

*Recollections
from
Long Ago*

Extracts from the Mother's Conversations

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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

RECOLLECTIONS FROM LONG AGO

1. THE EARTHLY PARADISE	...	89
2. A WHITE FLAME	...	93
3. AT THE AGE OF FIVE	...	93
4. TRANCE	...	95
5. GOING INTO TRANCE	...	95
6. CONTRADICTORY EXPERIENCES	...	96
7. CONTACT WITH THE HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS	...	97
8. HER GRANDMOTHER	...	98
9. HER FATHER	...	98
10. A SPLENDID EDUCATION	...	99
11. HER MOTHER	...	99
12. HER BROTHER	...	100
13. HER MOTHER	...	101
14. FAITH IN ONE'S DESTINY	...	101
15. “YOU ARE BORN TO REALISE THE HIGHER IDEAL”	...	102
16. TELLING STORIES	...	102
17. SCOLDED ALL THE TIME	...	103
18. MASTER RATHER THAN SLAVE	...	104
19. THE GRIEF OF ANOTHER	...	104
20. NOTHING MIRACULOUS	...	105
21. BEING CARRIED	...	105
22. AT THE EDGE OF THE FOREST	...	105
23. REAL FAIRY TALES	...	106
24. OTHER TIMES, OTHER LIVES	...	106
25. ALWAYS LEARNING	...	107
26. A NEED TO KNOW	...	107
27. A PERIOD OF LEARNING	...	108
28. STUDIES	...	109
29. OPPORTUNITY FOR PROGRESS	...	111
30. TO LEARN AT EVERY MOMENT	...	112
31. PROJECTION	...	113
32. GOING OUT OF THE BODY	...	114
33. SUBTLE PERCEPTIONS	...	114
34. SHOOTING STAR	...	115

35. THE SPECTATORS	...	116
36. CONCENTRATION	...	117
37. NO FEAR	...	117
38. LIKE THE CHICK IN THE EGG	...	118
39. EXTERIORISATION	...	119
40. OUT OF THE BODY	...	121
41. TRANSMITTING FORCES	...	121
42. THE ENVELOPE OF PROTECTION	...	122
43. REMINISCENCES OF TLEMCEN	...	122
44. ENTITIES THAT CONTROL THE WEATHER	...	126
45. LITTLE ENTITIES	...	127
46. CONSCIOUS HANDS	...	128
47. CONTINUING TO WORK THROUGH OTHER HANDS	...	128
48. BEETHOVEN AND YSAYÉ	...	130
49. MODERN ART	...	131
50. MODERN ART	...	132
51. ART AND YOGA	...	133
52. COMMUNICATING WITH A LION	...	134
53. CONSCIOUSNESS IN ANIMALS?	...	134
54. CONSCIOUS ANIMALS	...	135
55. PETS WITH ASPIRATION	...	137
56. ASPIRATION IN ANIMALS	...	137
57. GOAT AND JAGGERY	...	137
58. LOVE AND THE DESIRE TO DEVOUR	...	138
59. MATERNAL LOVE	...	139
60. TAMING ANIMALS	...	140
61. CONSCIOUS VEGETABLES	...	141
62. THE VITAL CRAVING FOR PRAISE	...	142
63. MIRACULOUS	...	143
64. THE RENUNCIATION OF DESIRE	...	143
65. THE WAY TO CHANGE	...	144
66. ADVERSE PROPAGANDA	...	145
67. BEING UPSET	...	145
68. PHYSICAL MIND	...	146
69. HORRORS OF WAR	...	146
70. A BOOK	...	147
71. THE GOD OF RELIGIONS	...	147
72. MONSIEUR VINCENT AND HIS CREED	...	148
73. "SINNING" HUMANITY	...	148
74. THE MORALITY OF NATURE	...	149
75. RELIGIOUS ATTITUDE	...	150
76. VITAL ENTITIES IN RELIGIOUS MONUMENTS	...	151
77. TEMPLE BY THE SHORE	...	153
78. THE BLACK KALI	...	155
79. PRIESTS	...	156
80. THE LORD AND THE ASURA	...	156

RECOLLECTIONS FROM LONG AGO

(Extracts from the Mother's Conversations)

1. The Earthly Paradise

Is it true that there was an earthly paradise? Why was man driven out of it?

From the historical point of view (I am not speaking from the psychological but from the historical point of view), if I base myself on my memories — only I cannot prove it; nothing can be proved, and I do not think there is any truly historical proof, that is to say, one which has been preserved, or at any rate none has yet been found — but according to what I remember, there was certainly a moment in earth's history when there existed a kind of earthly paradise, in the sense that it was a perfectly harmonious and natural life; that is to say, the manifestation of the mind was in accord, was *still* in complete accord with the ascending march of Nature and totally harmonious, without perversion or distortion. This was the first stage of mind's manifestation in material forms.

How long did it last? It is difficult to say. But for man it was a life that was like a kind of outflowing of animal life. I have a memory of a life in which the body was perfectly adapted to its natural environment and the climate adapted to the needs of the body, the body to the needs of the climate. Life was wholly spontaneous and natural, just as a more luminous and more conscious animal life would be; but there were none of the complications and distortions that the mind brought in later in the course of its development. I have the memory of that life — I had it, I relived it when I became conscious of the life of the earth as a whole. But I cannot say how long it lasted nor what area it covered. I do not know. I can only remember the condition, the state, what material Nature was like, what the human form and the human consciousness were like at that time and this kind of harmony with all the other elements on earth — harmony with animal life, and such a great harmony with plant life. There was a kind of spontaneous knowledge of how to use the things of Nature, of the properties of plants, of fruits and everything vegetable Nature could provide. No aggressiveness, no fear, no contradictions nor frictions and no perversions at all — the mind was pure, simple, luminous, uncomplicated.

It is only with the progress of evolution, the march of evolution, when the mind began to develop in itself, *for itself*, that all the complications and distortions began. So that the story of Genesis which seems so childish contains some truth. In the old traditions like that of Genesis, each letter stood for a specific knowledge, it was a graphic summary of the traditional knowledge of that time. But apart from that, even the symbolic story had a reality in the sense that there truly was a period of life on

earth — the first manifestation of mentalised matter in human forms — which was still in complete harmony with all that preceded it. It was only later...

And the symbol of the tree of knowledge represents the kind of knowledge which is no longer divine, the material knowledge that comes from the sense of division and which started spoiling everything. How long did this period last? Because in my memory too it was like an almost immortal life, and it seems that it was an accident of evolution that made it necessary for forms to disintegrate... for progress. So I cannot say how long it lasted. And where? According to certain impressions — but they are only impressions — it would seem that it was in the vicinity of... I do not know exactly whether it was on this side of Ceylon and India or on the other (*Mother points to the Indian Ocean, first to the west of Ceylon and India and then to the east, between Ceylon and Java*), but it was certainly a place which no longer exists, which has probably been swallowed up by the sea. I have a very clear vision of this place and a very clear awareness of this life and its forms, but I cannot give any material details. To tell the truth, when I relived these moments I was not curious about details. One is in a different state of mind and one has no curiosity about these material details; everything changes into psychological factors. And it was... it was something so simple, so luminous, so harmonious, beyond all our preoccupations — precisely beyond all these preoccupations with time and place. It was a spontaneous, extremely beautiful life, and so close to Nature, like a natural flowering of the animal life. And there were no oppositions, no contradictions, or anything like that — everything happened in the best way possible.

(Silence)

Repeatedly, in different circumstances, several times, I have had the same memory. It was not exactly the same scene or the same images, because it was not something that I saw, it was *a life* that I was living. For some time, by night or by day, in a certain state of trance I went back to a life that I had lived and had the full consciousness that it was the outflowing of the human form on earth — the first human forms capable of embodying the divine Being. It was that. It was the first time I could manifest in an earthly form, in a particular form, in an individual form — not a “general” life but an individual form — that is to say, the first time that the Being above and the being below were joined by the mentalisation of this material substance. I lived this several times, but always in similar surroundings and with a very similar feeling of *such* joyful simplicity, without complexity, without problems, without all these questions; there was nothing, absolutely nothing of the kind! It was an outflowing of the joy of living, simply that, in universal love and harmony — flowers, minerals, animals: all were in harmony.

It was only long afterwards — but this is a personal impression — long afterwards that things went wrong. Probably because some mental crystallisations

were necessary, inevitable for the general evolution, so that the mind might be prepared to move on to something else. This is where... Faugh! It is like falling into a hole, into ugliness, into obscurity; everything becomes so dark afterwards, so ugly, so difficult, so painful, it is really — it really feels like a fall.

(*Silence*)

I knew an occultist who used to say that it was not — how to put it? — inevitable. In the total freedom of the manifestation it is the deliberate separation from the Origin that is the cause of all disorder. But how to explain it? Our words are so poor that we cannot speak of these things. We can say that it was “inevitable” because it happened; but if we go outside the creation, we can conceive — or we could have conceived — of a creation in which this disorder would not have happened. Sri Aurobindo also said practically the same thing, that it was a kind of “accident”, if you like, but an “accident” which has given the manifestation a much greater and much more complete perfection than if it had never occurred. But this still belongs to the realm of speculation and these speculations are useless, to say the least. In any case, the experience, the feeling is this: a... (*Mother indicates an abrupt fall*) oh! all of a sudden.

For the earth it probably happened like that, all of a sudden: a kind of ascent, then a fall. But the earth is only a very small point of concentration. For the universe it is something else.

(*Silence*)

So the memory of that time is preserved somewhere, in the earth’s memory, in the region where all the memories of the earth are recorded, and those who are able to communicate with this memory can say that the earthly paradise still exists somewhere; but I know nothing about it, I do not see.

What about the story of the serpent? Why does the serpent have such an evil reputation?

The Christians say that it is the spirit of Evil.

(*Silence*)

But all this is a misunderstanding.

The occultist I spoke of used to say that the true interpretation of the Bible story about Paradise and the serpent is that man wanted to rise from a state of animal divinity — like the animals — to a state of conscious divinity through the development of the mind — and that is what the symbol means when it is said that they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. And the serpent — he always used to say that it was iridescent, that is to say, it was all the colours of the rainbow — it was not at all the

spirit of Evil, it was the evolutionary force, the force, the power of evolution, and of course it was the power of evolution that had made them taste of the fruit of knowledge. And so, according to him, Jehovah was the chief of the Asuras, the supreme Asura, the egoistic god who wanted to dominate everything and have everything under his control. And once he had taken the position of supreme lord in relation to earthly realisation, of course he was not pleased that man should make this mental progress, for it would bring him a knowledge that enabled him not to obey any longer! This made him furious! For it would enable man to become a god by the evolutionary power of consciousness. And that is why they were driven out of Paradise.

There is a good deal of truth in that, a good deal.

And Sri Aurobindo fully agreed. He said the same thing. It is the evolutionary power — the power of the mind — that led man towards knowledge, a separative knowledge. And it is a fact that man became conscious of himself with the sense of good and evil. But, of course, that spoiled everything and he could not stay there. He was driven out by his own consciousness. He could no longer stay there.

But were they driven out by Jehovah or by their own consciousness?

It is just two different ways of saying the same thing.

According to me, all these old Scriptures and these old traditions have different levels of meaning (*Mother makes a gesture to show the different levels*); and according to the period, the people, the needs, one symbol or another has been selected and used. But there comes a time — when you transcend all these things and see them from what Sri Aurobindo calls “the other hemisphere” — when you become aware that these are merely ways of speaking to establish a contact — a kind of bridge or link between the lower way of seeing and the higher way of knowing.

And people who argue and say, “Oh, no! it is like this; it is like that”— there comes a time when it seems so funny, so funny! And just that, the spontaneous retort of so many people, “Oh, that is impossible”— the word itself is so funny! For the slightest, I might even say, the most elementary intellectual development enables you to realise that you could not even think of it if it were not possible.

(Silence)

Oh! If we could only find that again, but how?

Really, they have spoilt the earth, they have spoilt it — they have spoilt the atmosphere, they have spoilt everything! And now, for the atmosphere to come back to what it should be — oh! we have a long way to go, and above all psychologically. But even the very structure of matter (*Mother feels the air around her*), with their bombs and experiments, oh, they have made a mess of it all!... They have really made a mess of matter.

Probably — no, not probably — it is quite certain that it was necessary to knead it, to churn it, to prepare it so that it can receive *this*, the new thing which is not yet manifested.

It was very simple, very harmonious, very luminous, but not complex enough. And this complexity has spoilt everything, but it will bring a realisation that is *infinitely* more conscious — infinitely. And so when the earth again becomes so harmonious, simple, luminous, pure — simple, pure, purely divine — and with this complexity, then we shall be able to do something.

As the Mother was leaving she noticed a brilliant crimson Canna flower.

There were so many flowers just like this in the landscape of the earthly paradise, red, so beautiful.

(11 March 1961)

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* *

2. A White Flame

I have been through all kinds of things in life, always with the impression of a sort of light — so intangible, so perfectly pure (not in the moral sense, purely light!) that it could go everywhere, mingle with everything without ever being mixed with anything. When young, I would feel this, this flame, a white flame. And never did I feel disgust, contempt, recoil, the sense of being dirtied — by anything or anyone. It was always like this — a flame, white, white, so white that nothing could prevent it from being white. And I have felt this far back in the past (now, my approach is entirely different: it comes from above, and I have other reasons for seeing the Purity in all things).

(8 November 1960)

3. At the Age of Five

When I was five years old (I must have begun earlier, but the memory is a bit vague, there is nothing precise), but from five onwards, I have in my consciousness (not a mental memory but the consciousness — how to put it? — it is noted, a notation) ... well, I began with consciousness. Of course without at all knowing what it was. And the first experience I had, it was of the consciousness here (*gesture above the head*), which I felt like a Light and a Force and which I felt there (*same gesture*) at

the age of five.

It was a very pleasant sensation: I would sit in a little armchair which had been made specially for me, and I was all alone in the room, and I... (I did not know what it was, nothing at all, isn't it, nothing, nothing — mentally zero), and a kind of very pleasant feeling of something which was very strong and very luminous and which was here (*above the head*): the Consciousness. And the impression was, "It is this that I must live, that I must be" — not with all those words, naturally, but... (*Mother makes a gesture of aspiration upward*), and then I would pull it down, for it was that which was... truly my *raison d'être*.

It is the first memory I have: at five years. And it has acted more in an ethical sense than an intellectual sense. And yet, in an intellectual form also, because, for instance... You see, apparently I was a child like any other, except that, it seems, I was difficult — difficult, that is to say, not interested in food, not interested in ordinary games, not liking to go to my friends' houses for snacks, because eating cake was not interesting in the least! And it was impossible to punish me because I really could not have cared less: if I was deprived of dessert, it was rather a relief! And flatly refusing to learn to read, refusing to learn. And even very difficult when it came to taking a bath, because having been put in the care of an English governess, we were to be given cold baths which my brother accepted well, but I just howled! Later it was found, because the doctor said so, that it was not good for me, but that was much later. So, that is the picture.

But when there was some unpleasantness with relatives, playmates, friends, I would feel all the nastiness or bad will — all sorts of things came which were not beautiful — I was rather sensitive, especially as I instinctively nurtured an ideal of beauty, of harmony, which all the circumstances of life kept denying; so when I felt sad, I was careful not to say anything to my mother or to my father, because my father did not care about it at all, and my mother would scold me — that was always the first thing she did. And so I would go to my room and sit down in my little armchair, and there I would concentrate and try to understand — in my own way. And I remember that after quite a few attempts, probably fruitless, the result was like this, (I always used to talk to myself; I don't know why or how, but I would talk to myself just as I talked to others); and I would tell myself: "Look here, you feel sad because so-and-so said something really disgusting to you, but why does that make you cry? Why are you sad? It is he who has done something bad, it is he who should be crying. You have not done anything bad to him... Did you tell him nasty things? Did you fight with her, or with him? No, you did not do anything, did you; well then, as you have not done anything, you need not feel sad. It is only if you had done something bad that you should be sad, but..." So that settled it: I would never cry. With just a slight inward movement, or with this "something" that said, "You have done no wrong," there was no sadness.

But there was another side to this: there was, growing more and more, this

same “someone” who was watching me, and as soon as I said one word more or made one gesture too many, had one little bad thought, or teased my brother or whatever, the smallest thing, it would say (*Mother takes on a severe tone*), “Look out, be careful!” So at first I used to lament about it, but by and by it taught me: “Must not lament: must put right, must mend.” And when things could be mended, I would do it — and almost always it could be done. All that at the level of intelligence of a child aged between five and seven.

So it was consciousness.

(25 July 1962)

4. Trance

For me, I came to know that I had this capacity because it made me prone to fainting — not too often, but it happened. When I was a child and did not know a thing, I fainted two or three times; the fainting, as it happened, was not unconscious — it was conscious, and after a bit of practice (not the practice of fainting!), of occult practice, when I fainted I would see myself. Even before that, I had seen myself but I did not know what it meant, I understood nothing. But I would see myself. And afterwards, whenever I would faint, the first thing I did was to see my body lying stretched out there in a ridiculous position. So I would rush back into it vigorously, and it would all be over.

Evidently, I was probably born with some predispositions! (*Laughter*)

(20 April 1963)

5. Going into Trance

There was another thing (*laughing*), even as a child, very young, suddenly, right in the middle of an action or a sentence or anything at all, I would go into trance — and nobody knew what it was! At that time, everyone thought that I had fallen asleep! But I remained conscious, with an arm raised or in the middle of a word, and pfft! Nothing there. (*Mother laughs*) Outwardly, nothing; inwardly, quite an intense, interesting experience. But that, it used to happen to me even when I was quite young.

I remember once, I must have been ten or twelve, there was a luncheon at my parents’ house for a dozen or so people, all in their Sunday best (they were members of the family but all the same it was a “luncheon” and there was a certain protocol; in short, one had to behave properly!) and I was at one end of the table next to a first-cousin of mine who later became director of the Louvre for a while (he had an artistic intelligence, a rather capable young man). So there we were, and I remember I was observing something in his atmosphere which was quite interesting, (mind you, I

knew nothing; if someone had spoken about “aura” and all that... nothing, I knew nothing of occult things but the faculties were already there). I was observing a kind of sensation I had in his atmosphere, and then, just as I was putting the fork into my mouth, I was gone! What a scolding I got! I was told that if I did not know how to behave properly, I should not come to the table! (*Mother laughs*)

It was during this period that I used to go out every night and every night I would do the work I have spoken of in *Prayers and Meditations* (I have only mentioned it in passing). [*February 22, 1914*] But every night, at the same time, when the whole house was very quiet, I would go out of my body and I had all kinds of experiences. And so, gradually, my body became a sleepwalker (that is to say, the connection remained solidly established and the consciousness of the form became more and more conscious), and I had got into the habit of getting up — but not like ordinary sleepwalkers: I would get up, open my desk, take out a sheet of paper and write poems.... I, who had nothing of the poet in me! Yes, poems! I would jot things down. And very consciously, I would put everything back into the drawer, close everything very carefully before going back to bed. Once, for some reason or other, I forgot: I left it open. My mother came in (it was my mother who would wake me up, because in France the windows are covered with heavy curtains, and so, she would come in in the morning and she would violently throw open the curtains and wake me up, brmm!, without any warning; but I was used to it and so I was already quite prepared to wake up, otherwise it would have been very unpleasant!). Anyway, she came in, calling me with unquestionable authority, and then she found the open desk and a paper: “What is this!” She took it. “What have you been up to?” I do not know what I replied, but she went to the doctor: “My daughter has become a sleepwalker! You have to give her a drug.”

It was not easy.

(5 August 1961)

6. *Contradictory Experiences*

...I have had the most contradictory experiences! There is only one thing that has been continuous from my childhood (and the more I look, the more I see that it was continuous like this): it was this divine Presence, and outwardly, someone who might very well have said, “God? What is this foolishness! There is no such thing as God!” So you understand, you see the picture.

This, you know, is a marvellous grace, marvellous, to have had this experience so constant, so powerful, like this, like something holding out against everything, everything, everything: this Presence. And in my outward consciousness, a total negation of everything. Even later, I used to say, “Well, if God exists, he’s a real scoundrel! He’s a wretch, I want nothing to do with this God who created us...”

You know, the idea of God who is sitting peacefully in his heaven, and then who creates the world and who amuses himself by watching it, then telling you afterwards, “How well it has been made!”

“Oh!” I said, “That monster, I don’t want it!”

(29 April 1961)

7. *Contact with the Higher Consciousness*

...from my earliest childhood, I had the contact with the higher consciousness (*gesture above the head*) and in a real stupefaction at the state of the earth and people — when I was very young. All the time I was in a stunned amazement. And I have received blows! ... Constantly. Each thing came to me as a stab or a punch or a hammer blow, and I would say to myself, “What? How is it possible?” You know, all the baseness, all the lies, all the hypocrisy, all that is crooked, all that distorts and undoes the flow of the Force. And I would see this in my parents, in circumstances, in friends, in everything — a stupefaction. It was not translated intellectually: it was translated by that stupefaction. And when I was very young, the Force was already there (*gesture above the head*); I have a clear memory from the age of five: I only had to sit down for a moment to feel it, that Force which would come. And I went through the whole of life, till the age of twenty or twenty-one (when I began to encounter the Knowledge and someone who explained to me what it was) like that, in that stupefaction: “What? — is this life? What? — is this what people are? What...?” And I was as though bruised by blows, my child!

Then, from the age of twenty or twenty-five, that habit of pessimism began. It took all that time, all those blows, for it to come.

But from the point of view of health, whenever I had an illness (for me it was never an “illness,” it was still part of the blows), I had a trust, a complete assurance that it had no reality. And very young (very young, maybe around the age of thirteen or fourteen), each time there was a blow, I would tell my body, “But what is the use of being ill since you will have to get well!” And that stayed for over thirty years: what’s the use of being ill since you have to get well? And it faded away only little by little, with that growing pessimism.

Now I have to undo all that work.

...

You understand, it was impossible, impossible for me to believe in (“believe” — even understand) all those movements of betrayal, of jealousy, all the movements of negation of the Divine in the human being and in things — it was impossible, I did not understand! But it came from every side, striking, striking, striking.... So all that had to be undone.

...

But we only have to hold out, that is all.

We must remove the imprint little by little. And the only way to remove it, precisely, is to make contact with the Truth. There is no other way...

(10 October 1964)

8. Her Grandmother

When my grandmother died... My grandmother, she had a feel for the occult. She had made her own fortune (a considerable fortune) and she had five children, each one more spendthrift than the others. And so she would tell me (she considered me the only sensible person in the family and she would confide in me), she would tell me, "You see, all these people, they will squander all my money!" She had a son who was sixty years old (because she had married very young, she had married in Egypt at the age of fifteen, and her son was sixty then), and so, she would tell me, "You see this boy, he goes out and visits impossible people! And then he starts playing cards and loses all my money!"

I saw this "boy", I was there in the house when it happened. He came and said very politely, "Good-bye, mother, I'm going out to so-and-so's house."

"Ah, please don't waste all my money, and take an overcoat because it is getting chilly at night."

Sixty years old! It was comical....

But to return to my story. My grandmother came after she died (I took a lot of care of her), she came to my mother (my mother was with her when she died; they embalmed her because she wanted to be burned, she had this idea in her head, and since she died at Nice they had to embalm her so she could be burned in Paris). I was in Paris. My mother arrived with her and told me, "Just imagine, I'm seeing her all the time! And what's more, she gives me advice! She tells me, 'Don't waste your money!'"

"Well, she's right, one must be careful," I replied.

"But she's dead! How can she talk to me! I tell you, she is dead, quite dead!"

I said to her, "What does it mean, to die?"

It was all very funny.

(5 August 1961)

9. Her Father

My father had a wonderful constitution, and he was strong! a steadiness. He wasn't very tall, but stocky. He had done all his studies in Austria (at that time French was widely spoken in Austria, but he knew German, he knew English, he knew Italian,

he knew Turkish...), and there he had learnt to ride horses in an extraordinary manner: he was so strong that he could make a horse to kneel simply by bending its knees. With one blow of his fist, he could break anything at all, a hundred-sous coin (those big silver hundred-sous coins we had then), one blow and it was broken in two. Curiously enough, he looked Russian. I don't know why. They used to call him Barine. What a steadiness! An extraordinary physical stability! And this man, not only did he know all those languages, but as far as arithmetic was concerned, I have never seen such a brain. Never. He would do the calculations, like that, as a game, without the least effort — calculations with hundreds of digits! And then, he loved birds. He had a room to himself in our apartment (because my mother could not much bear with him), he had his separate room, and there he had a big cage... full of canaries!

During the day he would close the windows and let all the canaries loose!

And what stories he could tell! He had read, I think, all possible kinds of serialised novels, all the stories: stories of extraordinary adventures, (he loved adventures), and so, when we were children, he would receive us in his room very early in the morning (he was still sitting in bed) and he would tell us stories — but he told the stories from the books he had read, but he told them as if they were his own stories. So, he had had extraordinary adventures — with outlaws, with wild animals.... All the stories he had picked up he told them as his own. We enjoyed it tremendously!

(5 August 1961)

10. A Splendid Education

I was brought up by an ascetic mother, a stoic, who was like an iron bar, and when we were very young, she spent her time telling us, my brother and me, again and again that we were not on earth to have fun, that it was a constant hell, but that one has to put up with it, and the only satisfaction one could have, was to do one's duty.

A splendid education...!

Splendid. I am infinitely grateful to her.

(29 May 1962)

11. Her Mother

I remember, once.... She would scold me quite often (but it was very good, it is a very good lesson!), she would scold me very, very often — for things I had not done! Once she scolded me for something I had done but which she had not understood (that I had done with the best of intentions); she reproached me for it as if it was an

act... that should not be done (it was something I had given to someone without asking her permission!). At first I stiffened and said, "I did not do it." She started to say I was lying. So, without saying a word, all of a sudden, I looked at her and I felt... I felt all the human misery and all the human falsehood, and then, soundlessly, the tears began to flow. She said, "What! Now you are crying!" At that, I became a bit *fed up*. I told her, "Oh, I'm not crying about myself, but because of the world's misery."

"You're going mad!"

She really believed I was going mad.

It was quite funny.

It is strange.... I say it is "strange" because it is due to her that I took birth in this body, it has been chosen. When she was very young she had a great aspiration. (She was exactly twenty years older than I; she was twenty when I was born; I was her third child. The first was a son who died in Turkey when he was two months old, I think... Then there was my brother who was born in Egypt, at Alexandria, and then me, born in Paris) and she was exactly twenty years old. At that time she had (especially since the death of her first child) a kind of great aspiration in her: her children had to be "the best in the world." It was not an ambition, (I do not know what it was). And she had a will! My mother had a formidable will, like an iron bar, absolutely immune to any outside influence. Once she had decided, it was decided; even if someone were there, dying, she would not have budged! And she had decided: "My children will be the best in the world."

There was one thing, she had a sense of progress; she felt that the world was progressing and we had to be better than anything that had come before — and that was enough.

And it was enough, it is strange...

(5 August 1961)

12. Her Brother

Did I tell you what happened to my brother? No?... My brother was a terribly serious boy, and terribly studious — oh, it was terrible! But anyway, also a very strong character, a strong will, and interesting, there was something interesting in him. (When he was studying for the *Polytechnique*, I studied with him — it interested me.) We were very intimate (there were only eighteen months between us) and he was quite violent, but with such an extraordinary strength of character. He almost killed me three times, the third time my mother told him, "Next time, you will kill her." So he took the resolution that it would not happen again — and it never happened. But what I wanted to tell you is that at eighteen, when he was preparing for the *Polytechnique* exams, just before that, one day, as he was crossing the Seine (I think

it was the Pont des Arts), in the middle, suddenly... he felt something descend into him that so strongly immobilised him that he remained like that, petrified; then, although he didn't exactly hear a voice, but it came very clearly to him: "If you want, you can become a god" (it was translated like that in his consciousness). He told me that it took hold of him entirely, immobilised him, a formidable power and extremely luminous: "If you want, you can become a god." Then, there in the experience itself, right then, he replied, "No, I want to serve humanity." And it was gone. Of course, he took great care to say nothing to my mother, but we were intimate enough for him to tell me about it. So I told him, "Well (*laughing*), what an idiot you are!"

That is it...

Therefore, at that moment, he could have had a spiritual realisation: he had the stuff in him.

(5 August 1961)

13. *Her Mother*

...It was a little later (a few years later, three years later), that I had the experience I told you about — of the Light piercing through me; I saw it physically entering into me. It was evidently the descent of a Being — not a past incarnation, a Being from a plane. It was a golden light. It was an incarnation of a divine consciousness.

Therefore, it proves that she succeeded for both her children.

(5 August 1961)

14. *Faith in One's Destiny*

There was an aviator, one of the great "aces" as they are called of the First [World] War, and a marvellous aviator. He had won numerous battles, nothing had ever happened to him. But something occurred in his life and suddenly he felt that something was going to happen to him, an accident, that it was now all over. What they call their "good luck" had gone. This man left the military to enter civil aviation and he piloted one of these lines — no, not civil aviation: the war ended, but he continued flying military airplanes. And then he wanted to make a trip to South Africa: from France to South Africa. Evidently, something must have been upset in his consciousness (I did not know him personally, so I don't know what happened). He started from a certain city in France to go to Madagascar, I believe (I am not sure, I think it was Madagascar). And from there he wanted to come back to France. My brother was at that time governor of the Congo, and he wanted to get back quickly to his post. He asked to be allowed as a passenger on the plane (it was one of those planes for professional tours, to show what these planes could do). Many people

wanted to dissuade my brother from going by it; they told him, “No, these trips are always dangerous, you must not go on them.” But finally he went all the same. They had a breakdown and stopped in the middle of the Sahara, a situation not very pleasant. Yet everything was arranged as by a miracle, the plane started again and put down my brother in the Congo, exactly where he wanted to go, then it went farther south. And soon after, half-way the plane crashed — and the other man was killed.... It was obvious that this had to happen. But my brother had an absolute faith in his destiny, a certitude that nothing would happen. And it was translated in this way: the mixture of the two atmospheres made the dislocation unavoidable, for there was a breakdown in the Sahara and the plane was obliged to land, but finally everything was in order and there was no real accident. But once he was no longer there, the other man had all the force of his “ill-luck” (if you like), and the accident was complete and he was killed.

(23 December 1953)

15. “You are Born to Realise the Highest Ideal”

When, as a child, I used to complain to my mother about food or any such small matter she would always tell me to go and do my work or pursue my studies instead of bothering about trifles. She would ask me if I had the complacent idea that I was born for comfort. “You are born to realise the highest Ideal,” she would say and send me packing. She was quite right, though of course her notion of the highest Ideal was rather poor by our standards. We are all born for the highest Ideal: therefore, whenever in our Ashram some petty request for more comfort and material happiness is refused, it is for your own good and to make you fulfil what you are here for. The refusal is actually a favour inasmuch as you are thereby considered worthy to stand before the highest Ideal and be shaped according to it.

(1930-31)

16. Telling Stories

...there is a world in which you are the supreme maker of forms: that is your own particular vital world. You are the supreme fashioner and you can make a marvel of your world if you know how to use it. If you have an artistic or poetic consciousness, if you love harmony, beauty, you will build there something marvellous which will tend to spring up into the material manifestation. When I was small I used to call this “telling stories to oneself”. It is not at all a telling with words, in one’s head: it is a going away to this place which is fresh and pure, and... building up a wonderful story there. And if you know how to tell yourself a story in this way, and if it is truly

beautiful, truly harmonious, truly powerful and well co-ordinated, this story will be realised in your life — perhaps not exactly in the form in which you created it, but as a more or less changed physical expression of what you made.

That may take years, perhaps, but your story will tend to organise your life.

But there are very few people who know how to tell a beautiful story; and then they always mix horrors in it, which they regret later.

If one could create a magnificent story without any horror in it, nothing but beauty, it would have a *considerable* influence on everyone's life. And this is what people don't know.

If one knew how to use this power, this creative power in the world of vital forms, if one knew how to use this while yet a child, a very small child... for it is then that one fashions his material destiny. But usually people around you, sometimes even your own little friends, but mostly parents and teachers, dabble in it and spoil everything for you, so well that very seldom does the thing succeed completely.

But otherwise, if it were done like that, with the spontaneous candour of a child, you could organise a wonderful life for yourself — I am speaking of the physical world.

The dreams of childhood are the realities of mature age.

(18 April 1956)

17. *Scolded All the Time*

This is something I have heard from my very childhood, and I believe our great grandparents heard the same thing, and from all time it has been preached that if you want to succeed in something you must do only that. And as for me, I was scolded all the time because I did many different things! And I was always told I would never be good at anything. I studied, I did painting, I did music, and besides was busy with other things still. And I was told my music wouldn't be up to much, my painting wouldn't be worthwhile, and my studies would be quite incomplete. Probably it is quite true, but still I have found that this had its advantages — those very advantages I am speaking about, of widening, making supple one's mind and understanding. It is true that if I had wanted to be a first-class player and to play in concerts, it would have been necessary to do what they said. And as for painting, if I had wanted to be among the great artists of the time, it would have been necessary to do that. That's quite understandable. But still, that is just one point of view. I don't see any necessity of being the greatest artist, the greatest musician. That has always seemed to me a vanity. And besides, it is a question of opinion....

(10 February 1954)

18. Master Rather than Slave

But if you are consciously organised, unified around the divine centre, ruled and directed by it, you are master of your destiny. That is worth the trouble of attempting.... In any case, I find it preferable to be the master rather than the slave. It is a rather unpleasant sensation to feel yourself pulled by the strings and made to do things whether you want to or not — it makes no difference — but to be compelled to act because something pulls you by the strings, something which you do not even see — that is exasperating. However, I do not know, but I found it very annoying, even when I was a little child. At five, it began to seem to me quite intolerable and I sought for a way so that it might be otherwise — without people getting a chance to scold me. For I knew nobody who could help me and I did not have the chance that you have, someone who can tell you: “This is what you have to do!” There was nobody to tell me that. I had to find it out all by myself. And I found it. I started at five. And you, you were five long ago....

(1 July 1953)

19. The Grief of Another

...One lives amidst constant collective suggestions, constantly; for example, I don't know if you have been present at funerals, or if you have been in a house where someone has died — naturally you must observe yourself a little, otherwise you won't notice anything — but if you observe yourself a little, you will see that you had no special reason to feel any sorrow or grief whatever for the passing away of this person; he is a person like many others; this has happened and by a combination of social circumstances you have come to that house. And there, suddenly, without knowing why or how, you feel a strong emotion, a great sorrow, a deep pain, and you ask yourself, “Why am I so unhappy?” It is quite simply the vibrations which have entered you, nothing else.

And I tell you it is easy to observe, for it is an experience I had when I was a little child — and at that time I was not yet doing conscious yoga; perhaps I was doing yoga but not consciously — and I observed it very, very clearly. I told myself, “Surely it is their sorrow I am feeling, for I have no reason to be especially affected by this person's death”; and all of a sudden, tears came to my eyes, I felt as though a lump were in my throat and I wanted to cry, as though I were in great sorrow — I was a small child — and immediately I understood, “Oh! it is their sorrow which has come inside me.”

It is the same thing for anger.

(8 February 1956)

20. *Nothing Miraculous*

...once, in a room as long as this one and wider [12m x 4m] which was the salon in my family's house, there were some young friends who had come and we were playing. I told them, "I will show you something, how one should dance." I went to a corner of the salon to get the longest distance from one corner to another, and I told them, "One single step in the middle." And I did it! (*Mother laughs*) I sprang (I didn't even feel I was jumping, it was as if I were dancing, you know, as when they dance on tiptoe), landed on my toes, leaped up again and reached the other corner — one cannot do that alone, not even champions. The length surpassed the records, because afterwards I asked here, when we started physical exercises in the Ashram, I asked what the longest jump was — that one was longer! And they take a run-up, you see, they run and then jump. But I had not run: I was standing in the corner, and hop! (I said "hop!" to myself, soundlessly), and frrrt! I landed on my toes, leaped again and reached the other side — I was carried, quite evidently.

All this took place before the age of thirteen or fourteen (between eight and thirteen or fourteen). Many things of the kind, but which seemed perfectly natural to me — I never had the impression that I was doing something miraculous.

Perfectly natural.

(9 March 1963)

21. *Being Carried*

I remember also, once, there were hoops (I do not know if they are still there) bordering the lawns in the Bois de Boulogne — and I used to take a walk on them! It was a challenge I threw to my brother, (...he was older — and much better behaved!), and so I told him, "Can you walk on these?"

He said, "Leave me alone, it's not interesting."

I told him, "Just watch!" And I started walking on them, with such ease! As if I had done it all my life. And it was the same phenomenon: I felt weightless.

It was the feeling, always, of being carried: something that was holding me up, something that was carrying me.

From the age of thirteen or fourteen years, it became more difficult. But before that, it was really fine.

(9 March 1963)

22. *At the Edge of the Forest*

...when I was eleven or twelve, that was the time when my mother had rented a small house at the edge of the forest: we didn't have to go through the town. I

would go out and sit all alone in the forest. I would sit and then I would dream. One day (it happened often), one day some squirrels had come, several birds, and also (*Mother opens her eyes wide*), some does, looking on.... How lovely it was! When I opened my eyes and saw them, I found it charming — they went away.

(9 March 1963)

23. *Real Fairy Tales*

When I was six or eight, I used to eat with my brother, and to get ourselves to eat we were obliged to tell ourselves stories! We were given meat, you see, pieces of beefsteak, it was a nightmare! So my trick was to tell my brother, “I am an ogre ... and before me is half an ox,” and with each slash of my knife I would carve my ox! — I would tell a story to myself and finish swallowing my beefsteak!

...

Of course! I used to make up lots and lots of them!... Real fairy tales in which everything is so lovely, everything works out so nicely — not a single misery. Nothing but lovely things....

(10 November 1965)

24. *Other Times, Other Lives*

I had, when I was young — between ten and twelve years, I think, — some rather interesting experiences which I did not understand at all. I had some history books — history books they give you to learn history — and I would be reading it, and then all of a sudden, it was as if the book were becoming transparent, or the printed words were becoming transparent, and I would see something else or would see pictures. I did not know at all what was happening to me! And it seemed to me so natural that I thought it was like that for everybody. But I was close to my brother (he was only a year and a half older), and so I would tell him, “You see, they are talking nonsense in history, — it is LIKE THIS; it is not like that: it is LIKE THIS!” And several times I got exact corroborations regarding the details on one person or another. And they were, (I see it now, I understood later), they were certainly memories. But I even said about what was written, “But it is stupid! It was never like that; THIS is how it was said. It never happened like that; it happened like THIS.” And it was the book — the book was open, I was just working like any other child and... all of a sudden something would happen. Of course, it was something in me, but I used to think it was in the book!

(30 June 1962)

25. *Always Learning*

From my earliest childhood I have not stopped observing things. When I was very young I was chided for never speaking. It was because I spent my time observing. I passed my time observing, I registered everything, I learnt all I could, I did not stop learning. Well, I can still feel surprised. Suddenly I find myself looking at such twisted, insincere and obscure movements that I tell myself, “It is not possible. Can such a thing exist?” Indeed, things which still come to me, day after day, “It is not possible! In the world things happen in this way?” And yet I have seen a great number of people, I began being interested in people when very young, I have seen many countries, done what I recommend to others; in every country I lived the life of that country in order to understand it well, and there is nothing which interested me in my outer being as much as learning.

Well, now I still feel that I know nothing.

(9 June 1954)

26. *A Need to Know*

I remember, when I was eighteen, at that time there was in me an intense need to know... Because the experiences, I used to have then — I had had all kinds of experiences — but because of the surroundings in which I was living, I had not had any opportunity to receive the intellectual knowledge which would have given a meaning to all that, I could not talk about it. I had had experiences and experiences... For years, at night, I had experiences (but I was careful not to talk about it). All sorts of recollections of past lives, all sorts of things, but without any intellectual base. (Naturally, the advantage was that my experiences were not mentally made up, it was absolutely spontaneous.) But I had in me such a need to know!... I remember, I was living in a house (one of those buildings where there are many apartments) and there were in the adjoining apartment some young persons who were very strict Catholics and who had a faith which was very — they were very much convinced. And so I would see this, and I remember, one day, as I was getting ready, (I was doing my hair), I told myself, “They are lucky, the people who are born in a religion and who believe without questioning. How easy it is! one has only to believe, and then it is so simple.” I was feeling like this, and when I realised I was thinking like this (*laughs*), well, I gave myself a good talking-to: “You lazybones!”

To know, to know, to know!... Isn’t it, I knew nothing, nothing, nothing, only the things of ordinary life: external knowledge. I had learnt everything I had been given to learn. I learnt not only what I was taught but what my brother was taught — higher mathematics and all that! And I learnt and I learnt and I learnt — and it was nothing. None of it explained anything to me — nothing. I could not understand a thing!

To know!...

It happened to me later... two years later....

When I was told that the Divine was within (the teaching of the Gita, but in words that Westerners could understand,) that there was an inner Presence, that one carried the Divine within oneself, oh! ...it was a revelation! Isn't it, in a few minutes, everything, everything, I suddenly understood everything. Understood everything. It brought the contact instantaneously.

(29 April 1961)

27. A Period of Learning

Next, there was the period when one learns and one develops, but all that on the ordinary mental level, that is to say, studies. Curiosity made me want to learn to read. It happened like this, perhaps I have already told you... My brother would come back from school (I was around seven, just under seven, my brother was eighteen months older), he used to come home with those big pictures used even now, (you know, those drawings for children with small captions at the bottom), he came home and he gave me one of them.

I asked him, "What is written there?"

"Read it!" he said.

"Don't know how," I replied.

"Learn!"

So I told him, "All right, give me the letters."

He brought me a book with letters to learn the alphabet. In two days I knew it and on the third day I started reading. That is how I learnt. "Oh," they used to say, "this child is backward! Seven years old and she still can't read, it is disgraceful!" The whole family complained about it. But it so happened that, in about a week I knew what should have taken me years to learn — it gave them something to think about!

Then, the studies. I was always a very bright student, always for the same reason: I wanted to understand. Whereas the others learnt by heart, that did not interest me. I wanted to understand. And I had a good memory, a memory for sounds and images, fantastic! I had only to read a poem aloud at night, and the next morning I knew it. And after I had studied or read a book and someone spoke to me about it, I would say, "Ah, yes, that's on page so and so." I would find the page. Nothing had faded, it was still fresh. But this is the ordinary period of development.

Then at a very young age (about eight or ten), I began to paint, continuing with my studies and painting. At twelve I was already doing portraits. And the eagerness, an interest in all things of art, of beauty: music, painting. And it was a period of my life when there was a very intense development of the vital, a development in the

same way as when I was very young, with a kind of inner Guide, and it was a whole study — study of sensations, study of observation, study of execution, comparison, etc... and even study of taste, study of smell, study of hearing — with a whole range of observations. That is to say, a kind of a classification of experiences. And this has continued with all the events of my life, all the experiences that life can give — everything, everything, all the experiences, isn't it, the miseries, the joys, the difficulties, the sufferings — all, all, oh, a whole field! But always with “this” within, which was judging, deciding, classifying, organising, and making a sort of system...

(25 July 1962)

28. Studies

I remember, I clearly remember my attitude when I was studying, and I clearly remember all my classmates and which one was to me an intelligent girl, which one a chatterbox.... I have some very amusing memories like that, because I could not understand what it meant to learn in order to seem to know (I had a tremendous memory at the time, but didn't make use of it). And I liked only what I had understood.

Once in my life I took an exam (I do not remember which one), but I was just at the age limit, which means that I was too young to sit at the time of the regular exam, so they had me sit with those who had failed the first exam (I sat at that time because it was autumn, and I was old enough then). And I remember, it was a small group, the teachers were greatly annoyed because their holidays had been cut short, and the students were for the most part rather mediocre, or else rebellious. So I was observing all that (I was very young, you understand, I don't remember, thirteen or fourteen), I was observing all that, and there was a poor little girl who had been called to the blackboard for a problem in mathematics, and she did not know how to do it, she kept spluttering. Me (I was not being questioned just then), I looked and smiled — oh, dear! The teacher saw me and was very displeased with me and as soon as the girl was sent back, he called me and said to me, “You do it.” Well, naturally (I loved mathematics very much, really very much, and I understood, it made sense), so I did the problem — the fellow's face!... You see, I was not in that [*in the small outward person*]: I was constantly a witness. And I had the most extraordinary fun. So I know the way children are, the way teachers are, I know all that, I had great fun, really great fun....

At home, my brother was studying advanced mathematics (it was to enter the *Polytechnique*), and he found it difficult, so my mother had engaged a tutor to coach him. I was... younger than my brother. I used to look on, and everything was clear: the why, the how, it was clear. So the teacher was working hard, my brother was working hard, when all of a sudden I said, “But it's like this!” Then I saw the teacher's

face!... It seems he went and told my mother, "It's your daughter who should be studying!" (*Mother laughs*) And all that, it was like a picture, you understand, so funny, so funny!

For a time I attended a private school (I did not go to a state school because my mother considered it unfitting for a girl to be in a state school! But I was in a private school), a school of high repute at the time: their teachers were really capable people. The geography teacher had written books (he was a man of renown), he had written well-known books on geography and he was a fine man. So then, we were doing geography. (The maps were for me the most enjoyable because we drew all that). One day, the teacher looked at me (he was an intelligent man), he looked at me and asked, "Why are towns, the big cities, found on the banks of rivers?" I saw the students' bewildered looks, they were saying to themselves, "Luckily the question wasn't put to me!" I replied, "But it is very simple! It is because rivers are a natural means of communication." (*Mother laughs*) He too was surprised!... That's how it was, all my studies were like that, I enjoyed myself all the time — enjoyed myself thoroughly, it was great fun!

The teacher of literature... He was an old fellow full of all the most conventional ideas imaginable. What a bore he was, oh!... So all the students sat there, assiduous. He would give subjects for essays — do you know *The Path of Later On and the Road of Tomorrow*? I wrote it when I was twelve, it was my homework on his question! He had given a proverb (now I forget the words) and expected to be told... all the sensible things! I told my story, that little story. It was written at the age of twelve. And so, he would eye me with unease! (*laughing*) He expected me to make a scene.... Oh, but I was a good girl!

But always like that: with that something that looks on and sees the sheer ridiculousness of this life which takes itself so seriously! Oh!

...

There was only one instance that I recall when I took things seriously, and even then, (*laughing*) I put on a serious look. It was concerning my brother, who was still quite young (he may have been twelve, perhaps less: ten, and I eight — no, nine and eleven, something like that, children). My brother was quick-tempered, he was easily angered and would speak very bluntly, almost harshly. One day he talked back at my father (I do not know why, I do not remember); my father was furious and put him across his knees (my father was an extremely strong man, I mean physically strong), he put my brother across his knees and... (*laughing*) was spanking him; he had pulled his pants down and was spanking him. I entered and I saw that, (it was taking place in the dining room), I saw that, saw my father, I looked at him, and said to myself, "But this man is mad!" And I told him, "You will stop it at once, or I'm leaving the house." ...And I said it with such seriousness, oh! And I was resolute. And my father... (*laughing*) was flabbergasted.

All those memories have come back like that. So now I remember to what extent

— to what extent the consciousness was already there. But it was amusing.

...

And the ease: whatever I wanted to do, I could do it. But there was one thing (now I understand, at the time I did not know why it was so): whatever I wanted to do, I could do it, but after a time, I had experienced the thing and it did not seem to me important enough to devote a whole life to it. So I would move on to something else: painting, music, science, literature... everything, everything, and practical things. And always with extraordinary ease. And then, after a while, well, I would leave it. So my mother (she was a very stern person) would say, “My daughter is incapable of seeing anything through to the end.” And it remained like that: incapable of seeing anything through to the end — always taking up something, always like that, leaving it, then after a time taking up something else.... “Unstable. Unstable, she will never achieve anything in life!” (*Mother laughs*)

And it is true, it was the childlike transcription of the need for ever more, ever better, ever more, ever better... endlessly — the sense of advance, an advance towards perfection. A perfection that I felt to be quite beyond anything men conceive, something... a “something”, a something which was indefinable, but which one seeks through everything.

So all that has come back to be sorted out, to be put in its place, offered (*gesture upward*), and now, it is over.

(26 July 1967)

29. *Opportunity for Progress*

...every event in life, great or small, can be an opportunity for progress.... To help you understand what I mean, I shall give you two examples....

The first example takes place in Paris. You have to go out into this immense city; here all is noise, apparent confusion, bewildering activity. Suddenly you see a woman walking in front of you; she is like most other women, her dress has nothing striking about it, but her gait is remarkable, supple, rhythmic, elegant, harmonious. It catches your attention and you are full of wonder. Then, this body moving along so gracefully reminds you of all the splendours of ancient Greece and the unparalleled lesson in beauty which its culture gave to the whole world, and you live an unforgettable moment — all that just because of a woman who knows how to walk!

The second example is from the other end of the world, from Japan. You have just arrived in this beautiful country for a long stay and very soon you find out that unless you have at least a minimum knowledge of the language, it will be very difficult for you to get along. So you begin to study Japanese and in order to become familiar with the language you do not miss a single opportunity to hear people talking, you

listen to them carefully, you try to understand what they are saying; and then, beside you, in a tram where you have just taken your seat, there is a small child of four or five years with his mother. The child begins to talk in a clear and pure voice and listening to him you have the remarkable experience that he knows spontaneously what you have to learn with so much effort, and that as far as Japanese is concerned he could be your teacher in spite of his youth.

In this way life becomes full of wonder and gives you a lesson at each step. Looked at from this angle, it is truly worth living.

(November 1953)

30. To Learn at Every Moment

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 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.

(13 May 1953)

31. *Projection*

Even this simple little thing, to see where in your consciousness the wills that come from outside meet your will (which you call yours, which comes from within), at what place the two join together and to what extent the one from outside acts upon that from within and the one from within acts upon that from outside? You have never tried to find this out? It has never seemed to you unbearable that a will from outside should have an action upon your will? No?

I do not know.

Oh! I am putting very difficult problems! But, my children, I was preoccupied with that when I was a child of five!... So I thought you must have been preoccupied with it since a long time.

In oneself, there are contradictory wills.

Yes, many. That is one of the very first discoveries. There is one part which wants things this way; and then at another moment, another way, and a third time, one wants still another thing! Besides, there is even this: something that wants and another which says no. So? But it is exactly that which has to be found if you wish in the least to organise yourself. Why not project yourself upon a screen, as in the cinema, and then look at yourself moving on it? How interesting it is!

This is the first step.

You project yourself on the screen and then observe and see all that is moving there and how it moves and what happens. You make a little diagram, it becomes so interesting then. And then, after a while, when you are quite accustomed to seeing, you can go one step further and take a decision. Or even a still greater step: you organise — arrange, take up all that, put each thing in its place, organise in such a way that you begin to have a straight movement with an inner meaning. And then you become conscious of your direction and are able to say: “Very well, it will be thus; my life will develop in that way, because that is the logic of my being. Now, I have arranged all that within me, each thing has been put in its place, and so naturally a central orientation is forming. I am following this orientation. One step more and I

know what will happen to me for I myself am deciding it....” I do not know, I am telling you this; to me it seemed terribly interesting, the most interesting thing in the world. There was nothing, no other thing that interested me more than that.

This happened to me.... I was five or six or seven years old (at seven the thing became quite serious) and I had a father who loved the circus, and he came and told me: “Come with me, I am going to the circus on Sunday.” I said: “No, I am doing something much more interesting than going to the circus!” Or again, young friends invited me to attend a meeting where we were to play together, enjoy together: “No, I enjoy... much more....” And it was quite sincere. It was not a pose: for me, it was like this, it was true. There was nothing in the world more enjoyable than that.

And I am so convinced that anybody who does it in that way, with the same freshness and sincerity, will obtain most interesting results....

(29 July 1953)

32. Going Out of the Body

...the number of persons who remain conscious under chloroform is greater than one thinks; but generally, when one wakes up from chloroform one feels pretty uneasy and remembers but vaguely his experiences outside the body. Is there anyone here who has fainted suddenly, as if by accident? You see your body, don't you? And you ask yourself, “But what is it doing there in that ridiculous position?” And you rush back into it! That happened to me once in Paris. I had been treated to a good dinner, and then I went to a conference hall, I believe. There were many people, it was very hot, I was standing there with the good dinner in my stomach, and suddenly I felt ill at ease. I told the person who was with me, “I must go out immediately.” Once outside, (it was in Trocadero Square), I fainted away completely. I saw my body there, stretched out, and I found it so ridiculous that I rushed into it and I gave it a good scolding, saying, “You must not play such tricks with me!”

(19 February 1951)

33. Subtle Perceptions

But for more subtle things, the method is to make for yourself an exact image of what you want, to come into contact with the corresponding vibration, and then to concentrate and do exercises — such as to practise seeing through an object or hearing through a sound, or seeing at a distance. For example, once, for a long time, for several months, I was confined to bed and I found it rather boring — I wanted to see. I was in a room and at one end there was another little room and at the end of the little room there was a kind of bridge; in the middle of the garden the bridge became

a staircase leading down into a very big and very beautiful studio, standing in the middle of the garden. I wanted to go and see what was happening in the studio, for I was feeling bored in my room. So I would remain very quiet, close my eyes and send out my consciousness, little by little, little by little, little by little. And day after day — I chose a fixed time and did the exercise regularly. At first you make use of your imagination and then it becomes a fact. After some time I really had the physical sensation that my vision was moving; I followed it and then I could see things downstairs which I knew nothing about. I would check afterwards. In the evening I would ask, “Was this like that? And was that like this?”

[Mother explained later: “To hear behind the sound is to come into contact with the subtle reality which is behind the material fact, behind the word or the physical sound or behind music, for example. One concentrates and then one hears what is behind. It means coming into contact with the vital reality which is behind the appearances. There can also be a mental reality, but generally, what lies immediately behind the physical sound is a vital reality.”]

But for each one of these things you must practise for months with patience, with a kind of obstinacy. You take the senses one by one, hearing, sight, and you can even arrive at subtle realities of taste, smell and touch.

(27 February 1962)

34. *Shooting Star*

Sweet Mother, it is said that if one sees a shooting star and at that moment one aspires for something, that aspiration is fulfilled within the year. Is this true?

Do you know what that means? — The aspiration must be formulated *during the time* the star is visible; and that doesn’t last long, does it? Well, if an aspiration can be formulated while the star is visible, this means that it is all the time *there*, present, in the forefront of the consciousness — this does not apply to ordinary things, it has nothing to do with that, it concerns a spiritual aspiration. But the point is that if you are able to articulate your spiritual aspiration just at that moment, it means that it is right in front of your consciousness, that it dominates your consciousness. And, necessarily, what dominates your consciousness can be realised very swiftly.

I had the opportunity to make this experiment. Exactly this. The moment the star was passing, at that very moment there sprang up from the consciousness: “To realise the divine union, for my body.” That very moment.

And before the end of the year, it was done.

But it was not because of the star! It was because that dominated my whole consciousness and I was thinking of nothing but that, I wanted only that, thought only of that, acted only for that. So, this thing which generally takes a whole lifetime — it is said the minimum time is thirty-five years! — before twelve months had passed, it was done.

But that was because I thought only of that.

And it was because I was thinking only of that, that just when the star flashed by I could formulate it — not merely a vague impression — formulate it in precise words like this: “To realise union with the Divine”, the inner Divine, the thing we speak of, the very thing we speak of.

Therefore, what is important is not the star but the aspiration. The star is only like an outer demonstration, nothing else. But it is not necessary to have a shooting star in order to realise swiftly! What is necessary is that the whole will of the being should be concentrated on one point.

(4 July 1956)

35. *The Spectators*

There are, in Paris, theatres of the third or fourth rank where sensational dramas are performed. These are suburban theatres. They are not for intellectuals but for the masses, and all the elements are always extremely dramatic, moving. Well, those who go there are mostly very simple people and forget completely that they are in a theatre. They identify themselves with the drama. And so, things like this happen: on the stage there is the traitor hiding behind the door, and the hero comes along, not aware naturally that the traitor is hiding there and he is going to be killed. Now, there are people sitting up there (in what is called the gallery), right up in the theatre, who shout: “Look out, he is there!” (*Laughter*) It has not happened just once, it happens hundreds of times, spontaneously. I had seen a play of this kind called *Le Bossu*, I believe; anyway it was quite a sensational drama and it was being played at the *Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin*. In this play there was a room. On the stage a large room could be seen and at its side a small room and... I don’t remember the story now, but in the small room there was a button which could be pressed, and by pressing the button the ceiling of the bigger room could be brought down on those who were there so as to crush them inexorably!... And a warning had been given, people had already spoken about it, passed on the word. And now there was a traitor who had hidden himself in the little room and he knew the trick of the button, and then there was the hero who came in with other people, and they started arguing; and everyone knew that the ceiling was going to come down.... I didn’t say anything, I remembered I was in the theatre, I was waiting to see how the author was going to get out of this situation to save his hero (for it was evident he couldn’t kill him off like that before everybody!). But the others were not at all in the same state. Well, there were spectators who shouted, really shouted: “Look out, mind the ceiling!” That’s how it was.

(12 August 1953)

36. *Concentration*

When I was in Paris, I used to go to many places where there were gatherings of all kinds, people making all sorts of researches, spiritual (so-called spiritual), occult researches, etc. And once I was invited to meet a young lady (I believe she was Swedish) who had found a method of knowledge, exactly a method for learning. And so she explained it to us. We were three or four (her French was not very good but she was quite sure about what she was saying!); she said: "It's like this, you take an object or make a sign on a blackboard or take a drawing — that is not important — take whatever is most convenient for you. Suppose, for instance, that I draw for you... (she had a blackboard) I draw a design." She drew a kind of half-geometric design. "Now, you sit in front of the design and concentrate all your attention upon it — upon that design which is there. You concentrate, concentrate without letting anything else enter your consciousness — except that. Your eyes are fixed on the drawing and don't move at all. You are as it were hypnotised by the drawing. You look (and so she sat there, looking), you look, look, look.... I don't know, it takes more or less time, but still for one who is used to it, it goes pretty fast. You look, look, look, you *become* that drawing you are looking at. Nothing else exists in the world any longer except the drawing, and then, suddenly, you pass to the other side; and when you pass to the other side you enter a new consciousness, and you know."

We had a good laugh, for it was amusing. But it is quite true, it is an excellent method to practise. Naturally, instead of taking a drawing or any object, you may take, for instance, an idea, a few words. You have a problem preoccupying you, you don't know the solution of the problem; well, you objectify your problem in your mind, put it in the most precise, exact, succinct terms possible, and then concentrate, make an effort; you concentrate only on the words, and if possible on the idea they represent, that is, upon your problem — you concentrate, concentrate, concentrate until nothing else exists but that. And it is true that, all of a sudden, you have the feeling of something opening, and one is on the other side. The other side of what?... It means that you have opened a door of your consciousness, and instantaneously you have the solution of your problem.

(12 August 1953)

37. *No Fear*

I practised occultism when I was twelve. But I must say I had no fear, I feared nothing. One goes out of one's body, but is tied by something resembling an almost imperceptible thread; if the thread is cut, it is all over. Life also is ended. One goes out, and then can begin seeing the world he has entered. And usually the first things one sees, as I said, are terrifying. Because, for you the air is empty, there is nothing in it — you see something blue or white, there are clouds, sunbeams, and all that is

very pretty — but when you have the other sight, you see that it is filled with a multitude of small formations which are all residues of desires or of mental deformation and these swarm inside it, you see, in a mass, and this is not always very pretty. At times it is extremely ugly. This assails you; it comes, presses upon you, attacks you; and if you are afraid, it takes absolutely frightful forms. Naturally, if you do not flinch, if you can look upon all that with a healthy curiosity, you perceive that it is not at all so terrifying. It may not be pretty, but it is not terrifying.

I could tell you a little story.

I knew a Danish painter who was quite talented and who wanted to learn occultism. He had come here, you know, had met Sri Aurobindo; he had even done his portrait. That was during the war, and when he came back to France, he wanted me to teach him a little of this occult science. I taught him how to go out of his body etc., and the controls, all that. And I told him that, above all, the first thing was not to have any fear. Then, one day he came to tell me that he had had a dream the night before. But it was not a dream, for, as I have told you, he knew a bit about how to go out of his body, and he had gone out consciously. And once he had gone out he was looking around seeing what was to be seen, when suddenly he saw a formidable tiger coming towards him, drawing close with the most frightful intentions.... He remembered what I had told him, that he must not be afraid. So he began to say to himself, “There is no danger, I am protected, nothing can happen to me, I am wrapped up in the power of protection”, and he began looking at the tiger in that way, without any fear. And as he went on looking at the tiger, immediately it began to grow smaller and smaller and smaller and — it became a tiny little cat! (*Laughter*)

(3 March 1954)

38. Like the Chick in the Egg

When I began studying occultism, I became aware that — just when I began to work upon my nights in order to make them conscious — I became aware that there was between the subtle-physical and the most material vital a small region, very small, which was not sufficiently developed to serve as a conscious link between the two activities. So what took place in the consciousness of the most material vital did not get translated exactly in the consciousness of the most subtle physical. Some of it got lost on the way because it was like a — not positively a void but something only half-conscious, not sufficiently developed. I knew there was only one way, that was to work to develop it. I began working. This happened sometime about the month of February, I believe. One month, two months, three, four, no result. We go on. Five months, six months... it was at the end of July or the beginning of August. I left Paris, the house I was staying in, and went to the countryside, quite a small place

on the seashore, to stay with some friends who had a garden. Now, in that garden there was a lawn — you know what a lawn is, don't you? Grass — where there were flowers and around it some trees. It was a fine place, very quiet, very silent. I lay on the grass, like this, flat on my stomach, my elbows in the grass, and then suddenly all the life of that Nature, all the life of that region between the subtle-physical and the most material vital, which is very living in plants and in Nature, all that region became all at once, suddenly, without any transition, absolutely living, intense, conscious, marvellous; and this was the result, wasn't it?, of six months of work which had given nothing. I had not noticed anything; but just a little shift like that and the result was there! It is like the chick in the egg, yes! It is there for a very long time and yet one sees nothing at all. And one wonders whether there is indeed a chick in the egg; and then, suddenly "Tick!", there is a tiny hole, you know, and then everything bursts and out comes the chick! It is quite ready, but it took all that time to be formed; that's how it is. When you want to prepare something within you, that is how it is, it is like the chick in the egg. You need a very long time, and this without having the least result, never getting discouraged, and continuing your effort, absolutely regularly, as though you had eternity before you and, moreover, as though you were quite disinterested about the result. You do the work because you do it. And then, suddenly, one day, it bursts and you see before you the full result of your work.

But you understand, don't you? One speaks like this, very easily, of becoming conscious of one's nights, having control over one's sleep-activities and all sorts of things of this kind, but you need to do many such little works like the one I have just described to you. Many of these are needed to obtain this result. When one is accomplished, you realise that there is another missing, and when this is done, you realise there is still another, and so on, until one fine day you can do what I said, and you go from one plane to another, like that, putting all to rest, until you come out of all activity and enter the supreme rest, consciously. It is worth the trouble. There you are!

(23 June 1954)

39. Exteriorisation

There are some very remarkable instances of exteriorisation. I am going to tell you two incidents about cats which occurred quite a long time ago in France. One happened very long ago, long before the war even. We used to have small meetings every week — quite a small number of friends three or four, who discussed philosophy, spiritual experiences, etc. There was a young boy, a poet, but one who was rather light-minded; he was very intelligent, he was a student in Paris. He used to come regularly to these meetings (they took place on Wednesday evenings) and one evening

he did not come. We were surprised; we had met him a few days before and he had said he would come — he did not come. We waited quite a long time, the meeting was over and at the time of leaving I opened the door to let people out (it was at my house that these meetings were held), I opened the door and there before it sat a big dark grey cat which rushed into the room like mad and jumped upon me, like this, mewing desperately. I looked into its eyes and told myself, “Well, these are so-and-so’s eyes” (the one who was to come). I said, “Surely something has happened to him.” And the next day we learnt that he had been assassinated that night; the next morning he had been found lying strangled on his bed. This is the first story. The other happened long afterwards, at the time of the war — the First [World] War, not the Second — the war of the trenches. There was a young man I knew very well; he was a poet and artist (I have already spoken about him), who had gone to the war. He had enlisted, he was very young; he was an officer. He had given me his photograph. (This boy was a student of Sanskrit and knew Sanskrit very well, he liked Buddhism very much; indeed he was much interested in things of the spirit, he was not an ordinary boy, far from it.) He had given me his photograph on which there was a sentence in Sanskrit written in his own hand, very well written. I had framed this photograph and put it above a sort of secretaire (a rather high desk with drawers); well, above it I had hung this photograph. And at that time it was very difficult to receive news, one did not know very well what was happening. From time to time we used to receive letters from him, but for a long time there had been nothing, when, one day, I came into my room, and the moment I entered, without any apparent reason the photograph fell from the wall where it had been well fixed, and the glass broke with a great clatter. I felt a little anxious, I said, “There is something wrong.” But we had no news. Two or three days later (it was on the first floor; I lived in a house with one room upstairs, all the rest on the ground floor, and there was a flight of steps leading to the garden) I opened the entrance door and a big grey cat rushed in — light grey, this time — a magnificent cat, and, just as the other one had done, it flung itself upon me, like this, mewing. I looked into its eyes — it had the eyes of... that boy. And this cat, it turned and turned around me and all the time tugged at my dress and miaowed. I wanted to put it out, but it would not go, it settled down there and did not want to move. The next day it was announced in the papers that this boy had been found dead between two trenches, dead for three days. That is, at the time he must have died his photograph had fallen. The consciousness had left the body completely: he was there abandoned, because they did not always go to see what was happening between the trenches; they could not, you understand; he was found two or three days later; at that time probably he had gone out altogether from his body and wanted definitely to inform me about what had happened and he had found that cat. For cats live in the vital, they have a very developed vital consciousness and can easily be taken possession of by vital forces.

But these two examples are quite extraordinary, for they both came about almost

in the same way, and in both instances the eyes of these cats had completely changed — they had become human eyes.

(14 April 1951)

40. *Out of the Body*

I have already told you several times, I think, that when one undergoes this occult discipline, one is able to leave one's physical body, go out in the vital and move about quite consciously, acting quite consciously in this vital world; then to leave one's vital being asleep and go out mentally, acting and living in the mental world quite consciously and with similar relations — for the mental world is in relation with the mental being, as the physical world is in relation with the physical being — and so on, progressively and by a regular discipline. I knew a woman who had been trained in this way, who had quite remarkable personal faculties, who was conscious in all her states of being, and she used to be able to go out twelve times from her body, that is to say, from twelve consecutive bodies, until she reached the summit of the individual consciousness, which could be called the threshold of the Formless. She remembered everything and recounted everything in detail. She was an Englishwoman; I even translated from English a book in which there was a description of all she saw and did in these domains.

It is obviously the sign of a great mastery of one's being, and the sign of having reached a high degree of conscious development. But it is almost the opposite of the other experience of going out of one's consciousness to enter a state in which one is no longer conscious; it is, so to say, the opposite.

(22 August 1956)

41. *Transmitting Forces*

Fifty years ago.... There was that occultist who later gave me lessons in occultism for two years. His wife was a wonderful clairvoyant and had an absolutely remarkable capacity — precisely — of transmitting forces. They lived in Tlemcen. I was in Paris. I used to correspond with them. I had not yet met them at all. And then, one day, she sent me in a letter petals of the pomegranate flower, "Divine's Love". At that time I had not given the meaning to the flower. She sent me petals of pomegranate flowers telling me that these petals were bringing me her protection and force.

Now, at that time I used to wear my watch on a chain. Wristwatches were not known then or there were very few. And there was also a small eighteenth century magnifying-glass... it was quite small, as large as this (*gesture*).... And it had two lenses, you see, like all reading-glasses; there were two lenses mounted on a small

golden frame, and it was hanging from my chain. Now, between the two glasses I put these petals and I used to carry this about with me always because I wanted to keep it with me; you see, I trusted this lady and knew she had power. I wanted to keep this with me, and I always felt a kind of energy, warmth, confidence, force which came from that thing.... I did not think about it, you see, but I felt it like that.

And then, one day, suddenly I felt quite depleted, as though a support that was there had gone. Something very unpleasant. I said, "It is strange; what has happened? Nothing really unpleasant has happened to me. Why do I feel like this, so empty, emptied of energy?" And in the evening, when I took off my watch and chain, I noticed that one of the small glasses had come off and all the petals were gone. There was not one petal left. Then I really knew that they carried a considerable charge of power, for I had felt the difference without even knowing the reason. I didn't know the reason and yet it had made a considerable difference. So it was after this that I saw how one could use flowers by charging them with forces. They are extremely receptive.

(14 July 1954)

42. The Envelope of Protection

Someone was seeking to establish a constant and conscious contact — absolutely constant and conscious — with the inner Godhead, not only with the psychic being but the divine Presence in the psychic being, and she had decided that she would be like this, that she would busy herself with nothing else, that is to say, whatever she might be doing, her concentration was upon this, and even when she went out walking in the street, her concentration was upon this. She lived in a big city where there was much traffic: buses, tramways, etc., many things, and to cross the street one had to be considerably careful, wide-awake and attentive, otherwise one could get run over, but this person had resolved that she would not come out of her concentration. One day when she was crossing one of the big avenues with all its cars and its tramways, still deep in her concentration, in her inner seeking, she suddenly felt at about an arm's length a little shock, like this; she jumped back and a car passed just by her side. If she had not jumped back she would have been run over....

(31 March 1951)

43. Reminiscences of Tlemcen

...I am going to tell you about Madame X.

Madame X was born on the Isle of Wight and she lived in Tlemcen with her husband who was a great occultist. Madame X herself was an occultist of great powers,

a remarkable clairvoyant, and she had mediumistic qualities. Her powers were quite exceptional; she had received an extremely complete and rigorous training and she could exteriorise herself, that is, bring out of her material body a subtle body, in full consciousness, and do it twelve times in succession. That is, she could pass consciously from one state of being to another, live there as consciously as in her physical body, and then again put that subtler body into trance, exteriorise herself from it, and so on twelve times successively, to the extreme limit of the world of forms.... I shall speak to you about that later, when you can understand better what I am talking about. But I am going to tell you about some small incidents I saw when I was in Tlemcen myself, and a story she told me I shall also tell you.

The incidents are of a more external kind, but very funny.

She was almost always in trance and she had trained her body so well that even when she was in trance, that is, when one or more parts of her being were exteriorised, the body had a life of its own and she could walk about and even attend to some small material occupations.... She did a great deal of work, for in her trances she could talk freely and she used to narrate what she saw, which was noted down and later formed a teaching — which has even been published. And because of all that and the occult work she was doing, she was often tired, in the sense that her body was tired and needed to recuperate its vitality in a very concrete way.

Now, one day when she was particularly tired, she told me, “You will see how I am going to recover my strength.” She had plucked from her garden — it was not a garden, it was a vast estate with ancient olive trees, and fig trees such as I have never seen anywhere else, it was a real marvel, on a mountainside, from the plain to almost half way up — and in this garden there were many lemon trees and orange trees... and grapefruit. Grapefruit has flowers which have an even better fragrance than orange blossoms — they are large flowers and she knew how to make an essence from them herself, she had given me a bottle — well, she had plucked a huge grapefruit like this, (*gesture*) very large and ripe, and she lay down on her bed and put the grapefruit on her solar plexus, here, (*gesture*) like this, holding it with both hands. She lay down and rested. She did not sleep, she rested. She told me, “Come back in an hour.” An hour later I returned... and the grapefruit was as flat as a pancake. That meant that she had such a power to absorb vitality that she had absorbed all the life from the fruit and it had become soft and completely flat. And I saw that myself! You may try, you won’t succeed! (*Laughter*)

Another time — and this is even more amusing... But first I shall tell you a little about Tlemcen, which you probably don’t know. Tlemcen is a small town in southern Algeria, almost on the borders of the Sahara. The town itself is built in the valley which is surrounded by a circle of mountains, not very high but nevertheless higher than hills. And the valley is very fertile, verdurous, magnificent. The population there is mainly Arabs and rich merchants; indeed, the city is very prosperous — it *was*, for I don’t know what it is like now; I am speaking to you about things that

happened at the beginning of this century — there were very prosperous merchants there and from time to time these Arabs came to pay a visit to Monsieur X. They knew nothing, understood nothing, but they were very interested.

One day, towards evening, one of these people arrived and started asking questions, ludicrous ones besides. Then Madame X said to me, “You will see, we are going to have a little fun.” In the verandah of the house there was a big dining-table, a very large table, like that, quite wide, with eight legs, four on each side. It was really massive, and heavy. Chairs had been arranged to receive this man, at a little distance from the table. He was at one end, Madame X at the other; I was seated on one side, Monsieur X also. All four of us were there. Nobody was near the table, all of us were at a distance from it. And so, he was asking questions, as I said rather ludicrous ones, on the powers one could have and what could be done with what he called “magic”.... She looked at me and said nothing but sat very still. Suddenly I heard a cry, a cry of terror. The table started moving and with an almost heroic gesture went to attack the poor man seated at the other end! It went and bumped against him.... Madame X had not touched it, nobody had touched it. She had only concentrated on the table and by her vital power had made it move. At first the table had wobbled a little, then had started moving slowly, then suddenly, as in one bound, it flung itself on that man, who went away and never came back!

She also had the power to dematerialise and rematerialise things. And she never said anything, she did not boast, she did not say, “I am going to do something”, she did not speak of anything; she just did it quietly. She did not attach much importance to these things, she knew they were just a proof that there are other forces than purely material ones.

When I used to go out in the evenings — towards the end of the afternoon I used to go for a walk with Monsieur X to see the countryside, go walking in the mountains, the neighbouring villages — I used to lock my door; it was a habit with me, I always locked my door. Madame X would rarely go out, for the reasons I have already mentioned, because she was in a trance most of the time and liked to stay at home. But when I returned from the walk and opened my door — which was locked, and therefore nobody could have entered — I would always find a kind of little garland of flowers on my pillow. They were flowers which grew in the garden, they are called *Belles de Nuit*; we have them here, they open in the evening and have a wonderful fragrance. There was a whole alley of them, with big bushes as high as this; they are remarkable flowers — I believe it’s the same here — on the same bush there are different coloured flowers: yellow, red, mixed, violet. They are tiny flowers like... bluebells; no, rather like the convolvulus, but these grow on bushes — convolvulus is a creeper, these are bushes — we have some here in the garden. She always used to put some behind her ears, for they have a lovely smell, oh! delightfully beautiful. And so, she used to take a walk in the alley between these big bushes which were quite high, and she gathered flowers, and — when I came back, these flowers were

in my room!... She never told me how she did it, but she certainly did not go in there. Once she said to me, "Were there no flowers in your room?" — "Ah! yes, indeed," I said. And that was all. Then I knew it was she who had put them there.

I could tell you many stories, but I shall finish with this one she had told me, which I did not see myself.

As I was telling you, Tlemcen is very near the Sahara and it has a desert climate except that in the valley a river flows which never dries up and makes the whole country very fertile. But the mountains were absolutely arid. Only in the part occupied by farmers did something grow. Now, Monsieur X's park — a large estate — was, as I said, a marvellous place... everything grew there, everything one could imagine and to a magnificent size. Now, she told me — they had been there a very long time — that about five or six years before, I think, they had felt that these barren mountains might one day cause the river to dry up and that it would be better to plant trees there; and the administrator of Tlemcen ordered trees to be planted on all the neighbouring hills; a wide amphitheatre, you know. He said that pine trees should be planted, for in Algeria the sea-pine grows very well. And they wanted to try it. Well, for some reason or other — forgetfulness or fantasy, heaven knows! — instead of ordering pine trees they ordered fir trees! Fir trees belong to Scandinavian countries, not at all to desert lands. And very conscientiously all these fir trees were planted. Now Madame X saw this and I believe she felt like making an experiment. So it happened that four or five years later these fir trees had not only grown but had become magnificent and when I went to Tlemcen the mountains all around were absolutely green, magnificent with trees. She said to me, "You see, these are not pine trees, they are fir trees", and indeed they were — you know fir trees are Christmas trees, don't you? — they were fir trees. Then she told me how after three years when the fir trees had grown, suddenly one day or rather one December night, as she had just gone to bed and put out her light, she was awakened by a tiny little noise — she was very sensitive to noise; she opened her eyes and saw something like a moonbeam — there was no moon that night — lighting up a corner of her room. And she noticed that a little gnome was there, like the ones you see in the fairy tales of Norway and Sweden, Scandinavian fairy tales. He was a tiny little fellow with a big head, a pointed cap, pointed shoes of dark green, a long white beard, and all covered with snow.

So she looked at him — her eyes were open — she looked at him and said, "But... Eh! what are you doing here?" — she was a little worried, for in the warmth of her room the snow was melting and making a little pool on the floor of her room. "But what are you doing here!"

Then he smiled at her, gave her his sweetest smile and said, "But we were called by the fir trees! Fir trees call the snow. They are trees of the snow countries. I am the Lord of the Snow, so I came to announce to you that... we are coming. We have been called, we are coming."

“Snow?... But we are near the Sahara!”

“Ah! then you shouldn’t have planted fir trees.”

Finally she told him, “Listen, I don’t know if what you tell me is true, but you are spoiling my floor. Go away!”

So he went away. The moonlight went with him. She lit a lamp — for there was no electricity — she lit a lamp and saw... a little pool of water in the place where he had stood. So it was not a dream, there really was a little being whose snow had melted in her room. And the next morning when the sun rose, it rose upon mountains covered with snow. It was the first time, it had never been seen before in that country.

Since then, every winter — not for long, just for a little while — all the mountains are covered with snow.

So that’s my story.

(15 March 1957)

44. Entities that Control the Weather

And with my own eyes I have seen... I have seen this here, seen it in France, seen it in Algeria... the rain falling at a particular, altogether fixed place, and it was exactly a place where it absolutely needed to rain, because it was dry and there was a field which needed watering, and at another place there was... at a distance from here to the end of the hall, at the other place there was a small sunlit spot, everything was dry, because to have the sun there was necessary. Naturally, if you seek the scientific point of view, they will explain this to you very scientifically. But I indeed have seen it as the result of an intervention... someone who knew how to ask it and obtained it.

In Algeria I saw not a few things like that, very interesting ones. And there, just because there was a certain atmosphere of a little more real knowledge it could be said, there were little entities, as for example entities which handled snow, you see, which produced snow, and which could come, enter a room and tell someone, “Now snow should fall here!” (It had never snowed in that country, never.) “Snow! You are joking. So near the Sahara it is going to snow?” “It must, because they have planted fir trees on the mountain, and when we see fir trees, we come. The fir trees are there to call us; so we come.” And so, you see, there was a discussion, and the little being went away with the permission to bring snow, and when it had gone, there was a little pool of snow water on the floor, melted snow which had turned into water. It was physical... and the mountain was covered with snow. In Algeria! It is *very near* the Sahara, you go down a few kilometres and you are at the Sahara. Someone had playfully covered all the hills with fir trees. “The fir tree belongs to cold countries. Why do you call us? We are coming.” All this is a true story, it is not an invention.

All depends on your relation. This too, it is quite possible the meteorologist scholars would have been able to explain, I know nothing about it, they explain everything one wants.

(30 November 1955)

45. *Little Entities*

...One of the most common activities of these intolerable little entities which are in the human physical atmosphere and amuse themselves at men's expense, is to blind you to such an extent that when you look for something, and the thing is staring you in the face, you do not see it! This happens very often. You search in vain, you turn everything over, you look into all possible corners, but you don't find the thing. Then you give up the problem and some time later (precisely when "the hand over the eyes" is removed), you come back to the same place and it is exactly there where you have looked, quietly lying there, it had not stirred! Only you were unconscious, you did not see. This is a very, very frequent amusement of these little entities. They also take pleasure in removing things, then they put them back, but at times they also don't put them back! They displace them, indeed they have all sorts of little pranks. They are intolerable. Madame Blavatsky made much use of them, but I don't know how she managed to make them so amiable, because generally they are quite unpleasant.

I had the experience — among innumerable instances — but precisely of two very striking cases, of two opposite things, only it was not the same beings.... There are little beings like fairies who are very sweet, very obliging, but they are not always there, they come from time to time when it pleases them. I remember the time I used to cook for Sri Aurobindo; I was also doing many other things at the same time, so I often happened to leave the milk on the fire and go for some other work or to see something with him, to discuss with somebody, and truly I was not always aware of the time, I used to forget the milk on the fire. And whenever I forgot the milk on the fire, I felt suddenly (in those days I used to wear a sari) a little hand catching a fold of my sari and pulling it, like this. Then I used to run quickly and would see that the milk was just on the point of boiling over. This did not happen just once, but several times, and very clearly, like a little child's hand clutching and pulling.

The other story is of the days Sri Aurobindo had the habit of walking up and down in his rooms. He used to walk for several hours like that, it was his way of meditating. Only, he wanted to know the time, so a clock had been put in each room to enable him to see the time at any moment. There were three such clocks. One was in the room where I worked; it was, so to say, his starting-point. One day he came and asked, "What time is it?" He looked and the clock had stopped. He went into the next room, saying, "I shall see the time there" — the clock had stopped. And it had stopped

at the same minute as the other, you understand, with the difference of a few seconds. He went to the third room... the clock had stopped. He continued walking three times like that — all the clocks had stopped! Then he returned to my room and said, “But this is impossible! This is a bad joke!” and all the clocks, one after the other, started working again. I saw it myself, you know, it was a charming incident. He was annoyed, he said, “This is a bad joke!” And all the clocks started going again!

(2 April 1951)

46. Conscious Hands

There are pianists who have individualised their hands and made them so wonderfully conscious that these hands are not decomposed — not the physical hands: the hands of the subtle physical and vital — they are not decomposed, do not dissolve at the time of death. They remain as instruments to play the piano and always try to incarnate in the hands of someone playing the piano. I have known some cases of people who, as they were about to play, felt as though other hands entered into theirs and started playing really marvellously, in a way they could not have done themselves.

These things are not as exceptional as one might believe, they happen quite often.

I saw the same thing in someone who used to play the violin and another who played the cello — two different cases — and who were not very wonderful performers themselves. One of them was just beginning his studies and the other was a good performer, but nothing marvellous. But all of a sudden, the moment they played the compositions of certain musicians, something of that musician entered into their hands and made their performance absolutely wonderful.

There was even a person — a woman — who used to play the cello, and the moment she played Beethoven, the expression of her face completely changed into Beethoven's and what she played was sublime, which she could not have played unless something of Beethoven's mind had entered into her.

(3 October 1956)

47. Continuing to Work through Other Hands

...There are people — for example, writers, musicians, artists — people who have lived on intellectual heights, who feel that they still have something further to do, that they have not finished what they had undertaken to do, have not reached the goal they had fixed for themselves, so they are ready to remain in the earth atmosphere as long as they can, with as much cohesiveness as possible and they try to manifest themselves and continue their progress in other human bodies. I have seen many such cases, I have seen the very interesting case of a musician who was a pianist (a

pianist of great worth), who had hands which were a marvel of skill, accuracy, precision, force, rapidity of movement, indeed, it was absolutely remarkable. This man died relatively young with the feeling that if he had continued to live he would have continued to progress in his musical expression. And such was the intensity of his aspiration that his subtle hands maintained their form without being dissolved, and each time he met anyone a little receptive and passive and a good musician, his hands would enter the hands of those who were playing — the person who was playing at the time could play well but in an ordinary way; but at that moment he became not merely a virtuoso but a wonderful artist during the time he played. It was the hands of the other that were making use of his. This is a phenomenon I know. I have seen the same thing in the case of a painter: it was also a matter of hands. The same thing with regard to some writers, and here it was the brain that kept quite a precise form and entered the brain of someone who was sufficiently receptive and suddenly made him write extraordinary things, infinitely more beautiful than anything he had written before. I saw that taking hold of someone. It was in the case of a composer of music — not one of those who execute, but who compose, like Beethoven, like Bach, like César Franck (but César Franck executed also). The composition of music is an extremely cerebral activity. Well, here also the brain of a great musician came in contact with one who was engaged in writing an opera and made him compose wonderful things and arranged on paper all the parts. He was busy writing an opera and it is extremely complex for the performers who have to bring out in the music the thought of the person who has composed; and that man (I knew him) when he received this formation had a blank paper before him and then he started writing; I saw him writing, putting lines, then some figures, on a big, very big page and when he reached the bottom, the orchestration of the Overture (for example, of a certain act) was completed (orchestration means the distribution of certain lines of music to each one of the instruments). And he was doing it simply on a paper, merely by this wonderful mental power. And it was not only his own: it was coming to him from a musical mind that incarnated in him.... Whilst I was there I saw him writing in front of me a page like that: it took him about half an hour or three-quarters of an hour. And he got such a reputation that even big well-known musicians brought him their works for orchestration. He did it better than anyone, and just in that way on his paper. He had no need to hear the music or anything. Afterwards, it was tried out and it was always very good. There were so many violins, so many cellos, so many altos, all the instruments: some were playing this, others playing that, yet others playing other things, sometimes all together, at other times one after another (it is very complicated, not a simple thing), well, there, while playing, hearing or even reading (sometimes he took the score and read it) he knew which notes had to be distributed to which instrument, which notes had to be played by another, and so on. And he had very clearly the feeling of something entering into him and helping him.

(16 September 1953)

48. *Beethoven and Ysayë*

...I explained to you the other day that before leaving the physical body, the psychic being decides most often what its next birth will be, the environment in which it will take birth and what its occupation will be, because it needs a certain field for its experience. So it may happen that very big writers and very big musicians take birth another time in somebody quite imbecile. And you say: "What! it is not possible!" Naturally it does not always happen like that, but it may. There was a case in which the contrary happened: it was a violin player, the most wonderful of the century.... (*Mother tries to remember.*) Just wait, I knew his name and it is gone — it came back and is gone again. What was his name?... Ysayë! he was a Belgian and a violinist, truly the most wonderful violinist of the epoch. Well, that man had most certainly in him a reincarnation of Beethoven. Not perhaps a reincarnation of his entire psychic being, but in any case, that of his musical capacity. He had the appearance, the head of Beethoven, I saw him, I heard him (I did not know him, I knew nothing, I was at a concert in Paris and they were giving the concerto in D major), I saw him coming on the stage to play and I said: "Strange! How much this man looks like Beethoven, he is the very portrait of Beethoven!" Then it just started with a stroke of the bow, three, four notes.... Everything changed, the atmosphere was changed. All became absolutely wonderful. Three notes started off with such power, such grandeur, so wonderful it was, nothing stirred, all waited. And he played that from beginning to end in an absolutely unique manner with an understanding I have not met with in any other executant. And then I saw that the musical genius of Beethoven was in him.... But perhaps Beethoven's psychic being had taken body in a shoemaker or anybody else, one does not know! It wanted to have another kind of experience.

For what I saw in this man was a formation belonging to an earthly plane, it was mental-vital; and as Beethoven had disciplined his whole mental, vital and physical being around his musical capacity, that had remained in form, it was a living thing, and had incarnated in that man, just as it was, but not necessarily Beethoven's psychic being. In his former life it was the psychic being of Beethoven that had shaped all those other beings, the psychic being that had disciplined them around musical creation; but after his death, it cannot at all be said whether the psychic being remained there; it must have returned to the psychic world as is the usual rule. That however had been formed, had its own life, independent and existing in itself. It was formed for a certain manifestation and it remained to manifest itself. And as soon as it found a fit instrument, it entered there to manifest itself.

(16 September 1953)

49. *Modern Art*

...I knew a painter, a disciple of Gustave Moreau; he was truly a very fine artist, he knew his work quite well, and then... he was starving, he did not know how to make both ends meet and he used to lament. One day, a friend intending to help him, sent a picture dealer to see him. When the merchant entered his studio, this poor man told himself, "At last! Here's my chance", and he showed him all the best work he had done. The art-dealer made a face, looked around, turned over things and began rummaging in all the corners; and suddenly he found... Ah! I must explain this to you, you are not familiar with these things: a painter, after his day's work has at times some mixed colours left on his palette; he cannot keep them, they dry up in a day; so he always has with him some pieces of canvas which are not well prepared and which he daubs with what are called "the scrapings of palettes" (with supply knives he scrapes all the colours from the palette and applies them on the canvases) and as there are many mixed colours, this makes unexpected designs. There was in a corner a canvas like that on which he used to put his palette-scrapings. The merchant suddenly falls upon that and exclaims, "Here you are! My friend, you are a genius, this is a miracle, it is this you should show! Look at this richness of tones, this variety of forms, and what an imagination!" And this poor man who was starving said shyly, "But sir, these are my palette-scrapings!" And the art-dealer caught hold of him: "Silly fool, this is not to be told!" Then he said, "Give me this, I undertake to sell it. Give me as many of these as you like; ten, twenty, thirty a month, I shall sell them all for you and I shall make you famous." Then, as I told you, his stomach was protesting; he was not happy, but he said, "All right, take it, I shall see." Then the landlord comes to demand his rent, the paint merchant comes demanding payment of the old bill; the purse is quite empty, and what is to be done? So though he did not make pictures with palette-scrapings, he did something which gave the imagination free play, where the forms were not too precise, the colours were all mixed and brilliant, and one could not know overmuch what one was seeing; and as people did not know very much what they saw, those who understood nothing about it exclaimed, "How beautiful it is!" And he supplied this to his art-dealer. He never made a name for himself with his real painting, which was truly very fine (it was really very fine, he was a very good painter), but he won a world reputation with these horrors! And this was just at the beginning of modern painting, this goes back to the Universal Exhibition of 1900; if I were to tell you his name, you would all recognise it.... Now, of course, they have gone far beyond, they have done much better. However, he had the sense of harmony and beauty and his colours were beautiful. But at present, as soon as there is the least beauty, it won't do at all, it has to be outrageously ugly, then that, that is modern!

(9 April 1951)

50. Modern Art

But how does it happen that after having reached so high the art of painting becomes so ugly and childish?

But have you ever seen that the human ascent is like that, a funicular ascent, quite straight? It turns all the time. So if you assume that there are vertical lines which are lines of a kind of human progress, then when things come there, they progress, but when they go further away they degenerate.

I shall tell you perhaps in ten years... I don't know, perhaps in ten years I shall tell you whether there is something in modern painting. Because I am going to tell you something curious: for the moment I find it downright ugly, not only ugly but stupid; but what is frightening is that it makes you completely sick of all other pictures. When one sees painting as it is done today... for we receive all the time art reviews in which, with much intelligence, are put reproductions of both ancient and modern pictures, and they are put side by side, which makes the thing very interesting, you can see both and compare. I can't manage to have yet a very clear notion of beauty in what modern painters do, I confess this, I haven't yet understood; but what is curious is that they have succeeded in taking away from me all the taste for the painting of old; except some very rare things, the rest seems to me pompous, artificial, ridiculous, unbearable.

Now this means that behind this incoherence and chaos there certainly is, there must be a creative spirit which is trying to manifest.

We have passed from a particular world which had reached its perfection and was declining, this is absolutely obvious. And so to pass from that creation to a new creation (because... well, suppose that it is the forces of ordinary Nature which are acting), instead of passing through a continuous ascent, there was evidently a fall into a chaos, that is, the chaos is necessary for a new creation.

The methods of Nature are like that. Before our solar system could exist, there was chaos. Well, in passing from this artistic construction which had reached a kind of summit, before passing from this to a new creation, it seems to me still the same thing, evidently a chaos. And the impression I have when I look at these things is that they are not sincere, and that's what is annoying. It is not sincere: either it is someone who has amused himself by being as mad as possible or perhaps it is someone who wanted to deceive others or maybe deceive even himself, or again, a kind of incoherent fantasy in which one puts a blot of paint in one place and then says immediately, "Why, it would be funny to put it there, and if one put it here, like this, and again if one put this like that, and again..." There, for the moment this is the impression it gives me, and I don't feel that it is something sincere.

But there is a sincere creative spirit behind, which is trying to manifest, which, for the moment, does not manifest, but is strong enough to destroy the past. That is,

there was a time when I used to look at the pictures of Rembrandt, of Titian, of Tintoretto, the pictures of Renoir and Monet, I felt a great aesthetic joy. This aesthetic joy I don't feel any more. I have progressed because I follow the whole movement of terrestrial evolution; therefore, I have had to overpass this cycle, I have arrived at another; and this one seems to me empty of aesthetic joy. From the point of view of reason one may dispute this, speak of all the beautiful and good things which have been done, all that is a different affair. But this subtle something, precisely, which is the true aesthetic joy, is gone, I don't feel it any longer. Of course I am a hundred miles away from having it when I look at the things they are now doing. But still it is something which is behind this that has made the other disappear. So perhaps by making just a little effort towards the future we are going to be able to find the formula of the new beauty. That would be interesting. It is quite recently that this impression came to me; it is not old. I have tried with the most perfect goodwill, by abolishing all kinds of preferences, preconceived ideas, habits, past tastes, all that; all that eliminated, I look at their pictures and I don't succeed in getting any pleasure; it doesn't give me any, sometimes it gives me a disgust, but above all the impression of something that's not true, a painful impression of insincerity.

But then quite recently, I suddenly felt this, this sensation of something very new, something of the future pushing, pushing, trying to manifest, trying to express itself and not succeeding, but something which will be a terrific progress over all that has been felt and expressed before; and then, at the same time is born the movement of consciousness which turns to this new thing and wants to grasp it. This will perhaps be interesting. That is why I told you: ten years. Perhaps in ten years there will be people who have found a new expression. A great progress would be necessary, an immense progress in the technique; the old technique seems barbarous. And now with the new scientific discoveries perhaps the technique of execution will change and one could find a new technique which would then express this new beauty which wants to manifest. We shall speak about it in ten years' time.

(1 June 1955)

51. Art and Yoga

...I have known some who had very little training and skill and yet through Yoga acquired a fine capacity in writing and painting. Two examples I can cite to you. One was a girl who had no education whatever; she was a dancer and danced tolerably well. After she took up Yoga, she danced only for friends; but her dancing attained a depth of expression and beauty which was not there before. And although she was not educated, she began to write wonderful things; for she had visions and expressed them in the most beautiful language. But there were ups and downs in her Yoga, and when she was in a good condition, she wrote beautifully, but otherwise

was quite dull and stupid and uncreative. The second case is that of a boy who had studied art, but only just a little. The son of a diplomat, he had been trained for the diplomatic career; but he lived in luxury and his studies did not go far. Yet as soon as he took up Yoga, he began to produce inspired drawings which carried the expression of an inner knowledge and were symbolic in character; in the end he became a great artist.

(28 June 1929)

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52. *Communicating with a Lion*

In Paris there is a garden called “The Garden of Plants”: there are animals there also, as well as plants. They had just received a magnificent lion. It was of course in a cage. And it was furious. There was a door in the cage behind which it could hide. And it would hide itself just when the visitors came to see it! I saw that and one day I went up to the cage and began speaking to it (animals are very sensitive to spoken language, they really listen). I began speaking softly to my lion, I said to it, “Oh! How handsome you are, what a pity that you are hiding yourself like this, how much we would like to see you....” Well, it listened. Then, little by little, it looked at me askance, slowly stretched its neck to see me better; later it brought out its paw and, finally, put the tip of its nose against the bars as if saying, “At last, here’s someone who understands me!”

(11 January 1951)

53. *Consciousness in Animals?*

I have met people who used to think themselves extremely intelligent, by the way, who thought they knew a lot, and when I spoke to them about the different parts of the being they looked at me like this (*gesture*) and asked me, “But what are you speaking about?” They did not understand at all. I am speaking of people who have the reputation of being intelligent. They don’t understand at all. For them it is just the consciousness; it is the consciousness — “It is my consciousness” and then there is the neighbour’s consciousness; and again there are things which do not have any consciousness. And then I asked them whether animals had a consciousness; so they began to scratch their heads and said, “Perhaps it is we who put our consciousness in the animal when we look at it,” like that...

(9 February 1955)

54. *Conscious Animals*

There are movements of certain vibrations which are vibrations of the species, you see, movements peculiar to the species to which you belong — there is the human species as there are all kinds. Now, some of these movements are not personal movements at all, they are movements of the species.

The human species has certain ways of being which are particular to it, which we reproduce almost automatically, as for example, walking upright, like this (*gesture*), whereas a cat goes on four feet, you see. This instinct of standing on one's two hind feet, upright, is peculiar to man, it is a movement that belongs to the species; to sit as we do with the head up, you see, to lie down as we do on the back...

You have only to watch animals: they lie down curled up, don't they? Almost all. It is with man that this way of lying on one's back, stretched out, begins, I think; I don't at all think that monkeys sleep like that, I think they sleep doubled up, that it is man who has started habits of this kind. And this reminds me...

I had a cat — in those days I used to sleep on the floor — which always came and slipped under the mosquito-net and slept beside me. Well, this cat slept quite straight, it did not sleep as cats do; it put its head here and then lay down like this (*gesture*), alongside my legs with its two forepaws like this, and its two little hind legs quite straight. And there was something very, very curious about it which I saw one night, like that. I used to ask myself why it was like this, and one night I saw a little Russian woman of the people with a fur bonnet and three little children, and this woman had a kind of adoration for her children and always wanted to look for a shelter for them; I don't know, I don't know the story, but I saw that she had her three little children, very small ones, with her... one like this, one like that, one like that (*Mother shows the difference in height*), and she was dragging them along with her and looking for a corner to put them in safety. Something must have happened to her, she must have died suddenly with a kind of very animal maternal instinct of a certain kind, but all full of fear — fear, anguish and worry — and this something must have come from there and in some way or other had reincarnated. It was a movement — it was not a person, you know, it was a movement which belonged to this person and must have come up in the cat. It was there for some reason or other, you see, I don't know how it happened, I know nothing about it, but this cat was completely human in its ways. And very soon afterwards it had three kittens, like that; and it was extraordinary, it didn't want to leave them, it refused to leave them, it was entirely... it did not eat, did not go to satisfy its needs, it was always with its young. When one day it had an idea — nobody had said anything, of course — it took one kitten, as they take them, by the skin of the neck, and came and put it between my feet; I did not stir; it returned, took the second, put it there; it took the third, it put it there, and when all three were there, it looked at me, mewed and was gone. And this was the first time it went out after having had them; it went to the garden, went to satisfy its

needs and to eat, because it was at peace, they were there between my feet. And when it had its young, it wanted to carry them on its back like a woman. And when it slept beside me, it slept on the back. It was never like a cat.

Well, these things are habits of the species, movements of the species. There are many others of the kind, you see, but this is an example.

These animals which are extraordinary like this one, after death do they come back in a human body?

Ah!

There was a cat... what its name was I don't know; and I had many cats, you know, so I don't remember now; there was one called Kiki, it was the first son of this cat, and then there was another, its second son (that is to say, born another time) which was called Brownie. This one was admirable and it died of the cat disease — as there is a disease of the dogs, there is a disease of the kittens — I don't know how it caught the thing, but it was wonderful during its illness and I was taking care of it as of a child. And it always expressed a kind of aspiration. There was a time before it fell ill... we used to have in those days meditation in a room of the Library House, in the room there — Sri Aurobindo's own room — and we used to sit on the floor. And there was an armchair in a corner, and when we gathered for the meditation this cat came every time and settled in the armchair and literally it entered into a trance, it had movements of trance; it did not sleep, it was not asleep, it was truly in a trance; it gave signs of that and had astonishing movements, as when animals dream; and it didn't want to come out from it, it refused to come out, it remained in it for hours. But it never came in until we were beginning the meditation. It settled there and remained there throughout the meditation. We indeed had finished but it remained, and it was only when I went to take it, called it in a particular way, brought it back into its body, that it consented to go away; otherwise no matter who came and called it, it did not move. Well, this cat always had a great aspiration, a kind of aspiration to become a human being; and in fact, when it left its body it entered a human body. Only it was a very tiny part of the consciousness, you see, of the human being; it was like the opposite movement from that of the woman with the other cat. But this one was a cat which leaped over many births, so to say, many psychic stages to enter into contact with a human body. It was a simple enough human body, but still, all the same...

There is a difference in the development of a cat and of a human being...

It happens... I think these are exceptional cases, but still it happens.

In these cases is the psychic conscious?

The aspiration is conscious, yes, conscious. The aspiration was very conscious

in it, very conscious. It is not a formed psychic as when the psychic becomes a completely independent being, it is not that; but it is an aspiration, it is an ardent aspiration for progress — as we, you know, we have the aspiration to become supra-mental beings instead of remaining human beings, well, it was something absolutely similar: it was a cat doing yoga — exactly — to become a man.

It was perhaps because its mother had in it a movement, a formation, an emanation of consciousness which had belonged to a human being; it is probably that which had left a kind of nostalgia for the human life which gave it this intensity of aspiration. But truly it did yoga for that.

(23 March 1955)

55. Pets with Aspiration

I have seen pet animals which truly had a sort of inner *need* to become something other than what they were. I knew dogs which were like that, cats, horses and even birds like that. The outer form was inevitably what it was, but there was something living and perceptible in the animal which was making an obvious effort to achieve another expression, another form.

(4 December 1957)

56. Aspiration in Animals

As man aspires to be a god?... I knew animals which aspired to become human beings, but they were living with human beings. Cats and dogs, for example, which lived in a close intimacy with human beings, truly had an aspiration. I had a cat which was very, very unhappy for being a cat, it wanted to be a man. It had an untimely death. It used to meditate, it certainly did a kind of sadhana of its own, and when it left, even a portion of its vital being reincarnated in a human being. The little psychic element that was at the centre of the being went directly into a man, but even what was conscious in the vital of the cat went into a human being. But these are rather exceptional cases.

(19 August 1953)

57. Goat and Jaggery

Animals in their natural state do not ever overeat, they eat according to their hunger and if some food is left over and they do not want it to be eaten by others, they hide it, bury it; they hide it with great care so that they may find it again when they are hungry. But an animal living with man loses this instinct and eats not only

all that is given but all that's left within its reach. I lived for some time in a small town in the south of France. There was a grocer there who kept goats and one of them had become quite greedy. He had just received a barrel of molasses — you know what molasses is?... How do you call it here? It is crude sugar, “jaggery”. He had received a barrel of jaggery and he opened it — he opened the lid and forgot to put it back. And there it was and the goat was roaming around. The goat thought that it must be quite good since it was left there within its reach! It began to eat it and found it truly excellent. And it went on — as it had lost all its instinct — until literally it fell dead, having eaten too much. Well, a wild animal would never do that. These are the advantages of man's company!

(23 September 1953)

58. *Love and the Desire to Devour*

...it is also said that the first expression of love in living beings is the desire to devour. One wants to absorb, desires to devour. There is one instance which would seem to prove that this is not altogether false — that is when the tiger catches its prey or the snake its victim, it happens that both the tiger's and the snake's victims give themselves up in a kind of delight of being eaten. An experience is narrated of a man who was in the bush with his friends and had lagged behind and was caught by a tiger, a man-eater. The others came back when they saw that he was missing. They saw the tracks. They ran after him, just in time to prevent the tiger's eating him. When he came to himself a little, they told him he must have had a frightful experience. He said: “No, just imagine, I don't know what happened to me, as soon as that tiger caught me and while it was dragging me along, I felt an intense love for it and a great desire to be eaten by it!”

This is quite true, it is not an invention. It is a true story.

Well, I have seen with my own eyes.... I believe I have already narrated this to you — the story of the little rabbit which had been put in a python's cage. It was in the cage in the *Jardin des Plantes* in Paris. It was the breakfast day. I happened to be there. The cage was opened, the little white rabbit put inside. It was a pretty little white rabbit and it immediately fled to the other end of the cage and trembled like anything. It was horrible to see this, for it knew very well what was happening, it had felt the snake, it knew very well. The serpent was simply coiled up on its mat. It seemed to be asleep, and very quietly it stretched out its neck and head, and then began looking at the rabbit. It looked at it without stirring — just looked at it. I saw the rabbit which at first stopped trembling; it no longer was afraid. It was quite doubled up and it began to recover. And then I saw it lift its head, open its eyes wide, and look at the snake, and slowly, very slowly it went forward towards it till it was just at the right distance. Then the snake with a single leap — without any disturbance,

without even uncoiling itself, just remaining where it was, you understand — hop! it took it. And then it began rolling it, preparing it for its dinner. It was not in order to play with it. It prepared the thing. It crushed all its bones nicely, made them crack; then it smeared it with a kind of gluey substance to make it quite slippery. And when it was all quite ready, it began swallowing it slowly, comfortably.... But it didn't have to disturb itself, it didn't have to make the least movement, except the last swift one just to catch it when it was right in front. It was the other creature that had come to it.

(8 July 1953)

59. *Maternal Love*

...And in animals it is often even purer than in human beings. There are instances of the devotion, care, self-forgetfulness of animals for their young, which are absolutely wonderful. Only, it is spontaneous, not thought out, not reflected upon; the animal does not think about what it is doing. Man thinks. At times this spoils the movement (at times — most often), sometimes it can give it a higher worth but that is rare. There is less spontaneity in man's movements than in an animal's.

I had a puss, the first time it had its kittens it did not want to move from there. It did not eat, did not satisfy any call of nature. It remained there, stuck to her kittens, shielding them, feeding them; it was so afraid that something would happen to them. And that was quite unthought out, spontaneous. It refused to move, so frightened it was that some harm might come to them — just through instinct. And then, when they were bigger, the trouble it took to educate them — it was marvellous. And what patience! And how it taught them to jump from wall to wall, to catch their food; how, with what care, it repeated once, ten times, a hundred times if necessary. It was never tired until the little one had done what it wanted. An extraordinary education. It taught them how to skirt houses following the edge of walls, how to walk so as not to fall, what had to be done when there was much space between one wall and another, in order to cross over. The little ones were quite afraid when they saw the gap and refused to jump because they were frightened (it was not too far for them, but there was the gap and they did not dare) and then the mother jumped, it went over to the other side, it called them: come, come along. They did not move, they were trembling. It jumped back and then gave them a speech, it gave them little blows with its paw and licked them, and yet they did not move. It jumped. I saw it do this for over half an hour. But after half an hour it found that they had learnt enough, so it went behind the one it evidently considered the most ready, the most capable, and gave it a hard knock with its head. Then the little one, instinctively, jumped. Once it had jumped, it jumped again and again and again....

There are few mothers who have this patience.

(26 August 1953)

60. *Taming Animals*

Once I was asked a question, a psychological question. It was put to me by a man who used to deal in wild animals. He had a menagerie, and he used to buy wild animals everywhere, in all countries where they are caught, in order to sell them again on the European market. He was an Austrian, I think. He had come to Paris, and he said to me, "I have to deal with two kinds of tamers. I would like to know very much which of the two is more courageous. There are those who love animals very much, they love them so much that they enter the cage without the least idea that it could prove dangerous, as a friend enters a friend's house, and they make them work, teach them how to do things, make them work without the slightest fear. I knew some who did not even have a whip in their hands; they went in and spoke with such friendliness to their animals that all went off well. This did not prevent their being eaten up one day. But still — this is one kind. The other sort are those who are so afraid before entering, that they tremble, you know, they become sick from that, usually. But they make an effort, they make a considerable moral effort, and without showing any fear they enter and make the animals work."

Then he told me, "I have heard two opinions: some say that it is much more courageous to overcome fear than not to have any fear.... Here's the problem. So which of the two is truly courageous?"

There is perhaps a third kind, which is truly courageous, still more courageous than either of the two. It is the one who is perfectly aware of the danger, who knows very well that one can't trust these animals. The day they are in a particularly excited state they can very well jump on you treacherously. But that's all the same to them. They go there for the joy of the work to be done, without questioning whether there will be an accident or not and in full quietude of mind, with all the necessary force and required consciousness in the body. This indeed was the case of that man himself. He had so terrific a will that without a whip, simply by the persistence of his will, he made them do all that he wanted. But he knew very well that it was a dangerous profession. He had no illusions about it. He told me that he had learnt this work with a cat — a cat!

He was a man who, apart from his work as a trader in wild animals, was an artist. He loved to draw, loved painting, and he had a cat in his studio. And it was in this way that he began becoming interested in animals. This cat was an extremely independent one, and had no sense of obedience. Well, he wanted to make a portrait of his cat. He put it on a chair and went to sit down at his easel. Frrrr... the cat ran away. So he went to look for it, took it back, put it back on the chair without even raising his voice, without scolding it, without saying anything to it, without hurting it of course or striking it. He took it up and put it back on the chair. Now, the cat became more and more clever. In the studio in some nooks there were canvasses, canvasses on which one paints, which were hidden and piled on one another,

behind, in the corners. So the cat went and sat there behind them. It knew that its master would take some time to bring out all those canvasses and catch it; the man, quietly, took them out one by one, caught the cat and put it back in its place.

He told me that once from sunrise to sunset he did this without stopping. He did not eat, the cat did not eat (*laughter*), he did that the whole day through; at the end of the day it was conquered. When its master put it on the chair it remained there (*laughter*) and from that time onwards it never again tried to run away. Then he told himself, "Why not try the same thing with the bigger animals?" He tried and succeeded.

Of course he couldn't take a lion in this way and put it on a chair, no, but he wanted to get them to make movements — silly ones, indeed, such as are made in circuses: putting their forefeet on a stool, or sitting down with all four paws together on a very small place, all kinds of stupid things, but still that's the fashion, that's what one likes to show; or perhaps to stand up like a dog on the hind legs; or even to roar — when a finger is held up before it, it begins to roar — you see, things like that, altogether stupid. It would be much better to let the animals go round freely, that would be much more interesting. However, as I said, that's the fashion.

But he managed this without any whipping, he never had a pistol in his pocket, and he went in there completely conscious that one day when they were not satisfied they could give him the decisive blow. But he did it quietly and with the same patience as with the cat. And when he delivered his animals — he gave his animals to the circuses, you see, to the tamers — they were wonderful.

Of course, those animals — all animals — feel it if one is afraid, even if one doesn't show it. They feel it extraordinarily, with an instinct which human beings don't have. They feel that you are afraid, your body produces a vibration which arouses an extremely unpleasant sensation in them. If they are strong animals this makes them furious; if they are weak animals, this gives them a panic. But if you have no fear at all, you see, if you go with an absolute trustfulness, a great trust, if you go in a friendly way to them, you will see that they have no fear; they are not afraid, they do not fear you and don't detest you; also, they are very trusting.

It is not to encourage you to enter the cages of all the lions you go to see, but still it is like that. When you meet a barking dog, if you are afraid, it will bite you, if you aren't, it will go away. But you must really not be afraid, not only appear unafraid, because it is not the appearance but the vibration that counts.

(26 January 1955)

61. *Conscious Vegetables*

...But I ought to tell you my own experience. Only I was thinking this was not something common.

In Tokyo I had a garden and in this garden I was growing vegetables myself. I had a fairly big garden and many vegetables. And so, every morning I used to go for a walk, after having watered them and all the rest; I used to walk around to choose which vegetables I could take for eating. Well, just imagine! There were some which said to me, "No, no, no, no, no."... And then there were others which called, and I saw them from a distance, and they were saying, "Take me, take me, take me!" So it was very simple, I looked for those which wanted to be taken and never did I touch those which did not. I used to think it was something exceptional. I loved my plants very much, I used to look after them, I had put a lot of consciousness into them while watering them, cleaning them, so I thought they had a special capacity, perhaps.

But in France it was the same thing. I had a garden also in the south of France where I used to grow peas, radishes, carrots. Well, there were some which were happy, which asked to be taken and eaten, and there were those which said, "No, no, no, don't touch me, don't touch me!" (*Laughter*)

Why did they say that, Sweet Mother?

Well, I experimented precisely to find out; and the result was not always the same. At times it was indeed that the plant was not edible; it was not good, it was hard or bitter, it was not good for eating. At other times it happened that it was not ready, that it was too early; it wasn't ripe. By waiting for a day or two, a day or two later it said to me, "Take me, take me, take me!" (*Laughter*)

(23 June 1954)

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62. The Vital Craving for Praise

...the vital craves even for the most rotten food and is so greedy that it will accept praise from even the very embodiments of incompetence. I am reminded of the annual opening of the Arts Exhibition in Paris, when the President of the Republic inspects the pictures, eloquently discovering that one is a landscape and another a portrait, and making platitudinous comments with the air of a most intimate soul-searching knowledge of Painting. The painters know very well how inept the remarks are and yet miss no chance of quoting the testimony of the President to their genius. For such indeed is the vital in mankind, ravenously fame-hungry.

(1930-31)

63. *Miraculous*

There is an intervention of forces, consciousnesses, movements, influences, which is invisible or imperceptible for our ordinary consciousness and *constantly* changes the whole course of circumstances.

We don't need to go very far; it is enough to take just a step outside the ordinary consciousness in order to realise this. I have already said several times that if one finds the psychic consciousness within oneself and identifies oneself with it, well, immediately one feels a complete reversal of circumstances and sees things almost totally differently from the way one ordinarily sees them. For one perceives the force which is acting instead of the result of this action.

At present you see only the result of the action of the forces, and this seems to you natural, logical. And it's only when something a little abnormal occurs — or it's a little abnormal for you — that you begin to feel surprised. But if you were in another state of consciousness, what seems abnormal to you now would no longer be so. You would see that it is the effect of something else, of another action than the one you perceive. But even from the purely material point of view, you are used to certain things, they have been explained to you: for example, electric light, or that it is enough to press a button to start a car. You can explain it, you have been told why, and so it seems absolutely natural to you. But I had instances of people who did not know, who were completely ignorant, who came from a place where these things had not yet penetrated, and who were suddenly shown a statue being lighted up by rays of light; they fell on their knees in adoration: it was a divine manifestation.

And I have seen someone else who was in the same state, it was a child who knew nothing. In front of him a button was pressed and the car started; it seemed a *tremendous* miracle to him. Well, it is like that. You are used to certain things, they seem absolutely natural to you. If you were not used to them, you would see, you would think them miracles.

(23 November 1955)

64. *The Renunciation of Desire*

The Buddha has said that there is a greater joy in overcoming a desire than in satisfying it. It is an experience everybody can have and one that is truly very interesting, very interesting.

There was someone who was invited — it happened in Paris — invited to a first-night (a first-night means a first performance) of an opera of Massenet's. I think... I don't remember now whose it was. The subject was fine, the play was fine, and the music not displeasing; it was the first time and this person was invited to the box of the Minister of Fine Arts who always has a box for all the first nights at the government

theatres. This Minister of Fine Arts was a simple person, an old countryside man, who had not lived much in Paris, who was quite new in his ministry and took a truly childlike joy in seeing new things. Yet he was a polite man and as he had invited a lady he gave her the front seat and himself sat at the back. But he felt very unhappy because he could not see everything. He leaned forward like this, trying to see something without showing it too much. Now, the lady who was in front noticed this. She too was very interested and was finding it very fine, and it was not that she did not like it, she liked it very much and was enjoying the show; but she saw how very unhappy that poor minister looked, not being able to see. So quite casually, you see, she pushed back her chair, went back a little, as though she was thinking of something else, and drew back so well that he came forward and could now see the whole scene. Well, this person, when she drew back and gave up all desire to see the show, was filled with a sense of inner joy, a liberation from all attachment to things and a kind of peace, content to have done something for somebody instead of having satisfied herself, to the extent that the evening brought her infinitely greater pleasure than if she had listened to the opera. This is a true experience, it is not a little story read in a book, and it was precisely at the time this person was studying Buddhist discipline, and it was in conformity with the saying of the Buddha that she tried this experiment.

And truly this was so concrete an experience, you know, so real that... ah, two seconds later, you see, the play, the music, the actors, the scene, the pictures and all that were gone like absolutely secondary things, completely unimportant, while this joy of having mastered something in oneself and done something not simply selfish, this joy filled all the being with an incomparable serenity — a delightful experience... Well, it is not just an individual, personal experience. All those who want to try can have it.

There is a kind of inner communion with the psychic being which takes place when one willingly gives up a desire, and because of this one feels a much greater joy than if he had satisfied his desire. Besides, most usually, almost without exception, when one satisfies a desire it always leaves a kind of bitter taste somewhere.

There is not one satisfied desire which does not give a kind of bitterness; as when one has eaten too sugary a sweet it fills your mouth with bitterness. It is like that. You must try sincerely. Naturally you must not pretend to give up desire and keep it in a corner, because then one becomes very unhappy. You must do it sincerely.

(9 February 1955)

65. *The Way to Change*

If you do not make a higher determinism intervene, truly you can change nothing. That is the only way of changing your physical determinism. If you remain in your

physical consciousness and want to change your determinism, you cannot... During the First War I knew a boy who had been told he would die of a gunshot (you know in war one dies easily), and he had even been given an approximate date. And that caused him such agony that he had succeeded in getting a long leave. He came to Paris on leave. He was an officer and had his pistol in his pocket. He jumped from a tram and fell down, the pistol went off and he was killed on the spot. He could not escape.

(10 March 1954)

66. Adverse Propaganda

...It doesn't matter at all. We had an instance like that, which was very amusing. Someone whom I won't name, came here and wrote in one of the leading French newspapers an absolutely stupid article which was... well, which showed the stupidity of the man and was extremely violent against the Ashram — that's not the reason I call him a fool, but still... Well, the result — one of the results — of this article was that we received a letter from someone: "I have read the article, I want to come to the Ashram immediately."

This can have just the opposite effect.

(4 April 1956)

67. Being Upset

If you are upset, it means that you have still much work to do upon your vital before it can be ready, it means there is a weakness somewhere. For some, the weakness is in the mind. I knew a boy in France who was a fine musician, he used to play the violin admirably. But his brain was not very big, it was just big enough to help him in his music, nothing more. He used to come to our spiritual meetings and, all of a sudden, he had the experience of the infinite in the finite; it was an absolutely true experience; in the finite individual came the experience of the infinite. But this upset the boy so much that he could make nothing at all of it! He could not even play his music any longer. The experience had to be stopped because it was too powerful for him. This is an instance where the mind was too weak.

(12 February 1951)

68. *Physical Mind*

But the truth is that the physical mind is truly completely stupid! You can prove it very easily. It is constructed probably as a kind of control, and in order to make sure that things are done as they ought to be. I think that this is its normal work.... But it has made it a habit to doubt everything.

I think I have already told you about the small experiment I made one day. I removed my control and left the control to the physical mind — it is the physical mind which doubts. So I made the following experiment: I went into a room, then came out of the room and closed the door. I had decided to close the door; and when I came to another room, this mind, the material mind, the physical mind, you see, said, “Are you sure you have locked the door?” Now, I did not control, you know... I said, “Very well, I obey it!” I went back to see. I observed that the door was closed. I came back. As soon as I couldn’t see the door any longer, it told me, “Have you verified properly?” So I went back again.... And this went on till I decided: “Come now, that’s enough, isn’t it? Closed or not, I am not going back any more to see!” This could have gone on the whole day. It is made like that. It stops being like that only when a higher mind, the rational mind tells it, “Keep quiet!” Otherwise it goes on indefinitely.... So, if by ill-luck you are centred there, in this mind, even the things you know higher up as quite true, even things of which you have a physical proof —like that of the closed door, it doubts, it will doubt, because it is built of doubt. It will always say, “Are you quite sure this is true?... Isn’t it an idea of yours?... You don’t suppose it is like that?” And it will go on until one teaches it to keep quiet and be silent.

(14 July 1954)

69. *Horrors of War*

The last months I spent in Paris were truly fantastic. And it can’t be told. The life in the trenches, for example, is something that cannot be told. The new generations do not know.... But, you see, the children born now will not even know if this was true, all these horrors which are related to them. What happened in the conquered countries, in Czechoslovakia, in Poland, in France — the frightful things, unbelievable, unthinkable, which took place — unless one has been very close by, has seen, one cannot believe it. It was... I was saying the other day that the vital world is a world of horrors; well, all the horrors of the vital world had descended upon earth, and upon earth they are still more horrible than in the vital world, because in the vital world, if you have an inner power, if you have the knowledge, if you have strength, you act upon them — you act, you can subdue them, you can show yourself stronger. But all your knowledge, all your power, all your strength is

nothing in this material world when you are subjected to the horrors of a war. And this acts in the terrestrial atmosphere in such a way that it is very, very difficult to eradicate it.

Naturally, men are always very anxious to forget. There are already those who have begun to say, “Are you quite sure it was like that?” But those who have gone through that, do not want it to be forgotten; so the places of torture, massacre — hideous places which go beyond all the worst the human imagination can conceive — some of these places have been preserved. You can go and visit the torture-chambers the Germans built in Paris, and they will never be destroyed, I hope, so that those who come and say, “Oh! You know, these things have been exaggerated” (for one does not like to know that such frightful things have happened), could be taken by the hand and told, “Come and see, if you are not afraid.”

(9 April 1951)

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70. *A Book*

In every religion there is a book — whether it be the Catechism, the Hindu texts, the Koran, in short, all the sacred books — you learn it by heart. You are told that this-is-the-truth, and you are sure it is the truth and remain comfortable. It is very convenient, you don’t need to try to understand. Those who don’t know the same thing as you, are in the falsehood, and you even pray for those who are outside the “Truth”! This is a common fact in all religions. But in all religions there are people who know better and don’t believe in these things. I had met one of these particularly, one belonging to the Catholic faith. He was a big man. I spoke to him about what I knew and asked him: “Why do you use this method? Why do you perpetuate ignorance?” He answered: “It is a policy of peace of mind. If we didn’t do that, people wouldn’t listen to us. This, indeed, is the secret of religions.” He told me: “There are in our religion, as in the ancient initiations, people who know. There are schools where the old tradition is taught. But we are forbidden to speak about it. All these religious images are symbols representing something other than what is taught. But that is not taught outside.”

(29 April 1953)

71. *The God of Religions*

But I can tell you about my own experience. Until the age of about twenty-five, all I knew was the God of religions, God as men have created him, and I did not want

him at any price. I denied his existence but with the certitude that if such a God did exist, I detested him.

When I was about twenty-five I discovered the inner God and at the same time I learnt that the God described by most Western religions is none other than the Great Adversary. When I came to India, in 1914, and became acquainted with Sri Aurobindo's teaching, everything became very clear.

(24 March 1970)

72. *Monsieur Vincent and His Creed*

In fact, the first human being that concerns you is yourself. You want to diminish suffering, but unless you can change the capacity of suffering into a certitude of being happy, the world will not change. It will always be the same, we turn in a circle — one civilisation follows another, one catastrophe another; but the thing does not change, for there is something missing, something not there, that is the consciousness. That's all.

At least, that's my opinion. I am giving it to you for what it is worth. If you want to build hospitals, schools, you may do so; if that makes you happy, so much the better for you. It has not much importance. When I saw the film *Monsieur Vincent*, I was very interested. He found out that when he fed ten poor men, a thousand came along. That was what Colbert told him: "It seems you create them, your poor ones, by feeding them!" And it is not altogether false. However! If it is your destiny to found schools and give instruction, to care for the sick, to open hospitals, it is good, do it. But you must not take that very seriously. It is something grandiose you are doing for your own pleasure. Say: "I am doing it because it gives me pleasure." But do not speak of yoga. It is not yoga you are doing. You believe you are doing something great, that's all, and it is for your personal satisfaction.

(8 April 1953)

73. *"Sinning" Humanity*

This reminds me of what happened in Paris when I was seventeen or eighteen. There was a "charity bazaar". This charity bazaar was a place where men from all over the world came to buy and sell all kinds of things, and the proceeds of the sale went to works of charity (it was meant more for amusement than for doing good, but still, charitable works profited by it). All the elegance, all the refinement of high society was gathered there. Now, the bazaar was very beautiful but not solidly built, because it was to last only for three or four days. The roof was of painted tarpaulin which had been suspended. Everything was lighted by electricity; the work

was more or less decently done, but naturally with the idea that it was only for a few days. There was a short-circuit, everything began to blaze up; the roof caught fire and suddenly collapsed upon the people. As I said, all the *élite* of society were there — for them, from the human point of view, it was a frightful catastrophe. There were people near the entrance who tried to escape; others, all ablaze, also tried to reach the door and run away. It was a veritable scuffle! All these elegant, refined people, who usually were so well-mannered, began to fight like street rowdies. There was even a Count of something or other, a very well-known man, a poet, a man of perfect elegance, who carried a silver-knobbed stick, and he was surprised in the act of hitting women on the head with his stick, and trying to push forward! Indeed, it was a fine sight, something most elegant! Afterwards, lamentations in society, big funerals and many stories.... Now, a Dominican, a well-known orator, was asked to give a speech over the tombs of the unfortunate who had perished in the fire. He said something to this effect: “It serves you right. You did not live according to the law of God and He has punished you by burning you.”

And every time there was a disaster this story was repeated. Naturally many people protested and said, “Here’s a God whom we won’t have!” But these ideas are quite typical of ordinary humanity.

“Sinning” humanity is altogether a Christian idea, which falsifies our idea of the Divine — a Divine who punishes poor people because it is their misfortune to be born “sinners” would not be very generous! However...

(5 March 1951)

74. *The Morality of Nature*

It was a group of people whom I met in Paris. A certain gentleman had founded a group called “The Morality of Nature”, and so he took his stand on all the movements of Nature to set up his moral code. But we know that Nature is... how to put it... a force, a consciousness or being, call it what you like, which is absolutely amoral, for whom the moral sense does not exist at all. So naturally this had rather disastrous results in practice. And in the very meeting where this gentleman was expounding his theories, there was a Catholic priest, a very learned man who studied many things (he knew lots of things), who immediately began to tell him that his morality of Nature was not moral. Then the other gentleman was not pleased and told him, “Oh, yes! You climb to the seventh storey of your ivory tower and from there you look at things without understanding them.” “The seventh storey of your ivory tower” was very amusing.

Well, he had found, according to himself (I don’t remember his name now), he had found the means of being happy, that everyone may be satisfied and men may love one another. So naturally people who did not agree with him, said to him,

“But how does it happen that when the law of Nature alone reigns — as for example, without even going as far as the animal, in vegetable life — how does it happen that there are constant massacres between plants and the perpetual struggle for life? Is this what you call harmony?” Then the other man did not understand anything.

(1 June 1955)

75. Religious Attitude

The first time I came to India I came on a Japanese boat. And on this Japanese boat there were two clergymen, that is, Protestant priests, of different sects. I don't remember exactly which sects, but they were both English; I think one was an Anglican and the other a Presbyterian.

Now, Sunday came. There had to be a religious ceremony on the boat, or else we would have looked like heathens, like the Japanese! There had to be a ceremony, but who should perform it? Should it be the Anglican or should it be the Presbyterian? They just missed quarrelling. Finally, one of them withdrew with dignity — I don't remember now which one, I think it was the Anglican — and the Presbyterian performed his ceremony.

It took place in the lounge of the ship. We had to go down a few steps to this lounge. And that day, all the men had put on their jackets — it was hot, I think we were in the Red Sea — they put on their jackets, stiff collars, leather shoes; neckties well set, hats on their heads, and they went with a book under their arm, almost in a procession from the deck to the lounge. The ladies wore their hats, some carried even a parasol, and they too had their book under the arm, a prayer-book.

And so they all crowded down into the lounge, and the Presbyterian made a speech, that is to say, preached his sermon, and everybody listened very religiously. And then, when it was over, they all came up again with the satisfied air of someone who has done his duty. And, of course, five minutes later they were in the bar drinking and playing cards, and their religious ceremony was forgotten. They had done their duty, it was over, there was nothing more to be said about it.

And the clergyman came and asked me, more or less politely, why I had not attended. I told him, “Sir, I am sorry, but I don't believe in religion.”

“Oh! oh! you are a materialist?”

“No, not at all.”

“Ah! then why?”

“Oh!” I said, “if I were to tell you, you would be quite displeased, perhaps it is better for me not to say anything.”

But he insisted so much that at last I said, “Just try to see, I don't feel that you are sincere, neither you nor your flock. You all went there to fulfil a social duty and

a social custom, but not at all because you really wanted to enter into communion with God.”

“Enter into communion with God! But we can’t do that! All that we can do is to say some good words, but we have no capacity to enter into communion with God.”

Then I said, “But it was just because of that I didn’t go, for it doesn’t interest me.”

After that he asked me many questions and admitted to me that he was going to China to convert the “heathens”. At that I became serious and told him, “Listen, even before your religion was born — not even two thousand years ago — the Chinese had a very high philosophy and knew a path leading them to the Divine; and when they think of Westerners, they think of them as barbarians. And so you are going there to convert those who know more about it than you? What are you going to teach them? To be insincere, to perform hollow ceremonies instead of following a profound philosophy and a detachment from life which lead them to a more spiritual consciousness?... I don’t think it’s a very good thing you are going to do.”

Then he felt so suffocated, the poor man; he said to me, “Eh, I fear I can’t be convinced by your words!”

“Oh!” I said, “I am not trying to convince you, I only described the situation to you, and how I don’t quite see why barbarians should want to go and teach civilised people what they have known long before you. That’s all.”

And there, that was the end of it.

(23 May 1956)

76. Vital Entities in Religious Monuments

In all religious monuments, in monuments considered the most... well, as belonging to the highest religion, whether in France or any other country or Japan — it was never the same temples or churches nor the same gods, and yet my experience was everywhere almost the same, with very small differences — I saw that whatever concentrated force there was in the church depended exclusively upon the faithful, the faith of the devotees. And there was still a difference between the force as it really was and the force as they felt it. For instance, I saw in one of the most beautiful cathedrals of France, which, from the artistic point of view, is one of the most magnificent monuments imaginable — in the most sacred spot I saw an *enormous* black, vital spider which had made its web and spread it over the whole place, and was catching in it and then absorbing all the forces emanating from people’s devotion, their prayers and all that. It was not a very cheering sight; the people who were there and were praying, felt a divine touch, they received all kinds of boons from their prayers, and yet what was there was this, this thing. But they had their faith which could change that evil thing into something good in them; they had their

faith. So, truly, if *I* had gone and told them, “Do you think you are praying to God? It is an enormous vital spider that’s feeding upon all your forces!”, that would really not have been very charitable. And that’s how it is most of the time, almost everywhere; it is a vital force which is there, for these vital entities feed upon the vibration of human emotions, and very few people, very few, an insignificant number, go to church or temple with a true religious feeling, that is, not to pray and beg for something from God but to offer themselves, give thanks, aspire, give themselves. There is hardly one in a million who does that. So they do not have the power of changing the atmosphere. Perhaps when they are there, they manage to get across, break through and go somewhere and touch something divine. But the large majority of people who go only because of superstition, egoism and self-interest, create an atmosphere of this kind, and that is what you breathe in when you go to a church or temple. Only, as you go there with a very good feeling, you tell yourself, “Oh, what a quiet place for meditation!”

I am sorry, but that’s how it is. I tell you I have deliberately tried this experiment a little everywhere. Maybe I found some very tiny places, like a tiny village church at times, where there was a very quiet little spot for meditation, very still, very silent, where there was some aspiration; but this was so rare! I have seen the beautiful churches of Italy, magnificent places; they were full of these vital beings and full of terror. I remember painting in a basilica of Venice, and while I was working, in the confessional a priest was hearing the confession of a poor woman. Well, it was truly a frightful sight! I don’t know what the priest was like, what his character was, he could not be seen — you know, don’t you, that they are not seen. They are shut up in a box and receive the confession through a grille. There was such a dark and sucking power over him, and that poor woman was in such a state of fearful terror that it was truly painful to see it. And all these people believe this is something holy! But it is a web of the hostile vital forces which use all this to feed upon. Besides, in the invisible world hardly any beings love to be worshipped, except those of the vital. These, as I said, are quite pleased by it. And then, it gives them importance. They are puffed up with pride and feel very happy, and when they can get a herd of people to worship them they are quite satisfied.

But if you take real divine beings, this is not at all something they value. They do not like to be worshipped. No, it does not give them any special pleasure at all! Don’t think they are happy, for they have no pride. It is because of pride that a man likes to be worshipped; if a man has no pride he doesn’t like to be worshipped; and if, for instance, they see a good intention or a fine feeling or a movement of unselfishness or enthusiasm, a joy, a spiritual joy, these things have for them an infinitely greater value than prayers and acts of worship and pujas...

(30 June 1954)

77. *Temple by the Shore*

Close by here, near the seashore, there is a fishermen's temple — Virampatnam, I think; when you go as far as Ariancouppam and from there turn to the left and go towards the sea, at the end of the road there is a temple. It is the temple of a strange godhead... it is one of the Kalis. Well, extraordinary stories are told about this Kali, but in any case, the custom is to kill a fairly large number of chickens every year in her honour. I happened to go down there — I believe it was the day after the festival had been celebrated: one could still see all the feathers scattered on the sands — and, above all, there was in that place an atmosphere of creepy dread and total ignorance, and also (I don't know the practice — who eats the chickens? whether it is the one who kills them or the priests — but here truly there were too many! If the priests ate all that they would be quite sick! So it must probably have been also the people who had killed the chickens), there was that atmosphere of greed, not only greed but of gluttony, of people who think about eating. And there was that Kali who was particularly satisfied with all the vital forces of all those poor little chickens; they had been killed off by hundreds and each one had a little vital force which escaped when its throat was cut, and so that Kali was feeding upon all that: she was very happy. And there was evidently — I don't know if it could be called cruelty, it was rather greed, — greed of vital forces, of a very unconscious vital force, for these poor chickens don't have anything very conscious. And the whole thing created a very low, very heavy, very unconscious and painful atmosphere, yet not of the intensity of cruelty. So it can't be said that this practice is due to cruelty, I don't think so. Perhaps some of these people, had they to sacrifice a little kid, a little lamb they loved, perhaps they would even find this a little sad. It is rather a great unconsciousness and a great fear. Oh, fear! In religions there is so much fear! Fear: "If I don't do this or that, if I don't cut the throat of a dozen chickens, disastrous things will happen to me all my life through or at least the whole of this year. My children will be ill, I shall lose my job, I won't be able to earn my living; very, very unpleasant things will happen to me."... And so, let us sacrifice the dozen chickens. But it is not from the desire to kill. It can't be said that it's through cruelty: it's through unconsciousness.

What did that Kali do when you went to see her?

You know the story, don't you?... I did not know the place, but there is a bit of a road between Ariancouppam and this temple. And so, half-way, I was seated quietly in my car knowing nothing — I knew nothing, neither the story of that Kali nor of the chickens nor anything — I was seated in my car when suddenly I saw a black being coming, with hair all dishevelled, who asked me to make a pact. And she assumed a tone of great supplication and told me, "Ah! If you wish, if you wish to adopt me and come to help me, how many people would come, how very glorious

this place would become.” She was a funny little creature. She was black, dishevelled, quite thin, she didn’t seem to be flourishing much! Later I was told — I don’t know the story exactly, I can’t say — that some misfortune had befallen her: her head had been cut off, wasn’t that it? Something like that. (*Turning to a disciple*) Amrita, do you know the story of the Kali of Virampatnam?... No, you don’t? Someone had related it to me, anyway it was not very interesting, it was an unfortunate Kali. I told her to remain quiet and that I did not understand what she wanted of me, that I came... that if she had a sincere aspiration, well, there would be a response to her aspiration. The next moment we reached the temple; then I began to understand that this was the person for whom the temple had been built. Later we went to walk on the seashore under the casuarina trees, and there we saw all the feathers and drops of blood and the remains of the fire — the fire on which, evidently, people had cooked their chickens. And we asked for the story. And I knew then the story of that Kali and how, for that festival, chickens were massacred in great numbers. So, that’s it.

I don’t suppose that creature felt any considerable satisfaction in seeing the chickens killed — I know nothing about it. As I said, all the profit she could get out of it was the absorption of some vital forces coming out of the chicken. But it was evident that she felt an enormous satisfaction in seeing a large crowd — the more people came there and the more chickens were killed, the greater was the sign of success. This proved that she had become a person of considerable importance! And so in her ingenuousness she came to ask my help, telling me that if I wanted to help her and give her something of my vital force and vital presence, there would be still more people and more chickens! Then that would be a very great success. I replied that as things stood it was quite enough, that she should remain quiet.

To what plane did she belong, Mother?

The most material vital.

Why is she called Kali?

I don’t know. It is one of the Kalis — I have a vague impression that her head was cut off or that she was buried up to the neck or I don’t know what. Something like that. There is a story of a head which comes out of the sand, buried up to the neck. But that, anyone in this country will tell you the story, I don’t remember it. It is a form of Kali — there are countless forms of Kali. Each believer has his image, has his particular relation with a certain Kali. Sometimes it is their own Kali: there are family Kalis — lots of family Kalis. I knew families who had very dangerous Kalis. If what they wanted was not done, always some misfortune befell the family members. There was a very strong formation. I suppose it was the family members

who were still more responsible than their Kali. And I knew people who, when the misfortune came, a real misfortune in the family — someone's death — took the image of Kali and went and threw it into the Ganges.

(17 March 1954)

78. *The Black Kali*

What does that black Kali do?

Well, I believe she does fairly bad things! It is obvious that she takes a great pleasure in destruction.

That one — it was at the time of the First World War, the early days of the First War. I was here. I was staying in the house on Dupleix Street, Dupleix House. From the terrace of that house could be seen Sri Aurobindo's room, the one in the Guest House. Sri Aurobindo was staying there. He had two rooms and the small terrace. And from the terrace of Dupleix House the terrace of the Guest House could be seen. I don't know if it can still be seen; that depends on the houses in between, but at that time it could. And I used to sit on the terrace to meditate every morning, facing Sri Aurobindo's room. That day I was in my room, but looking at Sri Aurobindo's room through a small window. I was in meditation but my eyes were open. I saw this Kali entering through my door; I asked her, "What do you want?" And she was dancing, a truly savage dance. She told me, "Paris is taken, Paris will be destroyed." We used to have no news, it was just at the beginning of the war. I was in meditation. I turned towards her and told her, "No, Paris will not be taken, Paris will be saved", quietly, just like this, but with a certain force. She made a face and went away. And the next day, we received the "dispatch". In those days there were no radios yet, we had telegraph messages, "dispatches", which were proclaimed, posted on the gate of the Government House. We got the news that the Germans had been marching upon Paris, that Paris was not defended; the way was quite open, they had to advance only a few kilometres more and they would have entered the city. But when they saw that the road was clear, that there was nobody to oppose them, they felt convinced that it was an ambush, that a trap had been set for them. So they turned round and went back! (*Laughter*) And when the French armies saw that, naturally they gave chase and caught them, and there was a battle. It was the decisive battle: they were stopped. Well, evidently it was that. It took this form: When I said to Kali, "No", they were panic-stricken. They turned back. Otherwise, if they had continued to advance it would have been all over.

(17 March 1954)

79. *Priests*

I have had discussions (not “discussions”, but exchange of views) with prelates. There was a certain cardinal.... I told him my experience, that is to say, what I knew.

He replied, “Whether you want to or not, you belong to the Church; because those who know belong to the Church.”

And he said, “You know what we are taught when we become cardinals.”

I said, “Nobody has taught me anything, it is my experience.”

Then he repeated, “Whether you want to or not, you belong to the Church.”

I felt like telling him a few things, but I did not reply.

(29 April 1961)

80. *The Lord and the Asura*

...I have a sort of recollection — the recollection of a very, very ancient story that no one ever told me... in which the first Asura *challenged*, defied the supreme Lord, telling him, “I am as great as You!”

And the answer was, “I wish that you become greater than I, because then there will be no more asura.”

And this recollection is very vivid, somewhere.... If you become the Whole, it is finished, isn't it, the asura's ambition is to be greater than the supreme Lord: “Become greater than I, then there will be no more asura.”

On a very small scale, it is like that on the earth.

(3 July 1963)

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*Let the splendour of Bharat's past
be reborn in the realisation
of her imminent future
with the help and blessings
of her living soul.*

The Mother

(CWM, Vol. 13, p. 352)

With Compliments from Well-wishers