention to everything that comes. You know, when someone bothers you a great deal and you want to get rid of him, you don’t listen to him, do you? Good! You turn your head away (gesture) and think of something else. Well, you must do that: when thoughts come, you must not look at them, must not listen to them, must not pay any attention at all, you must behave as though they did not exist, you see! And then, repeat all the time like a kind of — how shall I put it? — as an idiot does, who repeats the same thing always. Well, you must do the same thing; you must repeat, “Peace, peace, peace.” So you try this for a few minutes and then do what you have to do; and then, another time, you begin again; sit down again and then try. Do this on getting up in the morning, do this in the evening when going to bed. You can do this... look, if you want to digest your food properly, you can do this for a few minutes before eating. You can’t imagine how much this helps your digestion! Before beginning to eat you sit quietly for a while and say, “Peace, peace, peace!” and everything becomes calm. It seems as though all the noises were going far, far, far away (Mother stretches out her arms on both sides) and then you must continue; and there comes a time when you no longer need to sit down, and no matter what you are doing, no matter what you are saying, it is
always “Peace, peace, peace.” Everything remains here, like this, it does not enter (gesture in front of the forehead), it remains like this. And then one is always in a perfect peace... after some years.

But at the beginning, a very small beginning, two or three minutes, it is very simple. For something complicated you must make an effort, and when one makes an effort, one is not quiet. It is difficult to make an effort while remaining quiet. Very simple, very simple, you must be very simple in these things. It is as though you were learning how to call a friend: by dint of being called he comes. Well, make peace and calm your friends and call them: “Come, peace, peace, peace, peace, come!”

Is that all, my children?

Mother, is the seat of understanding in the head?

The faculty of understanding? Is that what you are asking about, whether it is in the head? I have just said the opposite. A few minutes ago I said that all mental faculties are in the mind and it is only by habit that they are in the head. One can understand from any place whatever. One can understand from wherever the seat of the consciousness is.

You say “by habit”. One can’t change it, one is born like that!

Were you thinking when you were born?

It is natural to think with the head. How can one make a habit of it?

It has been a habit for a very long time — the parents of the parents of the parents, and so on — but not for everyone! It is like the habit of looking with the eyes, but it has been proved that it is possible to create centres of vision elsewhere than in
the eyes — with a little concentration. I don’t say that the brain is not made for thinking, I have never told you that, but I said that thought does not depend upon the brain, which is quite a different thing. If one knows how to handle mental forces, one sees clearly that the brain is very suitable for expressing oneself — it has evidently been made for that, for receiving thoughts and putting them into action, into expression, words — but it doesn’t need to be exclusive.

(After a silence) I mean that this exclusiveness is a habit. However, when one has done a little yoga seriously, one knows very well that one can think here (Mother shows the centre of the forehead between the eyebrows, then the right side, then the left) one can think here, one can think here, one can think in front and, as I was saying just now, one can think much higher up — but naturally, one thinks that all thought-phenomena, concentration, are produced in the brain — and when one thinks up above, here (Mother shows the space above the head), one thinks much better than when one thinks here. It is only that one has never tried to do otherwise. Not “never tried”, there are quite a number of people who have tried and have succeeded.

There you are, my children! I think that’s all. It’s enough for this evening.