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“Great is Truth and it shall prevail”

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THE MAHATMAS

KUTHUMI

(This poem is purely a play of the imaginative, a poetic reconstruction of the central idea only of Mahatmahood.)

The seven mountains and the seven seas
Surround me. Over me the eightfold Sun
Blazing with various colours — green and blue,
Scarlet and rose, violet and gold and white,
And the dark disk that rides in the mortal cave —
Looks down on me in flame. Below spread wide
The worlds of the immortals, tier on tier
Like a great mountain climbing to the skies,
And on their summit Shiva dwells. Of old
My doings were familiar with the earth,
The mortals over whom I hold control
Were then my fellows. But I followed not
The usual path, the common thoughts of men.
A thirst of knowledge and a sense of power,
A passion of divine beneficence
Pursued me through a hundred lives. I rose
From birth to birth, until I reached the peak
Of human knowledge, then in Bharat born,
I, Kuthumi, the Kshatriya, the adept,
The mighty Yogin of Dwaipayana's school,
To Vyasa came, our great original sage.
He looked upon me with the eyes that see
And smiled august and awful. "Kuthumi,"
He cried, "now gather back what thou hast earned
In many lives, remember all thy past,
Cease from thy round of human births, resume
The eightfold powers that make a man as God.
Then come again and learn thy grandiose work,
For thou art of the souls to death denied."
I went into the mountains by the sea
That thunders pitilessly from night to morn,
And sung to by that rude relentless sound

Amidst the cries of beasts, the howl of winds,
 Surrounded by the gnashing demon hordes,
 I did the Hathayoga in three days,
 Which men with anguish through ten lives effect,
 Not that now practised by earth's feeble race,
 But that which Ravan knew in Lanka, Dhruv
 Fulfilled, Hiranyakashipu performed,
 The Yoga of the old Lemurian Kings.
 I felt the strength of Titans in my veins,
 The joy of Gods, the pride of Siddhas. Tall
 And mighty like a striding God I came
 To Vyasa; but he shook his dense piled locks,
 Denying me; "Thou art not pure," he cried.
 I went in anger to Himaloy's peaks
 And on the highest in the breathless snow
 Sat dumb for many years. Then knowledge came
 Streaming upon me and the hills around
 Shook with the feet of the descending power.
 I did the Rajayoga in three days,
 Which men with care and accuracy minute
 Ceaselessly follow for an age in vain —
 Not Kali's Rajayoga, but the means
 Of perfect knowledge, purity and force
 Bali the Titan learned and gave to men,
 The Yoga of the old Atlantic Kings.
 I came to Vyasa, shining like a sun.
 He smiled and said, "Now seek the world's Great Soul,
 Sri Krishna, where he lives on earth concealed,
 Give up to him all that thou know'st and hast;
 For thou art he, elect from mortal men
 To guard the knowledge, yet an easy task
 While the third age preserves man's godlike form.
 But when thou seest the iron Kali come
 And he from Dwarca leaves the Earth, know then
 The time of trial, help endangered men,
 Preserve the knowledge that preserves the world,
 Until Sri Krishna utterly returns.
 Then art thou from thy mighty work released
 Into the worlds of bliss for endless years
 To rest, until another aeon comes,
 When of the seven Rishis thou art one."

I sent my knowledge forth across the land.
 It found him not in Bharat's princely halls,
 In quiet asrams, nor in temples pure,
 Nor where the wealthy traffickers resort —
 Brahmin nor Kshatriya body housed the Lord,
 Vaisya nor Sudra nor outcaste. At length
 To a bare hut on a wild mountain's verge
 Led by the star I came. A hermit mad
 Of the wild Abhirs, who sat dumb or laughed
 And ran and leaped and danced upon the hills
 But told the reason of his joy to none,
 In him I saw the Lord, behind the man
 Perceived the spirit that contains the world.
 I fell before him, but he leapt and ran
 And smote me with his foot and out of me
 All knowledge, all desire, all strength was gone
 Into its source. I sat an infant child.
 He laughed aloud and said, "Take back thy gifts,
 O beggar!" and went leaping down the slope.
 Then full of light and strength and bliss I soared
 Beyond the spheres, above the mighty Gods
 And left my human body on the snows.
 And others gathered to me, more or less
 In puissance to assist, but mine the charge
 By Vishnu given. I gather knowledge here,
 Then to my human frame awhile descend
 And walk mid men, choosing my instruments,
 Testing, rejecting and confirming souls —
 Vessels of the Spirit; for the golden age
 In Kali comes, the iron lined with gold,
 The Yoga shall be given back to men,
 The sects shall cease, the grim debates die out
 And atheism perish from the Earth,
 Blasted with knowledge; love and brotherhood
 And wisdom repossess Sri Krishna's world.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Collected Poems*, SABCL, Vol. 5, pp. 83-85)

THE CLAIMS OF THEOSOPHY

I WISH to write in no narrow and intolerant spirit about Theosophy. There can be nothing more contemptibly ignorant than the vulgar prejudice which ridicules Theosophy because it concerns itself with marvels. From that point of view the whole world is a marvel; every operation of thought, speech or action is a miracle, a thing wonderful, obscure, occult and unknown. Even the sneer on the lips of the derider of occultism has to pass through a number of ill-understood processes before it can manifest itself on his face, yet the thing itself is the work of a second. That sneer is a much greater and more occult miracle than the precipitation of letters or the reading of the Akashic records. If Science is true, what more absurd, paradoxical and Rabelaisian miracle can there be than this, that a republic of small animalcules forming a mass of grey matter planned Austerlitz, wrote Hamlet or formulated the Vedanta philosophy? If I believed that strange dogma, I should no longer hold myself entitled to disbelieve anything. Materialism seems to me the most daring of occultisms, the most reckless and presumptuous exploiter of the principle, *Credo quia impossibile*, I believe it because it is impossible. If these minute cells can invent wireless telegraphy, why should it be impossible for them to precipitate letters or divine the past and the future? Until one can say of investigation "It is finished" and of knowledge "There is nothing beyond", no one has a right to set down men as charlatans because they profess to be the pioneers of a new kind of Science.

Neither, I hope, shall I be inclined to reject or criticise adversely because Theosophy has a foreign origin. There is no law of Nature by which spiritual knowledge is confined to the East or must bear the stamp of an Indian manufacture before it can receive the imprimatur of the All-Wise. He has made man in his own image everywhere, in the image of the Satyam Jnanam Anantam, the divine Truth-Knowledge-Infinity, and from wheresoever true knowledge comes, it must be welcomed.

Nevertheless if men claim to be the pioneers of a new kind of Science, they must substantiate their claims. And if foreigners come to the people of India and demand to be accepted as instructors in our own special department of knowledge, they must prove that they have a prodigious superiority. Has the claim been substantiated? Has the superiority been proved?

What Indians see is a body which is professedly and hospitably open to all enquiry at the base but entrenches itself in a Papal or mystic infallibility at the top. To be admitted into the society it is enough to believe in the freest investigation and the brotherhood of mankind, but everyone who is admitted must feel, if he is honest with himself, that he is joining a body which stands for certain well-known dogmas, a definite and very elaborate cosmogony and philosophy and a peculiar organisation,

the spirit, if not the open practice in which seems to be theocratic rather than liberal. One feels that the liberality of the outer rings is only a wisely politic device for attracting a wider circle of sympathisers from whom numerous converts to the inner can be recruited. It is the dogmas, the cosmogony, the philosophy, the theocratic organisation which the world understands by Theosophy and which one strengthens by adhesion to the society; free inquiry and the brotherhood of man benefit to a very slight degree.

One sees also a steady avoidance of the demand for substantiation, a withdrawal into mystic secrecy, a continual reference to the infallible knowledge of the male & female Popes of Theosophy or, when that seems to need bolstering, to the divine authority of invisible and inaccessible Mahatmas. We in India admit the Guru and accept the Avatar. But still the Guru is only a vessel of the infinite Knowledge, the Avatar is only a particular manifestation of the Divine Personality. It is shocking to our spiritual notions to find cosmic Demiurges of a vague semi-divine character put between us and the All-Powerful and All-Loving and Kutthumi and Maurya taking the place of God.

One sees, finally, a new Theocracy claiming the place of the old, and that Theocracy is dominantly European. Indians figure numerous as prominent subordinates, just as in the British system of government Indians are indispensable and sometimes valued assistants. Or they obtain eminence on the side of pure spirituality and knowledge, just as Indians could rise to the highest places in the judicial service or in advisory posts, but not in the executive administration. But if the smaller hierophants are sometimes and rarely Indians, the theocrats and the bulk of the prophets are Russian, American or English. An Indian here and there may quicken the illumination of the Theosophist, but it is Madame Blavatsky or Mrs Besant, Sinnett or Leadbeater who lays down the commandments and the Law. It is strange to see the present political condition of India reproducing itself in a spiritual organisation; it illustrates perhaps the subtle interconnection and interdependence of all individual and communal activities in the human being. But the political subordination finds its justification in the physical fact of the British rule. It is argued plausibly, and perhaps correctly, that without this subordination British supremacy could have no sure foundation. But where is the justification for the foreign spiritual control? The argument of native incapacity may be alleged. But I do not find this hypothesis of superiority supported by the facts. I do not see that Mrs Besant has a more powerful and perfect intellectuality, eloquence, personality or religious force than had Swami Vivekananda or that a single Theosophist has yet showed him or herself to be as mighty and pure a spirit as the Paramhansa Ramakrishna. There are Indian Yogins who have a finer and more accurate psychical knowledge than the best that can be found in the books of the Theosophists. Some even of the less advanced have given me proofs of far better-developed occult powers than any Theosophist I have yet known. The only member of the Theosophical Society who could give me any spiritual help I could not better by my unaided faculties, was one excluded from the esoteric section because his rare and potent experiences

were unintelligible to the Theosophic guides; nor were his knowledge and powers gained by Theosophic methods but by following the path of our Yoga and the impulse of an Indian guru, one who meddled not in organisations and election cabals but lived like a madman, *unmattavat*.

These peculiarities of the Theosophical movement have begun to tell and the better mind of India revolts against Theosophy. The young who are the future, are not for the new doctrine. Yet only through India can Theosophy hope to survive. It may attract a certain number of European adherents, but cannot hope to control the thought and life of the West. Its secretive and Papal tendency is a fatal bar. Europe has done definitely with all knowledge that will not submit itself to scrutiny; it is finishing with the usurpations of theocracy in things spiritual as it has finished with them in things temporal. Even devout Catholics writhe uneasily under the shower of Papal encyclicals and feel what an embarrassment it is to have modern knowledge forbidden by a revenant from the Middle Ages or opinion fixed by a Council of priests no more spiritual, wise or illustrious than the minds they coerce with their irrational authority. Europe is certainly not going to exchange a Catholic for a Theosophical Pope, the Council of Cardinals for the Esoteric Section, or the Gospel and the Athanasian Creed for *Ancient Wisdom* and *Isis Unveiled*.

Will India long keep the temper that submits to unexamined authority and blinds itself with a name? I believe not. We shall more and more return to the habit of going to the root of things, of seeking knowledge not from outside but from the Self who knows and reveals. We must more and more begin to feel that to believe a thing because somebody has heard from somebody else that Mrs Besant heard it from a Mahatma, is a little unsafe and indefinite. Even if the assurance is given direct, we shall learn to ask for the proofs. Even if Kutthumi himself comes and tells me, I shall certainly respect his statement, but also I shall judge it and seek its verification. The greatest Mahatma is only a servant of the Most High and I must see his *chaprass* before I admit his plenary authority. The world is putting off its blinkers; it is feeling once more the divine impulse to see.

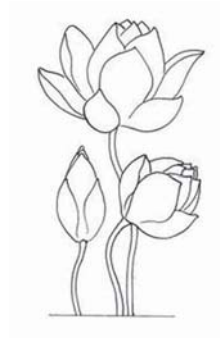
It is not that Theosophy is false; it is that Theosophists are weak and human. I am glad to believe that there is much truth in Theosophy. There are also considerable errors. Many of the things they say which seem strange and incredible to those who decline the experiment, agree with the general experience of Yogins; there are other statements which our experience appears to contradict or to which it gives a different interpretation. Mahatmas exist, but they are not omnipotent or infallible. Rebirth is a fact and the memory of our past lives is possible; but the rigid rules of time and of Karmic reaction laid down dogmatically by the Theosophist hierophants are certainly erroneous. Especially is the hotchpotch of Hindu and Buddhist mythology and Theosophic prediction served up to us by Mrs Besant confusing and misleading. At any rate it does not agree with the insight of much greater Yogins than herself. Like most Theosophists she seems to ignore the numerous sources and possibilities of

error which assail the Yogin before his intellect is perfectly purified and he has his perfection in the higher and superintellectual faculties of the mind. Until then the best have to remember that the mind even of the fairly advanced is not yet divine and that it is the nature of the old unchastened human element to leap at misunderstandings, follow the lure of predilections and take premature conclusions for established truths. We must accept the Theosophists as enquirers; as hierophants and theocrats I think we must reject them.

If Theosophy is to survive, it must first change itself. It must learn that mental rectitude to which it is now a stranger and improve its moral basis. It must become clear, straightforward, rigidly self-searching, sceptical in the nobler sense of the word. It must keep the Mahatmas in the background and put God and Truth in the front. Its Popes must dethrone themselves and enthrone the intellectual conscience of mankind. If they wish to be mystic and secret like our Yogins, then they must like our Yogins assert only to the initiate and the trained; but if they come out into the world to proclaim their mystic truths aloud and seek power, credit and influence on the strength of their assertions, then they must prove. It need not and ought not to be suddenly or by miracles; but there must be a scientific development, we must be able to lay hold on the rationale and watch the process of the truths they proclaim.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 67-71)



SCIENCE & RELIGION IN THEOSOPHY

I HAVE said that I wish to write of Theosophy in no strain of unreasoning hostility or spirit of vulgar ridicule; yet these essays will be found to be much occupied with criticisms and often unsparing criticisms of the spirit and methods of Theosophists. There is, however, this difference between my criticisms and much that I have seen written in dispraise of the movement, that I censure not as an enemy but as an impartial critic, not as a hostile and incredulous outsider but as an earnest and careful inquirer and practical experimentalist in those fields which Theosophy seeks to make her own. Theosophy was not born with Madame Blavatsky, nor invented by the Mahatmas in the latter end of the nineteenth century. It is an ancient and venerable branch of knowledge, which unfortunately has never, in historical times, been brought out into the open and subjected to clear, firm and luminous tests. The imaginations of the cultured and the superstitions of the vulgar played havoc with its truths and vitiated its practice. It degenerated into the extravagances of the Gnostics & Rosicrucians and the charlatanism of magic and sorcery. The Theosophical Society was the first body of inquirers which started with the set & clear profession of bringing out this great mass of ancient truth into public notice and establishing it in public belief. The profession has not been sustained in practice. Instead of bringing them out into public notice they have withdrawn them into the shrouded secrecy of the Esoteric society; instead of establishing them to public belief, they have hampered the true development of Theosophy & injured its credit by allowing promise to dwarf performance and by a readiness to assert which was far beyond their power to verify. I do not deny that the Theosophical Society increases in its numbers, but it increases as a mystic sect and not in the strength of its true calling. I do not deny that it has done valuable service in appealing to the imaginations of men both in India & Europe; but it has appealed to their imaginations & has not convinced their reason. When there is so serious a failure in a strong and earnest endeavour, we must look for the cause in some defect which lies at the very roots of its action. And it is just there at the very roots of its active life that we find the vital defect of modern Theosophy. We find a speculative confusion which fatally ignores the true objects and the proper field of such a movement and a practical confusion which fatally ignores the right and necessary conditions of its success. They have failed to see what Theosophy rightly is and what it is not; they have failed to understand that error and the sources of error must be weeded out before the good corn of truth can grow. They have fallen into the snare of Gnostic jargon and Rosicrucian mummery and have been busy with a nebulous chase after Mahatmas, White Lodges and Lords of the Flame when they should have been experimenting earnestly and patiently, testing their results severely and arriving at sound and incontestable conclusions which they

could present, rationally founded, first to all enquirers and then to the world at large.

M^{rs} Besant would have us believe that Theosophy is Brahavidya. The Greek Theosophia and the Sanscrit Brahavidya, she tells us in all good faith, are identical words and identical things. Even with M^{rs} Besant's authority, I cannot accept this extraordinary identification. It can only have arisen either from her ignorance of Sanscrit or from that pervading confusion of thought and inability to perceive clear and trenchant distinctions which is the bane of Theosophical inquiry & Theosophical pronouncements. Vidya may be represented, though not perfectly represented by sophia; but Brahman is not Theos and cannot be Theos, as even the veriest tyro in philosophy, one would think, ought to know. We all know what Brahavidya is, — the knowledge of the One both in Itself and in its ultimate and fundamental relations to the world which appears in It whether as illusion or as manifestation, whether as Maya or as Lila. Does Theosophy answer to this description? Everyone knows that it does not and cannot. The modern Theosophist tells us much about Mahatmas, Kamaloka, Devachan, people on Mars, people on the Moon, astral bodies, precipitated letters, Akashic records and a deal of other matters, of high value if true and of great interest whether true or not. But what on earth, I should like to know, has all this to do with Brahavidya? One might just as well describe botany, zoology & entomology or for that matter, music or painting or the binomial theory or quadratic equations as Brahavidya. In a sense they are so since everything is Brahman, — sarvam khalvidam Brahma. But language has its distinctions on which clear thinking depends, & we must insist on their being observed. All this matter of Theosophy is not Brahavidya, but Devavidya. Devavidya is the true equivalent, so far as there can be an equivalent, of Theosophy.

I am aware that Theosophy speaks of the Logos or of several Logoi and the government of the world — not so much by any Logos as by the Mahatmas. Still, I say, that all this does not constitute Theosophy into Brahavidya, but leaves it what it was, Devavidya. It is still not the knowledge of the One, not the knowledge that leads to salvation, but the knowledge of the Many, — of our bondage & not of our freedom, Avidya & not Vidya. I do not decry it for that reason, but it is necessary that it should be put in its right place and not blot out for us the diviner knowledge of our forefathers. Theosophy is or should be a wider & profounder Science, a knowledge that deals with other levels & movements of consciousness, planes if you like so to call them, phenomena depending on the activity of consciousness on those levels, worlds & beings formed by the activity of consciousness on those levels, — for what is a world but the synthesis in Space & Time of a particular level of consciousness, — forming a field of consciousness with which material Science, the Science of this immediately visible world, cannot yet deal, and for the most part, not believing in it as fact, refuses to deal. Theosophy is, therefore, properly speaking, a high scientific enquiry. It is not or ought not to be a system of metaphysics or a new religion.

SRI AUROBINDO

(*Essays Divine and Human*, CWSA, Vol. 12, pp. 72-74)

THEOSOPHY IN THE EVENING TALKS

As to destiny, what do you mean by destiny? It is a word and men are easily deceived by words. Is destiny a working of inert, blind, material forces? In that case, there is no room for choice, you have to end by accepting Shankara's Mayavada, or else rank materialism.

But if you mean by destiny that there is a will at work in the universe then a choice in action becomes possible.

And when he speaks of cycles there is some truth in the idea, but it is not possible to make a rigid rule about the recurrence of the cycles. These cycles are plastic and need not be all of the same duration. In the *Aryan Path* Mr. Morris has written an article full of study of facts and historical data in which he tries to show that human history has always run in a cycle of five hundred years. He even believes that there are Mahatmas who manage this world!

15 January 1939

(*Evening Talks*, 2007 Ed., p. 89)

* * *

A disciple from Madras sent a copy of the *Theosophist*. It contained lectures and the latest declaration by Mrs. Besant about Krishnamurthy's avatarhood and the descent of the world-teacher in him.

Disciple: Did you read the *Theosophist*?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, I made an unsuccessful effort. What she used to write before was readable and had some power. But this is rather hopeless.

Disciple: Did you read the book containing the account of so many past lives?

Sri Aurobindo: I know those visions. They are just what our Chittagong people are getting, they are full of imaginations. They are not visions that come to one, but those which one creates for oneself by pressure. One man told me that I have to close my eyes and begin to imagine I am in another's body and I shall be at once in that plane. I tried it once and saw it is very easy. You can construct the history of the world from the remotest past without much difficulty.

Disciple: Do these people do any Sadhana?

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, in their own way. But if a descent of a great Truth is to take place there must be a very solid preparation to hold it. That is a more important work than holding up somebody as the Avatar.

26 December 1925

(*Ibid.*, pp. 145-46)

Disciple: Has anyone conquered death before in the past?

Sri Aurobindo: We have to find out, — we don't know. The Mahatmas are said to have conquered death.

.....

Disciple: Their theory is that there was a great civilisation on the continent of Atlantis.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, there is every possibility that it is true.

Disciple: What is the proof?

Sri Aurobindo: Well, it is so, perhaps because the Master says it is so. But apart from that, they take their stand on geology and the theory of evolution. Once there was an idea that civilisation is only three or four thousand years old. Now people are forced to change their ideas.

Disciple: But the details about the last civilisation and the Mahatmas — are they all true?

Sri Aurobindo: What do you mean by 'true'? On the vital plane there is nothing that you cannot see: you can recast the whole history of the world. It is not the mental plane — really speaking it is the mental-vital. I was in that condition for ten days and any number of things came at that time.

Disciple: You could have written them down.

Sri Aurobindo: If I had thought them worthwhile.

Disciple: But then how far is it all true?

Sri Aurobindo: There is always some truth at the bottom. For instance, there is every likelihood that the continent of Atlantis had a great civilisation. So also the idea of evolution is true as far as physical evolution is concerned. But the fourth and fifth root race and the other details which are given are not certain.

That is the difficulty: to isolate the true intuition from the mixture — mental as well as vital. It would be quite another matter if one could keep the mind completely passive. But, evidently, that is impossible. The mind enters so much and also the vital being — they are both great and active creators.

26 September 1925

(*Ibid.*, pp. 181-83)

* * *

[*The talk turned to a Theosophical Lodge started by a European in Japan.*]

Sri Aurobindo: I don't think it came to much.

Disciple: Oh, it simply fell down after he left Japan. I was president of the Lodge for some time.

Disciple: How could it remain any longer when the head is here? (*Laughter*)

Sri Aurobindo: Probably even in that Lodge there were more foreigners than Japanese.

Disciple: There were only two Japanese, one Dutch, one Pole, and so on. The Japanese mind is not interested in these things — philosophy, metaphysics, etc.

20 September 1926

(*Ibid.*, p. 363)

* * *

Sri Aurobindo: There are various beings and they have various tendencies and motives. . .

They [the vital beings] get supported. But these are not strong beings. The really strong beings are those that are behind world-movements, like Theosophy; they have not only vital force but mental power.

29 May 1926

(*Ibid.*, pp. 412-13)

* * *

Disciple: What are the forces that correspond to the dark side of God on the physical plane?

Sri Aurobindo: They are what may be called the elemental beings, or rather, obscure elemental forces they are ‘forces’ more than ‘beings’. It is these that the Theosophists call the Elementals. They are not individualised beings like the Asura and the Rakshasa, they are ignorant forces working on the subtle-physical plane.

15 June 1926

(*Ibid.*, p. 479)

* * *

Sri Aurobindo: Blavatsky founded her Theosophy on Buddhism.

19 January 1939

(*Ibid.*, p. 649)

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[*The talk turned to Theosophy.*]

Dr. Manilal: The Theosophists speak of Mahatmas from whom they receive messages.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, Morya and Koothoomi are two of their Mahatmas. The Mahatmas are said to be living somewhere in Bhutan among Rishis who are thousands of years old, I hear.

Dr. Manilal: Not true? You wrote a long time ago a poem on Koothoomi in the *Standard-Bearer*. From it we have thought of a being with great spiritual realisation.

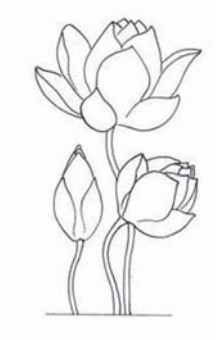
Sri Aurobindo: It was purely a play of the poetic imagination.

Dr. Manilal: What do you think of Madame Blavatsky?

Sri Aurobindo: She was a remarkable woman.

14 December 1938

(*Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 1, p. 20)



ON THEOSOPHY

(A Selection of Passages)

[. . .] ASIA has served predominantly (not exclusively) as a field for man's spiritual experience and progression, Europe has been rather a workshop for his mental and vital activities. As the cycle progressed, the Eastern continent has more and more converted itself into a storehouse of spiritual energy sometimes active and reaching forward to new development, sometimes conservative and quiescent. Three or four times in history a stream of this energy has poured out upon Europe, but each time Europe has rejected wholly or partially the spiritual substance of the afflatus and used it rather as an impulse to fresh intellectual and material activity and progress.

The first attempt was the filtering of Egyptian, Chaldean and Indian wisdom through the thought of the Greek philosophers from Pythagoras to Plato and the Neo-Platonists; the result was the brilliantly intellectual and unspiritual civilisation of Greece and Rome. But it prepared the way for the second attempt when Buddhism and Vaishnavism filtered through the Semitic temperament entered Europe in the form of Christianity. Christianity came within an ace of spiritualising and even of asceticising the mind of Europe; it was baffled by its own theological deformation in the minds of the Greek fathers of the Church and by the sudden flooding of Europe with a German barbarism whose temperament in its merits no less than in its defects was the very antitype both of the Christian spirit and the Graeco-Roman intellect.

The Islamic invasion of Spain and the southern coast of the Mediterranean — curious as the sole noteworthy example of Asiatic culture using the European method of material and political irruption as opposed to a peaceful invasion by ideas — may be regarded as a third attempt. The result of its meeting with Graecised Christianity was the reawakening of the European mind in feudal and Catholic Europe and the obscure beginnings of modern thought and science.

The fourth and last attempt which is as yet only in its slow initial stage is the quiet entry of Eastern and chiefly of Indian thought into Europe first through the veil of German metaphysics, more latterly by its subtle influence in reawakening the Celtic, Scandinavian and Slavonic idealism, mysticism, religionism, and the direct and open penetration of Buddhism, Theosophy, Vedantism, Bahaim and other Oriental influences in both Europe and America.

On the other hand, there have been two reactions of Europe upon Asia; first, the invasion of Alexander with his aggressive Hellenism which for a time held Western Asia, created echoes and reactions in India and returned through Islamic culture upon mediaeval Europe; secondly, the modern onslaught of commercial, political, scientific

Europe upon the moral, artistic and spiritual cultures of the East.

(CWSA, Vol. 13, pp. 141-42)

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The philosophy of the Upanishads is the basis of all Indian religion and morals and to a considerable extent of Hindu politics, legislation and society. Its practical importance to [our] race is therefore immense. But it has also profoundly [affected] the thought of the West in many of the most critical stages of [its] development; at first through Pythagoras and other Greek philosophers, then through Buddhism working into Essene, Gnostic and Roman Christianity and once again in our own times through German metaphysics, Theosophy, and a hundred strange and irregular channels. One can open few books now at all in the latest stream of thought without seeing the old Vedantism busy at its work of moulding and broadening the European mind, sometimes by direct and conscious impact as a force, more often by an unacknowledged and impalpable pressure as an atmosphere. This potent influence [in] modern times of a way of thinking many thousands of years old, is due to [a] singular parallelism between the fundamental positions arrived [at by] ancient Vedantism and modern Science. Science in its [researches] amid matter has stumbled on the basal fact of the [Unity] of all things; the Unity of all things is the rock on which the Upanishads have been built. Evolution has been discovered and [analyzed] by Science; Evolution of a kind is implied at every turn by the Vedanta. Vedantism like Science, [but] after its own fashion, [is] severely conscientious in its logical processes and rigorously experimental; [Vedantism] has mastered physical and psychical laws which Science [is] now beginning to handle.

(CWSA, Vol. 18, p. 345)

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Why are a certain class of Indians still hypnotised in all fields by European culture and why are we all still hypnotised by it in the field of politics? Because they constantly saw all the power, creation, activity on the side of Europe, all the immobility or weakness of a static inefficient defence on the side of India. But wherever the Indian spirit has been able to react, to attack with energy and to create with éclat, the European glamour has begun immediately to lose its hypnotic power. No one now feels the weight of the religious assault from Europe which was very powerful at the outset, because the creative activities of the Hindu revival have made Indian religion a living and evolving, a secure, triumphant and self-assertive power. But the seal was put to this work by two events, the Theosophical movement and the appearance

of Swami Vivekananda at Chicago. For these two things showed the spiritual ideas for which India stands no longer on their defence but aggressive and invading the materialised mentality of the Occident. All India had been vulgarised and anglicised in its aesthetic notions by English education and influence, until the brilliant and sudden dawn of the Bengal school of art cast its rays so far as to be seen in Tokio, London and Paris. That significant cultural event has already effected an aesthetic revolution in the country, not yet by any means complete, but irresistible and sure of the future. The same phenomenon extends to other fields. Even in the province of politics that was the internal sense of the policy of the so-called extremist party in the Swadeshi movement; for it was a movement which attempted to override the previous apparent impossibility of political creation by the Indian spirit upon other than imitative European lines. If it failed for the time being, not by any falsity in its inspiration, but by the strength of a hostile pressure and the weakness still left by a past decadence, if its incipient creations were broken or left languishing and deprived of their original significance, yet it will remain as a finger-post on the roads. The attempt is bound to be renewed as soon as a wider gate is opened under more favourable conditions. Till that attempt comes and succeeds, a serious danger besets the soul of India; for a political Europeanisation would be followed by a social turn of the same kind and bring a cultural and spiritual death in its train. Aggression must be successful and creative if the defence is to be effective.

(CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 62-63)

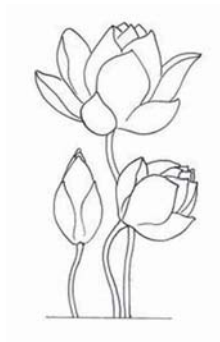
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A reaching towards deeper things, an increasing return of seekings which had been banished, an urge towards higher experience yet unrealised, an admission of ideas long foreign to the Western mentality can be seen everywhere. Aiding this process and aided by it there has been a certain infiltration of Indian and Eastern thought and influence; even here and there we find some growing recognition of the high value or the superior greatness of the ancient spiritual ideal. This infiltration began at a very early stage of the near contact between the farther Orient and Europe of which the English occupation of India was the most direct occasion. But at first it was a slight and superficial touch, at most an intellectual influence on a few superior minds. An academic interest or an attracted turn of scholars and thinkers towards Vedanta, Sankhya, Buddhism, admiration for the subtlety and largeness of Indian philosophic idealism, the stamp left by the Upanishads and the Gita on great intellects like Schopenhauer and Emerson and on a few lesser thinkers, this was the first narrow inlet of the floods. The impression did not go very far at the best and the little effect it might have produced was counteracted and even effaced for a time by the great flood of scientific materialism which submerged the whole life-view of later nine-

teenth-century Europe.

But now other movements have arisen and laid hold on thought and life with a triumphant success. Philosophy and thought have taken a sharp curve away from rationalistic materialism and its confident absolutisms. On the one hand, as a first consequence of the seeking for a larger thought and vision of the universe, Indian Monism has taken a subtle but powerful hold on many minds, though often in strange disguises. On the other hand new philosophies have been born, not indeed directly spiritual, vitalistic rather and pragmatic, but yet by their greater subjectivity already nearer to Indian ways of thinking. The old limits of scientific interest have begun to break down; various forms of psychical research and novel departures in psychology and even an interest in psychism and occultism, have come into increasing vogue and fasten more and more their hold in spite of the anathemas of orthodox religion and orthodox science. Theosophy with its comprehensive combinations of old and new beliefs and its appeal to ancient spiritual and psychic systems, has everywhere exercised an influence far beyond the circle of its professed adherents. Opposed for a long time with obloquy and ridicule, it has done much to spread the belief in Karma, reincarnation, other planes of existence, the evolution of the embodied soul through intellect and psyche to spirit, ideas which once accepted must change the whole attitude towards life. Even Science itself is constantly arriving at conclusions which only repeat upon the physical plane and in its language truths which ancient India had already affirmed from the standpoint of spiritual knowledge in the tongue of the Veda and Vedanta. Every one of these advances leads directly or in its intrinsic meaning towards a nearer approach between the mind of East and West and to that extent to a likelihood of a better understanding of Indian thought and ideals.

(CWSA, Vol. 20, pp. 69-71)



A CONVERSATION ON THEOSOPHY

The fundamental doctrine of the Theosophical Society, in my opinion, is the existence of the Masters. On the one hand this is the new message, the other doctrines (Karma, reincarnation) being purely philosophical and already known. On the other hand, this is a vital point for the leaders of the Society, who affirm that they are guided by these very Masters. From the logical and philosophical point of view, the existence of Siddhas who have perfected their nature and remain to guide humanity, is reasonable and even very probable. I admit it on this ground. Putting aside the idea that the leaders of the Society are consciously deceitful, how to account for their assertions about their relations with the Masters, not only on the higher planes but also on the physical plane? Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Olcott and C. W. Leadbeater,¹ for example, have met living masters. If one admits these statements, how to explain the paucity of spirituality in the Theosophical Society in general, and the general trend — ethical, moral, but not spiritual? There is something erroneous here; I cannot find its cause, but it has made me keep away from the movement (missionary, sectarian, etc., etc.). These are very important questions for me.

THERE are, in fact, two very different questions. Their true answers are not of a mental order, but can only be understood through spiritual realisation. However, here is what I can say about it.

About the first point, I shall say only that the existence of *perfect* beings, “those who have nothing more to learn” as you say, is problematic. There is always something to learn in the Infinite. The Buddha who took a vow to remain on earth until the last man enters Nirvana is not Gautama but Amitabha.

The other question is to assess the relations of the leaders of the Theosophical Society with the Masters — that is, to determine the nature of the psychical experiences of these persons. Everything in their works, and particularly the little true spirituality one finds there, makes me think that they have never gone beyond the vital plane, which corresponds to what they call the astral plane. I set aside the case of deception. The first thing to be considered is wilful self-deceit, the fact that on this plane we see what we mentally want to see. This is a complex and marvellous realm, where the true and the false are inextricably entangled. Everything appears under a logical and seductive form, organised, but finally illusory.

1. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Henry Steel Olcott founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. Charles Webster Leadbeater and Mrs Annie Besant (mentioned later in this conversation) were the other two important leaders of the early Theosophical movement.

Madame Blavatsky was an amazing woman, with strong intuitions, but someone in whom everything would get mixed up; she was incapable of discussing psychical facts critically. She did not want to, besides. What mattered to her was to launch a movement. And this impulse, this desire to organise, to exercise an influence, is characteristic of the vital plane. There are influences of all kinds there, whose one desire is to take possession of those who are high-placed in order to use them for their own ends. Not only the weak are their prey, but also the strong, for it is especially the strong they aim at.

After Madame Blavatsky, there was Mrs Besant. In the beginning she simply followed the lines of Madame Blavatsky; then it was Leadbeater who influenced her. She recognised this, however, at a certain point in her life (“the glamour he has put on me”), but as she had nothing of her own she returned to him.

What is special about the vital plane is that anyone who has a certain realisation there can make another person have the same realisation. One should not apply the criteria of ordinary life to this plane; this is the mistake that many spiritists, metaphysicists, etc. make. I know this by experience. I have old disciples who have deviated without my being able to bring them back, so great is the force of deception. Others write to me letters full of visions they have had; they have seen me and I am supposed to have given them instructions. Now it was not me and those instructions I would disown. It so happened that several of them had the same vision at the same time, apart from small variations of detail.

On the other hand, if the Masters directing the Theosophical Society are perfect, they have surely perceived the nature of these influences and also known the value of true spirituality. How is it they did not warn their disciples and why does one find so little of this spirituality? I have met Theosophists, some of whom have had glimpses of the spiritual life, but in none of those I know has it really been organised. While in others, persons who don't claim to be guided by perfect masters, one often finds far more spirituality, as in certain Yogis and others.

Their conception is mental and ethical, not spiritual. And as an ethical conception, there is nothing remarkable.

In spiritual life, one must always be ready to reject all systems and constructions. For a time a certain form is useful; then it becomes a hindrance. In my own spiritual life, since I was forty, three or four times I have completely discarded and broken the system I had arrived at.

If our disciples at X could not be brought back, the fault lies in their ambition, that kind of spiritual ambition, so dangerous for a Yogi, which endows us with a special importance in human life. It is a big danger, and I think it was responsible for making the Theosophists fall. There is a core of true spirituality there, very small, surrounded by a mass of erroneous facts and psychical data. And in time even the core gets affected.

I am answering your question because, by breaking through the veil, you will

reach this psychical region. Hardly one per cent can pass through it — due to their mental purity, their mind does not get attached to objects in order to find satisfaction in them. And this is a great danger, a powerful pressure. One must be very strong and hold on to the truth in order to resist. This is why I am replying and not in order to speak about the Theosophical Society. I have nothing against it nor against any of the Theosophists, to whom I wish the very best. I am not against them.

As for the fact that some have seen a Master physically, an explanation is possible. When conditions are favourable, these influences of the vital plane can very easily materialise; they have sufficient mastery over matter for this. Of course they must be given these conditions.

But if the Asuras can do this, can't the Suras do it too?

Obviously, but they do it far less frequently; they are not in a hurry to impose their guidance. And then very strict special conditions are necessary — one must be on an absolute march towards the Truth.

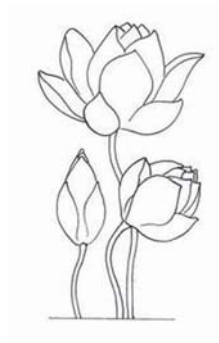
If these are the conditions of the vital plane, is it nevertheless possible to free oneself from them? These forces obey laws; by knowing them one can free oneself from them.

Of course it is possible. Even illusions obey laws. Here there is an aspect of true occultism, not that of the Theosophists. This occultism seeks to understand and realise, not to mentally create. It is in a way an extension of science.

11 January 1926

SRI AUROBINDO

(Conversations with Sri Aurobindo by Pavitra, published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2007, pp. 28-32)



**‘ . . . MAY THE PEACE OF THY DIVINE LOVE
BE WITH ALL BEINGS’**

February 11, 1914

As soon as one rises above the perception of contingencies, as soon as one's consciousness is identified with Thy supreme consciousness and one enters thus into that omniscience which I cannot define except as absolute Knowledge, how easy and even a little childish seem all those problems about what should or should not be done, about all the resolutions to be taken.

From the standpoint of the eternal work, the one thing important is to become conscious of Thee, to identify oneself with Thee and to maintain that conscious identification constantly. But as to what best use can be made of our physical organism, Thy mode of manifestation upon earth, it is quite enough, when Thou alone art conscious within us, to turn the gaze to the body in order to know beyond all doubt what is the best thing it can do, what activity will most fully utilise all its energies.

And without attaching much importance to that activity, that altogether relative utilisation, one can take without any difficulty, any inner debate, decisions which, to the outer consciousness appear the boldest and most dangerous.

How simple everything is for him who sees all things from the height of Thy eternity!

I hail Thee, O Lord, with a joyful and trusting devotion. May the peace of Thy divine love be with all beings.

THE MOTHER

(Prayers and Meditations, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 1, p. 71)

FORESIGHT

To FORESEE destiny! How many have attempted it, how many systems have been elaborated, how many sciences of divination have been created and developed only to perish under the charge of charlatanism or superstition. And why is destiny always so unforeseeable? Since it has been proved that everything is ineluctably determined, how is it that one cannot succeed in knowing this determinism with any certainty?

Here again the solution is to be found in Yoga. And by yogic discipline one can not only foresee destiny but modify it and change it almost totally. First of all, Yoga teaches us that we are not a single being, a simple entity which necessarily has a single destiny that is simple and logical. Rather we have to acknowledge that the destiny of most men is complex, often to the point of incoherence. Is it not this very complexity which gives us the impression of unexpectedness, of indeterminacy and consequently of unpredictability?

To solve the problem one must know that, to begin with, all living creatures, and more especially human beings, are made up of a combination of several entities that come together, interpenetrate, sometimes organising themselves and completing each other, sometimes opposing and contradicting one another. Each one of these beings or states of being belongs to a world of its own and carries within it its own destiny, its own determinism. And it is the combination of all these determinisms, which is sometimes very heterogeneous, that results in the destiny of the individual. But as the organisation and relationship of all these entities can be altered by personal discipline and effort of will, as these various determinisms act on each other in different ways according to the concentration of the consciousness, their combination is nearly always variable and therefore unforeseeable.

For example, the physical or material destiny of a being comes from his paternal and maternal forebears, from the physical conditions and circumstances in which he is born; one should be able to foresee the events of his physical life, his state of health and approximately how long his body will last. But then there comes into play the formation of his vital being (the being of desires and passions, but also of impulsive energy and active will) which brings with it its own destiny. This destiny affects the physical destiny and can alter it completely and often even change it for the worse. For example, if a man born with a very good physical balance, who ought to live in very good health, is driven by his vital to all kinds of excesses, bad habits and even vices, he can in this way partly destroy his good physical destiny and lose the harmony of health and strength which would have been his but for this unfortunate interference. This is only one example. But the problem is much more complex, for, to the physical and vital destinies, there must be added the mental destiny, the psychic destiny, and

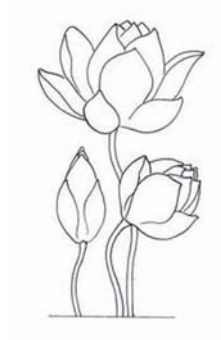
many others besides.

In fact, the higher a being stands on the human scale, the more complex is his being, the more numerous are his destinies and the more unforeseeable his fate seems to be as a consequence. This is however only an appearance. The knowledge of these various states of being and their corresponding inner worlds gives at the same time the capacity to discern the various destinies, their interpenetration and their combined or dominant action. Higher destinies are quite obviously the closest to the central truth of the universe, and if they are allowed to intervene, their action is necessarily beneficent. The art of living would then consist in maintaining oneself in one's highest state of consciousness and thus allowing one's highest destiny to dominate the others in life and action. So one can say without any fear of making a mistake: be always at the summit of your consciousness and the best will always happen to you. But that is a maximum which is not easy to reach. If this ideal condition turns out to be unrealisable, the individual can at least, when he is confronted by a danger or a critical situation, call upon his highest destiny by aspiration, prayer and trustful surrender to the divine will. Then, in proportion to the sincerity of his call, this higher destiny intervenes favourably in the normal destiny of the being and changes the course of events insofar as they concern him personally. It is events of this kind that appear to the outer consciousness as miracles, as divine interventions.

Bulletin, February 1950

THE MOTHER

(*On Education*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 12, pp. 77-79)



FORESIGHT — II

(This talk is based upon the Mother's essay entitled "Foresight")

"To foresee destiny! How many have attempted it, how many systems have been elaborated, how many sciences of divination have been created and developed only to perish under the charge of charlatanism or superstition. And why is destiny always so unforeseeable? Since it has been proved that everything is ineluctably determined, how is it that one cannot succeed in knowing this determinism with any certainty?"

FORESIGHT means seeing beforehand; but can you tell me what is going to happen tomorrow? I don't think you can. Of course you can say, we shall sleep, eat, etc. — general things. But you can't say whether something unexpected is going to happen. Why? Someone has said, "For this a special eye is needed." It is possible to foresee without receiving images: there is a mental knowledge without images. Seers are usually able to foresee — not always, but often. I don't suppose you were thinking of an extra eye in the middle of the forehead like the Cyclops! No, you mean an inner eye belonging to another world. One doesn't normally see material things with this eye, or if one does, it is from a very special angle. There are people who can see at a distance what is going on in another country or in a place that is far away from them.

Are these things seen by the psychic vision?

No, the psychic vision doesn't usually deal with material things.

Isn't it mental vision?

It could be, but then what you receive is the thoughts of the people in the place you see, because these people are focusing their *thoughts* on what is going on there.

Usually, "determinism" is taken to mean a logical chain of cause and effect; if you do one thing, a certain result will follow. For instance, if you eat a certain kind of food you will fall ill, if you swallow some poison you will die, and so on. But it often happens that the effects of certain determinisms cancel out the effects of other determinisms.

"Here again the solution is to be found in Yoga. And by yogic discipline one can not only foresee destiny but modify it and change it almost totally. First of all, Yoga teaches us that we are not a single being, a simple entity which

necessarily has a single destiny that is simple and logical. Rather we have to acknowledge that the destiny of most men is complex, often to the point of incoherence. Is it not this very complexity which gives us the impression of unexpectedness, of indeterminacy and consequently of unpredictability?"

There are people whose destiny is very complex, giving the impression that the things which happen to them are quite unexpected and unforeseeable, unless one can "see" by some means other than the ordinary.

"To solve the problem one must know that, to begin with, all living creatures, and more especially human beings, are made up of a combination of several entities that come together, interpenetrate, sometimes organising themselves and completing each other, sometimes opposing and contradicting one another."

An "entity" is a personality or an individuality. There are many such "personalities" in each one of us. If these personalities agree and are complementary with one another, they make up a human being, a rich and complex "person". But that is not what usually happens. These personalities do not agree with one another. For example, one of them might wish to make some progress, to become more and more perfect, to get a deeper knowledge of things, to realise more and more, to proceed towards the perfection of the being, while another one may simply want to have fun and enjoy itself as much as it can; one day it will do this, the next day something else, etc. If the personalities do not agree, this person's life will be incoherent, and that is not unusual: in fact, these cases are very common.

"Each one of these beings or states of being belongs to a world of its own and carries within it its own destiny, its own determinism. And it is the combination of all these determinisms, which is sometimes very heterogeneous, that results in the destiny of the individual."

A person may have a great many personalities within him — ten or twenty, for example — and each one has its own destiny. In the physical world, an individuality means a human body; so, in a human body there are many individualities, each one with its own destiny. What happens then? Conflicts, friction, inner disorder created by these individualities which are unable to get on with one another. The strongest one gets the upper hand; it is not only dominant over the others but curbs them to stop them from rebelling. So, in the end, the unlucky ones, the repressed ones, go to sleep. They bide their time, and when that time comes, they suddenly jump up and turn everything upside down. If that happens very often, that person's life will be a very disorderly one. He will take up one thing today and go on with another tomorrow and so on.

I don't think it is true to say that a person is "harmonious" if he has no inner complexity. People who have this kind of illusory harmony are usually deeply immersed in material life, so that the slightest unpleasantness upsets them completely, because they have nothing else. No, a truly harmonious personality implies a conscious arrangement of the inner individualities. This arrangement may be effected spontaneously before birth, but that is rare. The arrangement is achieved later, by means of a discipline, a proper education. But to succeed in this one must consciously take the psychic being as the centre and arrange, harmonise the various individualities around it. True harmony, inner organisation is the result of such a persistent effort.

"But as the organisation and relationship of all these entities can be altered by personal discipline and effort of will, as these various determinisms act on each other in different ways according to the concentration of the consciousness, their combination is nearly always variable and therefore unforeseeable."

In mathematics, one sometimes takes a great many numbers to try and find all the possible combinations of them. At once one finds that it becomes impossible, for there are many numbers that are beyond expression. Similarly, if you have a great many destinies that come together in you and occur in various combinations, depending on the part of the being that predominates at the time, if you try to foresee what is going to happen, it is extremely difficult. It is the same thing with states of consciousness. A destiny represents an individual; they all react on one another and the number of things that may happen is frightening! So how will you foresee that? The "laws" of the universe always work independently, and that is the "secret" of the composition of the universe.

"The art of living would then consist in maintaining oneself in one's highest state of consciousness and thus allowing one's highest destiny to dominate the others in life and action. So one can say without any fear of making a mistake: be always at the summit of your consciousness and the best will always happen to you. But that is a maximum which is not easy to reach. If this ideal condition turns out to be unrealisable, the individual can at least, when he is confronted by a danger or a critical situation, call upon his highest destiny by aspiration, prayer and trustful surrender to the divine will. Then, in proportion to the sincerity of his call, this higher destiny intervenes favourably in the normal destiny of the being and changes the course of events insofar as they concern him personally. It is events of this kind that appear to the outer consciousness as miracles, as divine interventions."

I shall give you an example of how consciousness, a higher consciousness, intervenes.

A man steps out of his house to go to his office. He goes a certain way. Suddenly he remembers that he has left something behind. He steps back to go and get it and just then, in the place where he would have been if he had stepped forward, a lead pipe falls. Something in this man's consciousness, by telling him to go back, has saved his life. That is what we mean when we say that an intervention of consciousness can change destiny. In this man there were two destinies — among others, probably, — one which wanted him to die and one which wanted him to live.

Can't this be called "chance"?

No, because chance is something quite incoherent, something that occurs for no reason, and if you believe that life is something incoherent, you still have much to learn. On the contrary, it is quite coherent, each little thing is exactly determined and if something makes you feel that it is "chance" it is because you know nothing about the determinisms. They are completely beyond you, because there are innumerable interweaving laws and you know nothing about them. So if something happens according to these laws you say it is a "miracle" or "chance"!

Pavitra has said: "In mathematics it has been shown that if the number of intervening factors is very high, and if they act independently, the result appears to be what is called 'chance'."

I have just explained that this is only an "appearance".

People who make an effort to progress and grow in consciousness, realise that what at one time in their lives they took to be a disaster or a calamity may appear fifteen years later like a blessing, an effect of Grace, some highest good. From a higher standpoint, it is quite obvious that if you bring your highest consciousness down into your ordinary life, it will bring the greatest good into your life.

People who have made some progress always have this experience. They see clearly that the so-called "disaster" was in fact the starting-point of their ascension, an ascension which could not have taken place without it. If someone has the inner vision and is able to enter his higher consciousness at will, he will see that it is the greatest good that happens to him when he is in contact with his highest consciousness.

But, to be able to understand this, there are two conditions. You must make an effort for progress and be utterly sincere, for if you are not sincere, you will never have any insight into your own life. You must be able to look at yourself and say, "How tiny I am."

If something is ineluctably determined, how can it be changed?

I shall give you a simple example — but it may occur in any state of consciousness. A stone falls. If it fulfils its destiny, it will fall to the ground, won't it? But you are there and you have a vital or a mental will — one or the other — and you catch the

stone in your hand. You have changed the destiny of the stone. A leaf falls — onto the ground if it follows its normal destiny. You have a vital will, you take the leaf in your hand. You have changed the destiny of the leaf. This happens millions of times in the universe and nobody notices it because it is so common.

But imagine that you have a very high range of consciousness. If into the determinism down here you can bring, by aspiration, an urge, a prayer, a higher consciousness, if you can get hold of your higher consciousness, so to say, and bring it into the material destiny, everything would immediately be changed. But because you do not see or do not understand what is happening, you say that it is chance or a miracle.

Not every destiny is active in a material destiny, and if you want to change this material destiny, you must be able to bring down another one from above. In this way, something new will enter into it — these “descents” of the higher consciousness take place all the time, but because we do not understand them, this “something new” that comes is turned by ordinary people into a “miracle”.

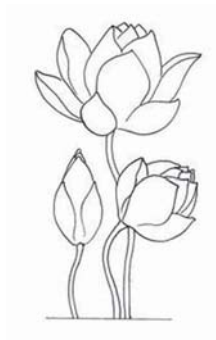
This is precisely what we want to do by bringing down into the physical and material world the supramental force and consciousness. At first it works by diffusion, not directly. Its working is more or less veiled, more veiled and distorted as it descends into the physical world, until it becomes almost imperceptible. If it could work here directly, without this distortion and this veiling, it would change everything in an absolutely unexpected way.

I hope you will get this concrete example one day!

30 December 1950

THE MOTHER

(*Words of the Mother – III*, CWM 2nd Ed., Vol. 15, pp. 285-91)



‘CHANGING A COMING CATASTROPHE’

If you see some catastrophe coming, can you, Mother, by your effort change it?

THAT depends upon the nature of the event. There are many things. . . That depends also upon the level from which one sees. There is a plane where there are all the possibilities, and on that level, as there are all the possibilities, there is the possibility also of changing these possibilities. If a catastrophe is foreseen in that plane, one can have the power of preventing it also. In other cases, even though one is forewarned, one has no action upon the event. And yet there, it depends on the level from where one sees.

A case of this kind was reported to me once where the very seeing of a thing prevented it from happening. An American gentleman had arrived at one of those big American hotels where there are lifts (you do not go down a staircase, you take a lift to go up or come down); now, early in the morning just before getting up, he had a dream which he remembered well: he had seen a boy dressed as a lift-boy and making the same movement a lift-boy makes directing you to get in. He was there. And then, at the end of the movement, instead of a lift, there was a hearse! — that is to say, that kind of carriage. . . oh! you must have seen some here now and then, to carry the dead to the cemetery; when they are not burnt, they are carried on a bier with black draperies, etc. So there was such a carriage, a hearse for carrying the dead. And the boy was signing to him to get into the carriage. When he came out of his room, the boy was there with the lift to take him down: exactly the same boy, the same face, the same dress, the same gesture. He remembered the hearse — he did not get into the lift. He said: “No, no!” and he walked down. And before he reached the ground floor, he heard a terrible noise and the lift had crashed down to the ground and all who were in it were killed. It was because of the dream that he had not got in, for he had understood.

Therefore in such a case when you have the vision, you can avert the catastrophe.

There are other cases, as I said, when you are simply forewarned. You are forewarned. In reality, it is to help you to prepare within for what must come, so that you may take the right inner attitude to face the event. It is like a lesson telling you: “This is what it must teach you.” You cannot change the thing, but you can change your attitude and your inner reaction. Instead of having a bad reaction, a wrong attitude towards the experience that occurs, you have a good reaction, a good attitude, and you derive as much benefit as possible out of what has happened.

In either case, it depends absolutely on the plane on which you see. When you have control over your nights and are conscious of your sleep and your dreams or of your visions, you also see the difference between the two; you can distinguish the difference: what is given to you as a warning so that you may intervene and what is given to you as an intimation so that you may take the right attitude towards what is

going to happen. It is always a lesson, but it is not always the same lesson. At times you can act with your will; at times you must learn the inner lesson which the incident is about to give you so that you may be ready for the event to have a fully favourable consequence. The same thing holds for everything that you see, there are hundreds of different varieties of visions and dreams and each one brings you the lesson it has to bring.

For example, when people are taken ill or when they are caught in an accident. Well, whether I see it myself or come to know of it from outside through someone's telling me about it — in every case it is not the same. There are cases when I am informed and I see that it is for intervening and I have the full power to change the consequence, that is, to cure the sick person. There are cases where I see I am not to intervene. For instance, it is time for the person to leave his body: he will leave the body. But knowing this, I must do for the person and for those around him what has to be done for the event to have the maximum beneficial effect or the minimum adverse effect — it depends on the circumstances.

There are events appertaining to a universal necessity and those one cannot change. There are events still in the balance which can be decided either way. The whole thing is to have a perception that's not only clear-sighted but also quite impartial and impersonal, without even the shadow of a shadow of preference. Then, when one is in that perfect state — it can't be said, of neutrality, it is not neutrality: it is a state of consciousness which is immobile like a mirror — then one can see within it the quality of the thing that's happening, one can see the things that have been decided so that they cannot be altered and those that are still in the balance and can be changed.

To tell the truth, for each event the situation is different. There are some that can be changed completely, reversed altogether; there are some that are capable of undergoing quite a considerable change; there are others that can suffer only a slight modification — a slight modification but one that has a considerable consequence; and there are some that are inevitable; they are so because they are so; if you tried to oppose, you would break your head against a wall and that would serve no purpose. The whole thing is to have this perspicacity, know to which domain the event belongs and not will any other thing than what *must be*.

I could give hundreds of instances of different cases.

A thing seems to have been completely determined: it is *going* to be so. But you have within you a will that surges up, a flame that is kindled, a great aspiration that is in harmony with a higher Will and you force it upon the event. And then a kind of combination takes place: what had to happen will happen, but along with something else which comes at the same time and changes the nature of the former. For events of importance to the earth, this happens very often. For example, when an entire set of movements, circumstances, combinations of forces bring about an absolute necessity of war, one can, by calling in another force, change the extent and the consequences, and sometimes even the nature of the war, but one is not able to avert it. I could give

you examples of this kind, of a very general nature.

I told you the other day with regard to the “spirit” of death, what can be done, through an inner action, to prevent Death from coming to someone’s house; but then it goes to another’s. You cannot deprive Death of what is its due. I have explained this to you. There are other cases where one might say in a somewhat childish way: “Death was not yet informed”, and so you can take away from it its booty without any consequences. But that does not always happen. There are cases when one does that. But put in this way it sounds childish like a fairy tale. Yet, it corresponds to something in the setting of the circumstances: it depends on the way the circumstances move.

What I would like to bring home to you is that the problem is extremely complicated and subtle, and that at times the direction of the movement can be altered a little; at other times, the movement can be reversed; and at still others just the consequences and the inner attitude with regard to the movement alone can be changed. And naturally men see all these things in a too simplified way and translate all this by their prayer to God: they say, in one case, “God has given me what I asked from him”, in another case, “He has refused me.” And so, that’s that. That is how they understand and it is sheer stupidity. To know how it happens, you must have a general, collective consciousness, at least as wide as the earth. That is the minimum. To understand truly one must have a universal consciousness. Then you can understand. For, I have said it somewhere in what I was reading today; I have said that all things are interdependent and there is neither any “beginning” nor any “end”. Where do you put the beginning?¹ . . . To understand that, you have to go beyond the earth-bound consciousness, you have to enter a universal consciousness. Then you will be able to understand.

But we are compelled — I am repeating what I said at the beginning — we are compelled to say things one after another. We say: “When the universe began . . . When the creation began . . . it begins in that way. . . . This happened and then that happened and then this took place and then that took place . . .” We say one thing after another, and to say the truth, it is not really like that at all! From a certain point of view, it is foolishness, but we cannot do otherwise. I cannot say all the words at the same time. So it is the state of our consciousness and the means at our disposal for expressing ourselves which make us say things that are stupid from the point of view of the absolute knowledge. But it is an approximation. Our stupidity is an approximation and becomes less stupid when we become aware that it happens only because

1. “If you look from one plane of consciousness, the individual will appear to you as if he were not only an instrument and recorder, but a creator. But look from another and higher plane of consciousness with a wider view of things and you will see that this is only an appearance. In the workings of the universe whatever happens is the result of all that has happened before. How do you propose to separate one being from the integral play of the manifestation or one movement from the whole mass of movements? Where are you going to put the origin of a thing or its beginning? The whole play is a rigidly connected chain; one link merges imperceptibly into another. Nothing can be taken out of the chain and explained by itself as if it were its own source and beginning.”

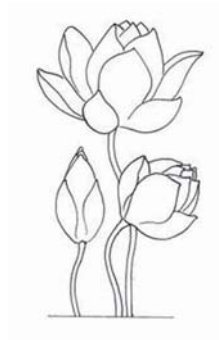
we cannot express ourselves otherwise. We are obliged to say things in succession, but they are a single whole.

And for most people it is not merely a question of saying but of knowing. They know things only one after another, feel them still more thus, live them yet more so. But there is a consciousness in which one knows all at the same time, understands all at the same time, can express all at the same time and can live wholly at the same time. But how to do it? Here it is not like that!

And so, you see, what one tries to do is to bring the two modes of consciousness as near each other as one is able to, so that even while living externally in the way we are compelled to do (because the physical world is like that and our physical consciousness is like that), we may be able at the same time to join the other Consciousness so closely that while doing things according to the material law and in the material way, in our consciousness we may not lose sight of the fact that it is only an approximation, a translation, and that it is not the Thing itself.

THE MOTHER

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LINES OF THE DESCENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS

1

THE world has been created by a descent of consciousness; it maintains itself, it proceeds and develops through a series of descents. In fact, creation itself is a descent, the first and original one, the descent of the supreme Reality into Matter and as Matter. The supreme Reality — the fount and origin of things and even that which is beyond — although essentially something absolute, indescribable, ineffable, indeterminate, has been, for purposes of the human understanding, signalised as a triune entity of Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. That is to say, first of all, it is, it exists always and for ever — invariably, in unbroken continuity; secondly, it exists not unconsciously, but consciously, in and as full consciousness; thirdly, it exists in delight — through delight and for and as delight; it has no other reason for existence but the pleasure and joy of simply existing. This primal, this original truth or reality transcends creation and is beyond and antecedent to it. What then is creation, what is its nature and character? Strange to say, it is the very opposite of the primal reality. First of all, it is not really existent: its existence is only another name for non-existence, as, in its phenomenal constitution, it is variable, ephemeral, transient and fragmentary or even seems made, as it were, of the stuff of dream. Secondly, it is not conscious; on the contrary, it is unconsciousness. And lastly it is not delight; there is an original insensibility and much undelight, grief and sorrow. That is the actual physical creation; or so, at least, it appears to be. How is this paradox to be explained? What is the significance of this riddle?

Descent is the master-key that unravels the mystery — that is to say, the descent of the delightful conscious existence as the material world. But why this descent at all? What was the necessity? What was the purpose? The *why* of a thing is always difficult, if not impossible, to gauge. But we shall try to understand the *how* of the phenomenon, and in so doing perhaps we may get at the *why* of it also. At present let us content ourselves by saying that such was His will — *la sua voluntade* — such was His wish — *sa aicchat*. For once perhaps instead of saying, “Let there be light”, He (or something in Him) must have said, “Let there be darkness”, and there was Darkness.

But the point is, this darkness did not come all on a sudden but arrived gradually through a developing process — we do not refer to physical time here but something antecedent, something parallel to it in another dimension. Let us see how it all came about.

The absolute in its triple or triune status (not in its supreme being but as we see it prior to manifestation) is in essence and principle an infinity and unity. Indeed, it is *the* infinite unity, and its fundamental character is a supreme and utter equality —

samam brahma. It is then a *status* or *statis*, that is to say, a state of perfectly stable equilibrium in which there is no movement of difference or distinction, no ripple of high and low or ebb and flow, no mark of quantity or quality. It is a stilled sea of self-identity, a vast limitless or pure consciousness brooding in trance and immobility. And yet in the bosom of this ineffable and inviolable equality, in the very hush and lull there lies secreted an urge, a pressure, a possibility towards activity, variation and even an eventual inequality. For the presence and possibility of dynamism is posited by the very infinity of the Infinite, since without it, the Infinite would be incapable of motion, expression and fulfilment of its Force.

There is thus inherent in the vast inalienable equality of the absolute Reality, a Force which can bring out centres of pressure, nuclei of dynamism, nodes of modulation. It is precisely round these centres of precipitation that the original and basic unity crystallises itself and weaves a pattern of harmonious multiplicity. Consciousness, by self-pressure, — *tapas taptvā* — turns its even and undifferentiated pristine equanimity into ripples and swirls, eddies and vortices of delight, matrices of creative activity. Thus the One becomes Many by a process of self-concentration and self-limitation.

At the very outset when and where the Many has come out into manifestation in the One here — also it must be remembered that we are using a temporal figure in respect of an extra-temporal fact — there and then is formed a characteristic range of reality which is a perfect equation of the one and the many: that is to say, the one in becoming many still remains the same immaculate one in and through the many, and likewise the many in spite of its manifoldness — and because of the special quality of the manifoldness — still continues to be the one in the uttermost degree. It is the world of fundamental realities. Sri Aurobindo names it the Supermind or Gnosis. It is something higher than but distantly akin to Plato's world of Ideas or Noumena (*ideai, nooumena*) or to what Plotinus calls the first divine emanation (*nous*). These archetypal realities are realities of the Spirit, Idea-forces, truth-energies, the root consciousness-forms, *ṛta cit*, in Vedic terminology. They are seed-truths, the original mother-truths in the Divine Consciousness. They comprise the fundamental essential many aspects and formulations of an infinite Infinity. At this stage these do not come into clash or conflict, for here each contains all and the All contains each one in absolute unity and essential identity. Each individual formation is united with and partakes of the nature of the one supreme Reality. Although difference is born here, separation is not yet come. Variety is there, but not discord, individuality is there, not egoism. This is the first step of Descent, the earliest one — not, we must remind ourselves again, historically but psychologically and logically — the descent of the Transcendent into the Cosmic as the vast and varied Supermind — *citraḥ praketo ajaniṣṭa vibhwā* — of the Absolute into the relational manifestation as *Vidyāśakti* (Gnosis).

The next steps, farther down or away, arrive when the drive towards differentiation and multiplication gathers momentum, becomes accentuated, and separation

and isolation increase in degree and emphasis. The lines of individuation fall more and more apart from each other, tending to form closed circles, each confining more and more exclusively to itself, stressing its own particular and special value and function, in contradistinction to or even against other lines. Thus the descent or fall from the Supermind leads, in the first instance, to the creation or appearance of the Overmind. It is the level of consciousness where the perfect balance of the One and the Many is disturbed and the emphasis begins to be laid on the many. The source of incompatibility between the two just starts here as if Many is not-One and One is not-Many. It is the beginning of Ignorance, Avidya, Maya. Still in the higher hemisphere of the Overmind, the sense of unity is yet maintained, although there is no longer the sense of absolute identity of the two; they are experienced as complementaries, both form a harmony, a harmony as of different and distinct but conjoint notes. The Many has come forward, yet the unity is also there supporting it — the unity is an immanent godhead, controlling the patent reality of the Many. It is in the lower hemisphere of the Overmind that unity is thrown into the background half-submerged, flickering, and the principle of multiplicity comes forward with all insistence. Division and rivalry are the characteristic marks of its organisation. Yet the unity does not disappear altogether, only it remains very much inactive, like a sleeping partner. It is not directly perceived and envisaged, not immediately felt but is evoked as reminiscence. The Supermind, then, is the first crystallisation of the Infinite into individual centres, in the Overmind these centres at the outset become more exclusively individualised and then jealously self-centred.

The next step of Descent is the Mind where the original unity and identity and harmony are disrupted to a yet greater degree, almost completely. The self-delimitation of consciousness — which is proper to the Supermind and even to the Overmind, at least in its higher domains — gives way to self-limitation, to intolerant egoism and solipsism. The consciousness withdraws from its high and wide sweep, narrows down to introvert orbits. The sense of unity in the mind is, at most, a thing of idealism and imagination; it is an abstract notion, a supposition and a deduction. Here we enter into the very arcana of Maya, the rightful possession of Ignorance. The individualities here have become totally isolated and independent and mutually conflicting lines of movement. Hence the natural incapacity of mind, as it is said, to comprehend more than one object simultaneously. The Supermind and, less absolutely, the Overmind have a global and integral outlook: they can take in each one in its purview all at once the total assemblage of things, they differentiate but do not divide — the Supermind not at all, the Overmind not categorically. The Mind has not this synthetic view, it proceeds analytically. It observes its object by division, taking the parts piecemeal, dismantling them, separating them, and attending to each one at a time. And when it observes it fixes itself on one point, withdrawing its attention from all the rest. If it has to arrive at a synthesis, it can only do so by collating, aggregating and summing. Mental consciousness is thus narrowly one-pointed: and in narrowing itself, being

farther away from the source it becomes obscurer, more and more outward gazing (*parāñci khāni*) and superficial. The One Absolute in its downward march towards multiplicity, fragmentation and partiality loses also gradually its subtlety, its suppleness, its refinement, becomes more and more obtuse, crude, rigid and dense.

Between the Overmind and the Mind proper, varying according to the degree of immixture of the two, according to the degree of descent and of emergence of one and the other respectively, there are several levels of consciousness of which three main ones have been named and described by Sri Aurobindo. The first one nearest to the Overmind and the least contaminated by the Mind is pure Intuition; next, the intermediary one is called the Illumined Mind, and last comes the Higher Mind. They are all powers of the Overmind functioning in the Mind. The higher ranges are always more direct, intense, synthetic, dynamic than the lower ones where consciousness is slower, duller, more uncertain, more disintegrated. The lower the consciousness descends the more veiled it becomes, losing more and more the directness, the sureness, the intensity and force and the synthetic unity native to the highest ranges of our consciousness and being.

A further descent into obscurity occurs when consciousness passes from Mind to Life. Darkness is almost visible here: there is a greater withdrawal on the part of each unit from its surrounding reality, a narrower concentration upon one's own separative existence — shades of the prison-house have gathered close around. The light, already dulled and faint in the mind, has become a lurid glare here. Passion has arisen and desire and hunger and battle and combat.

Here also in the vital three ranges can be distinguished — the lower becoming more and more turbid and turbulent and fierce or more and more self-centred and selfish. These levels can best be seen by their impact on our vital being and formations there. The first, the highest one, the meeting or confluence of the Mind and the Vital is the Heart, the centre of emotion, the knot of the external or instrumental vehicle, of the frontal consciousness, behind which is born and hides the true individualised consciousness, the psyche. The mid-region is the Higher Vital consisting of larger (egoistic) dynamisms, such as high ambition, great enterprise, heroic courage, capacity for work, adventure, masterfulness, also such movements as sweeping violences, mighty hungers, and intense arrogances. The physical seat of this movement is, as perhaps the *Tantras* would say, the domain ranging between the heart and the navel. Lower down ranges the Lower Vital which consists of small desires, petty hankerings, blind cravings — all urges and impulses that are more or less linked up with the body and move to gross physical satisfactions.

But always the Consciousness is driving towards a yet greater disintegration and fragmentation, obscuration and condensation of self-oblivion. The last step in the process of transmutation or involution is Matter where consciousness has wiped itself out or buried itself within so completely and thoroughly that it has become in its outward form totally dark, dense, hard, pulverised into mutually exclusive grains. The supreme luminous Will of Consciousness in its gradual descent and self-

obliteration finally ends in a rigid process of mere mechanised drive.

This is, so far then, the original and primal line of descent. It is the line down which the absolute Reality, the absolute Consciousness and the absolute Delight have turned into unreality and unconsciousness and undelight. But it is not all loss and debit. There is a credit side too. For it is only in this way, viz., by the manifestation of utter Ignorance, that the supreme Absolute has become concrete, the Formless has entered into form, the Bodiless has found a body: what was originally an indeterminate equal Infinity of pure consciousness, has become determinate and dynamic in the individual multiplicity of corporeal consciousness. What is the sense in all that, what is the gain or upshot? We shall presently see.

When consciousness has reached the farthest limit of its opposite, when it has reduced itself to absolutely unconscious and mechanical atoms of Matter, when the highest has descended into and become the lowest, then, by the very force of its downward drive, it has swung round and begun to mount up again. As it could not proceed farther on the downward gradient, having reached the extreme and ultimate limit of inconscience, consciousness had to turn round, as it were, by the very pressure of its inner impetus. First, then, there is a descent, a gradual involution, a veiling and closing up; next, an ascent, a gradual evolution, unfoldment and expression. We now see, however, that the last limit at the bottom — Matter — although appearing to be unconscious, is really not so: it is inconscient. That is to say, it holds consciousness secreted and involved within itself; it is, indeed, a special formulation of consciousness. It is the exclusive concentration of consciousness upon single points in itself: it is consciousness throwing itself out in scattered units and, by reason of separative identification with them and absorption into them, losing itself, forgetting itself in an absolute fixation of attention. The phenomenon is very similar to what happens when in the ordinary consciousness a worker, while doing a work, becomes so engrossed in it that he loses consciousness of himself, identifies himself with the work and in fact becomes the work, the visible resultant being a mechanical execution.

Now this imprisoned consciousness in Matter forces Matter to be conscious again when driven on the upward gradient. This tension creates a fire, as it were, in the heart of Matter, a mighty combustion and whorl in the core of things, of which the blazing sun is an image and a symbol. All this pressure and heat and concussion and explosion mean a mighty struggle in Matter to give birth to that which is within. Consciousness that is latent must be made patent; it must reveal itself in Matter and through Matter, making Matter its vehicle and embodiment. This is the mystery of the birth of Life, the first sprouting of consciousness in Matter. Life is half-awakened consciousness, consciousness yet in a dream state. Its earliest and most rudimentary manifestation is embodied in the plant or vegetable world. The submerged consciousness strives to come still further up, to express itself to a greater degree and in a clearer mode, to become more free and plastic in its movements; hence the appearance of the animal as the next higher formulation. Here consciousness delivers itself as a

psyche, a rudimentary one, no doubt, a being of feeling and sensation, and elementary mentality playing in a field of vitalised Matter. Even then it is not satisfied with itself, it asks for a still more free and clear articulation: it is not satisfied, for it has not yet found its own level. Hence after the animal, arrives man with a full-fledged Mind, with intelligence and self-consciousness and capacity for self-determination.

Thus we see that evolution, the unfolding of consciousness follows exactly the line of its involution, only the other way round: the mounting consciousness re-ascends step by step the same gradient, retraces the same path along which it had descended. The descending steps are broadly speaking (1) Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, (2) Supermind and its secondary form Overmind, (3) Mind — (i) mind proper and (ii) the intermediary psyche, (4) Life, (5) Matter. The ascending consciousness starting from Matter rises into Life, passes on through Life and Psyche into Mind, driving towards the Supermind and Sachchidananda. At the present stage of evolution, consciousness has arrived at the higher levels of Mind; it is now striving to cross it altogether and enter the Overmind and the Supermind. It will not rest content until it arrives at the organisation in and through the Supermind: for that is the drive and purpose of Nature in the next cycle of evolution.

Physical Science speaks of irreversibility and entropy in Nature's process. That is to say, it is stated that Nature is rushing down and running down: she is falling irrevocably from a higher to an ever lower potential of energy. The machine that Nature is, is driven by energy made available by a break-up of parts and particles constituting its substance. This katabolic process cannot be stopped or retraced; it can end only when the break-up ceases at dead equilibrium. You cannot lead the river up the channel to its source, it moves inevitably, unceasingly towards the sea in which it exhausts itself and finds its last repose and — extinction. But whatever physical Science may say, the science of the spirit declares emphatically that Nature's process is reversible, that a growing entropy can be checked and countermanded: in other words, Nature's downward current resulting in a continual loss of energy and a break-up of substance is not the only process of her activity. This aspect is more than counter-balanced by another one of upward drive and building up, of re-energisation and re-integration. Indeed, evolution, as we have explained it, is nothing but such a process of synthesis and new creation.

Evolution, which means the return movement of consciousness, consists, in its apparent and outward aspect, of two processes, or rather two parallel lines in a single process. First, there is the line of sublimation, that is to say, the lower purifies and modifies itself into the higher; the denser, the obscurer, the baser mode of consciousness is led into and becomes the finer, the clearer, the nobler mode. Thus it is that Matter rises into Life, Life into Psyche and Mind, Mind into Overmind and Supermind. Now this sublimation is not simply a process of refinement or elimination, something in the nature of our old Indian *nivṛtti* or *pratyāhāra*, or what Plotinus called *epistrophe* (a turning back, withdrawal or reabsorption): it includes and is attended by the process

of integration also. That is to say, as the lower rises into the higher, the lower does not cease to exist thereby, it exists but lifted up into the higher, infused and modified by the higher. Thus when Matter yields Life, Matter is not destroyed: it means Life has appeared in Matter and exists in and through Matter and Matter thereby has attained a new mode and constitution, for it is no longer merely a bundle of chemical or mechanical reactions, it is instinct with life, it has become organic matter. Even so, when Life arrives at Mind, it is not dissolved into Mind but both Life and Matter are taken up by the mental stuff, life becomes dynamic sentience and Matter is transformed into the grey substance of the brain. Matter thus has passed through a first transformation in Life and a second transformation in Mind; it awaits other transformations on other levels beyond Mind. Likewise, Life has passed through a first transformation in Mind and there are stages in this transformation. In the plant, Life is in its original pristine mode; in the animal, it has become sentient and centralised round a rudimentary desire-soul; in man, life-force is taken up by the higher mind and intelligence giving birth to idealism and ambition, dynamisms of a forward-looking purposive will.

We have, till now, spoken of the evolution of consciousness as a movement of ascension, consisting of a double process of sublimation and integration. But ascension itself is only one line of a yet another larger double process. For along with the visible movement of ascent, there is a hidden movement of descent. The ascent represents the pressure from below, the force of buoyancy exerted by the involved and secreted consciousness. But the mere drive from below is not sufficient all by itself to bring out or establish the higher status. The higher status itself has to descend in order to be manifest. The urge from below is an aspiration, a yearning to move ever upward and forward; but the precise goal, the status to be arrived at is not given there. The more or less vague and groping surge from below is canalised, it assumes a definite figure and shape, assumes a local habitation and a name when the higher descends at the crucial moment, takes the lower at its peak-tide and fixes upon it its own norm and form. We have said that all the levels of consciousness have been created — loosened out — by a first Descent; but in the line of the first Descent the only level that stands in front at the outset is Matter, all the other levels are created no doubt but remain invisible in the background, behind the gross veil of Matter. Each status stands confined, as it were, to its own region and bides its time when each will be summoned to concretise itself in Matter. Thus Life was already there on the plane of Life even when it did not manifest itself in Matter, when mere Matter, dead Matter was the only apparent reality on the material plane. When Matter was stirred and churned sufficiently so as to reach a certain tension and saturation, when it was raised to a certain degree of maturity, as it were, then Life appeared: Life appeared, not because that was the inevitable and unavoidable result of the churning, but because Life descended from its own level to the level of Matter and took Matter up in its embrace. The churning, the development in Matter was only the occasion, the condition precedent. For, however much one may shake or churn Matter, whatever change one may create in it

by a shuffling and reshuffling of its elements, one can never produce Life by that alone. A new and unforeseen factor makes its appearance, precisely because it comes from elsewhere. It is true all the planes are imbedded, submerged, involved in the complex of Matter; but, in point of fact, all planes are involved in every other plane. The appearance or manifestation of a new plane is certainly prepared, made ready to the last — the last but one — degree by the urge of the inner, the latent mode of consciousness that is to be; still the actualisation, the bursting forth happens only when the thing that has to manifest itself descends, the actual form and pattern can be imprinted and established by that alone. Thus, again, when Life attains a certain level of growth and maturity, a certain tension and orientation — a definite vector, so to say, in the mathematical language — when it has, for example, sufficiently organised itself as a vehicle of the psychic element of consciousness, then it buds forth into Mind, but only when the Mind has descended upon it and into it. As in the previous stage, here also Life cannot produce Mind, cannot develop into Mind by any amount of mechanical or chemical operations within itself, by any amount of permutation and combination or commutation and culture of its constituent elements, unless it is seized on by Mind itself. After the Mind, the next higher grade of consciousness shall come by the same method and process, viz., first by an uplifting of the mental consciousness — a certain widening and deepening and katharsis of the mental consciousness — and then by a descent, gradual or sudden, of the level or levels that lie above it.

This, then, is the nature of creation and its process. First, there is an Involution, a gradual foreshortening — a disintegration and concretisation, an exclusive concentration and self-oblivion of consciousness by which the various levels of diminishing consciousness are brought forth from the plenary light of the one supreme Spirit, all the levels down to the complete eclipse in the unconsciousness of the multiple and disintegrate Matter. Next, there is an Evolution, that is to say, embodiment in Matter of all these successive states, appearing one by one from the downmost to the topmost; Matter incarnates, all other states contribute to the incarnation and uphold it, the higher always transforming the lower in a new degree of consciousness.

Creation, the universe in its activity, is thus not simply a meaningless play, a pointless fancy. It has a purpose, an end, a goal, a fulfilment, and it follows naturally a definite pattern of process. The goal is the concretisation, the materialisation (which includes, of course, vitalisation and mentalisation) of the Spirit and the spiritual values. It means the establishment of divine names and forms in terrestrial individuals leading a divine life, individually and collectively here below.

2

We have so far spoken of two lines of descent. But in either case the descent was of a general and impersonal character. Consciousness was considered as a mere force, movement or quality. There is another aspect, however, in which the descent is of a particular and personal character and consciousness is not force or status only but conscious being or Person.

The various movements or forces of consciousness that play in the various fields or levels of creation are not merely states or degrees and magnitudes, currents and streams of consciousness: they are also personalities with definite forms and figures — not physical indeed, yet very definite even when subtle and fluidic. Thus the supreme Reality, which is usually described as the perfect status of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, is not merely a principle but a personality. It is the Supreme Person with his triune nature (Purushottama). It is the Divine as the supreme Knower and Doer or Creator and Lover. The creation in or from that status of consciousness is not simply a play or result of the force of consciousness, it is even more truly the embodiment of a conscious Will; it is the will of the Divine Father executed by the Divine Mother.

Now, as the Reality along with its consciousness, in the downward involutionary course towards materialisation, has been gradually disintegrating itself, multiplying itself, becoming more and more obscure and dense in separated and isolated units, even so the Person too has been following a parallel course of disintegration and multiplication and obscuration and isolation. At the origin lies, as we have said, the Perfect Person, the Supreme Person, in his dual aspect of being and nature, appearing as the supreme *puruṣa* and the supreme *prakṛti*, our Father and our Mother in the highest heaven.

Next is the domain of the Supermind with which the *manifestation* of the Divine starts. We have said it is the world of typical realities, of the first seed-realities, where the One and the Many are united and fused in each other, where the absolute unity of the Supreme maintains itself in undiminished magnitude and expresses and formulates itself perfectly in and through the original multiplicity. Here take birth the first personalities, absolute truth-forms of the Divine. Here are the highest gods, the direct formations of the Divine himself. Here are the Four Powers and Personalities of *īśwara* whom Sri Aurobindo has named after the Vaishnava terminology: (i) Mahavira, embodying the Brahmin quality of Knowledge and Light and wide Consciousness, (ii) Balarama, embodying the Kshatriya quality of Force and intense dynamism, (iii) Pradyumna, embodying the quality of love and beauty — the Vaishya virtue of mutuality and harmony and solidarity, and (iv) Aniruddha, embodying the Sudra quality of competent service, of organisation and execution in detail. Corresponding with these Four there are the other Four Powers and Personalities of the Divine Mother — *īśvarī*: (i) Maheshwari, (ii) Mahakali, (iii) Mahalakshmi and (iv) Mahasaraswati. Next in the downward gradient comes the Overmind where the individualised powers

and personalities of the Divine tend to become self-sufficient and self-regarding; their absolute unity is loosened and the lines of multiplicity begin to be more independent of each other, each aiming at a special fulfilment of its own. Still the veil that is being drawn over the unity is yet transparent which continues to be sufficiently dynamic. This is the abode of the gods, the true and high gods: it is these that the Vedic Rishis appear to have envisaged and sought after. The all gods (*viśve devāḥ*) were indeed acknowledged to be but different names and forms of one supreme godhead (*devāḥ*): it is the one god, says Rishi Dirghatamas, who is called multifariously whether as Agni or Yama or Matariswan; it is the one god, again, who is described as having a thousand heads and a thousand feet. And yet they are separate entities, each has his own distinct and distinctive character and attribute, each demands a characteristic way of approach and worship. The tendency towards an exclusive stress is already at work on this level and it is the perception of this truth that lies behind the term *henotheism* used by European scholars to describe the Vedic Religion.

The next stage of devolution is the Mind proper. There or perhaps even before, on the lower reaches of the Overmind, the gods have become all quite separate, — self-centred, each bounded in his own particular sphere and horizon. The overmind gods — the true gods — are creators in a world of balanced or harmoniously held difference; they are powers that fashion each a special fulfilment, enhancing one another at the same time (*parasparam bhāvayantaḥ*). Between the Overmind and the Mind there is a class of lesser gods — they have been called *formateurs*; they do not create in the strict sense of the term, they give form to what the anterior gods have created and projected. These form-makers that consolidate the encasement, fix definitely the image, have most probably been envisaged in the Indian *dhyānamūrtis*. But in the Mind the gods become still more fixed and rigid, “stereotyped”; the mental gods inspire exclusive systems, extreme and abstract generalisations, theories and principles and formulae that, even when they seek to force and englobe all in their cast-iron mould, can hardly understand or tolerate each other.

Mind is the birth-place of absolute division and exclusivism — it is the “own home” of egoism. Egoism is that ignorant mode — a twist or knot of consciousness which cuts up the universal unity into disparate and antagonistic units: it creates isolated, mutually exclusive whorls in the harmonious rhythm and vast commonalty of the one consciousness or conscious existence. The Sankhya speaks of the principle of ego coming or appearing after the principle of vastness (*mahat*). The Vast is the region above the Mind, where the unitary consciousness is still intact; with the appearance of the Mind has also appeared an intolerant self-engrossed individualism that culminates, as its extreme and violent expression, in the *asura* — Asura, the mentalised vital being.

The Asura or the Titan stands where consciousness descends from the Mind into the Vital or Life–Force. He is the personification of ambition and authority and arrogance, he is the intolerant and absolute self-seeker — he is Daitya, the son of

division. The Asura belongs to what we call the Higher Vital; but lower down in the Mid Vital, made wholly of unmixed life impulses, appear beings that are still less luminous, less controlled, more passionate, vehement and violent in their self-regarding appetite. They are the Rakshasas. If the Asura is perverse power, the Rakshasa is insatiate hunger.

All the ancient legends about a principle — and a personality — of Denial and Ignorance, of an Everlasting Nay — refer to this fact of a descending consciousness, a Fall. The Vedantic *māyā*, spoken of sometimes as the Dark Mother, seems to be the personification of the lower Overmind, Jehovah and Satan of the Hebrews, Olympians and Titans of the Greeks, Ahriman and Ahura Mazda of old Iran, the sons of Diti and Aditi the Indian Puranas speak of, are powers and personalities of consciousness when it has descended entirely into the mind and the vital where the division is complete. These lower reaches have completely lost the unitary consciousness; still there are beings even here that have succeeded in maintaining it as a memory or an aspiration, although in a general way the living reality of the oneness is absent. It is significant that the term asura which came to mean in classical and mythological ages *a + sura*, not-god, the Titan, had originally a different connotation and etymology, *asu + ra*, one having force or strength, and was used as a general attribute of all the gods. The degradation in the sense of the word is a pointer to the spiritual Fall: Satan was once Lucifer, the bringer or bearer of light. We may mention in this connection that these beings of which we are speaking, dwelling in unseen worlds, are of two broad categories — (1) beings that are native to each plane and immutably confined and bound to that plane, and (2) those that extend their existence through many or all planes and assume on each plane the norm and form appropriate to that plane. But this is a problem of individual destiny with which we are not concerned at present.

We were speaking of the descent into the Vital, the domain of dynamism, desire and hunger. The Vital is also the field of some strong creative Powers who follow, or are in secret contact with the line of unitary consciousness, who are open to influences from a deeper or higher or subtler consciousness. Along with the demons there is also a line of *daimona*, guardian angels, in the hierarchy of vital beings. Much of what is known as aesthetic or artistic creation derives its spirit from this sphere. Many of the gods of beauty and delight are denizens of this heaven. Gandharvas and Kinnaras are here, Dionysus and even Apollo perhaps (at least in their mythological aspect — in their occult reality they properly belong to the Overmind which is the own home of the gods), many of the angels, seraphs and cherubs dwell here. In fact, the mythological heaven for the most part can be located in this region.

All this is comprised within what we term the Higher or the Middle Vital. In the lower vital, we have said, consciousness has become still more circumscribed, dark, ignorantly obstinate, disparately disintegrated. It is the seed-bed of lust and cruelty, of all that is small and petty and low and mean, all that is dirt and filth. It is here that we place the *piśācas*, djinns, ghouls and ghosts, and vampires, beings who possess

the “possessed”.

Further down in the scale where life-force touches Matter, where Life is about to precipitate as Matter, appear beings of a still lower order, of smaller dimensions and magnitudes — imps, elves, pixies, goblins, gnomes, fairies or dryads and naiads. There are even creatures or entities so close to Matter that they come into being and pass away with the building up and breaking of a definite pattern of material organisation. This individualisation of consciousness as beings or persons seems to disappear altogether when we enter the strictly material plane. There is here only an agglomeration of uniform dead particles.

We have thus far followed the course of the break-up of Personality, from the original one supreme Person, through a continuous process of multiplication and disintegration, of parcellation and crystallisation into more and more small self-centred units, until we reach the final pulverisation as purely material physico-chemical atoms. Now with the reversal of consciousness, in its return movement, we have again a process of growth and building up of individuality and personality, with the awakening and ascension of consciousness from level to level on the physical plane and in the material embodiment, there occurs too an evolution of the personal aspect of the reality.

We say that at the lowest level of involution, in Matter, where consciousness has zero magnitude, there is no personality or individuality. It is all a mechanical play of clashing particles that constantly fly apart or come together according to the force or the resultant of forces that act upon them. An individuality means a bounded form as its basis of reaction and a form that tends to persist and grow by assimilation; it means a centre of a definite manner and pattern of reaction. Individuality, in its literal sense, designates that which cannot be divided (*in + dividus*). Division is only another name for death for the particular entity. Even in the case of cell-division or self-division of some lower organisms, in the first instance the original living entity disappears and, secondly, the succeeding entities, created by division, always re-form themselves again into integral wholes. A material particle, on the other hand, is divisible *ad infinitum*. We have been able to divide even an atom (which means also *that which cannot be divided*) to such an extent as to reduce it to a mere charge of energy, nay, we have sublimated it to a geometrical point. Individualisation starts with the coming of life. It is a ganglion of life-force round which a particular system of action and reaction weaves itself. The characteristic of individuality is that each one is unique, each relates itself to others and to the environment in its own way, each expresses itself, puts forth its energy, receives impacts from outside in a manner that distinguishes it from others. It is true this character of individuality is not very pronounced in the earlier or rudimentary forms of life. Still it is there: it grows and develops slowly along the ladder of evolution. Only in the higher animals it attains a clear and definite norm and form.

In man something else or something more happens. For man is not merely an individual, he is also a personality. He is the outcome of a twofold growth and

revelation. He has outgrown the vital and climbed into Mind, and he has dived into the Heart and touched his inner soul, his true psychic centre. It is this soul that is the source of his personality.

The formulation or revelation of the Psyche marks another line of what we have been describing as the Descent of Consciousness. The phenomenon of individualisation has at its back the phenomenon of the growth of the Psyche. It is originally a spark or nucleus of consciousness thrown into Matter that starts growing and organising itself behind the veil, in and through the movements and activities of the apparent vehicle consisting of the triple nexus of Body (Matter) and Life and Mind. The extreme root of the psychic growth extends perhaps right into the body, consciousness of Matter, but its real physical basis and tenement is found only with the growth and formation of the physical heart. And yet the psychic individuality behind the animal organisation is very rudimentary. All that can be said is that it is there, *in potentia*, it exists, it is simple *being*: it has not started *becoming*. This is man's speciality: in him the psychic begins to be dynamic; to be organised and to organise, it is a psychic personality that he possesses. Now this flowering of the psychic personality is due to an especial Descent, the descent of a Person from another level of consciousness. That Person (or Superperson) is the *jīvātman*, the Individual Self, the central being of each individual formation. The Jivas are centres of multiplicity thrown up in the bosom of the infinite Consciousness: it is the supreme Consciousness eddying in unit formations to serve as the basis for the play of manifestation. They are not within the frame of manifestation (as the typical formations in the Supermind are), they are above or beyond or beside it and stand there eternally and invariably in and as part and parcel of the one supreme Reality — Sachchidananda. But the Jivatman from its own status casts its projection, representation, delegated formulation — “emanation” in the phraseology of the neo-Platonists — into the manifestation of the triple complex of mind, life and body, that is to say, into the human vehicle, and thus stands behind as the psychic personality or the soul. This soul, we have seen, is a developing, organising focus of consciousness growing from below and comes to its own in the human being: or we can put it the other way, that is to say, when it comes to its own, then the human being appears. And it has come to its own precisely by a descent of its own self from above, in the same manner as with the other descents already described. Now, this “coming to its own” means that it begins henceforth to exercise its royal power, its natural and inherent divine right, viz, of consciously and directly controlling and organising its terrestrial kingdom which is the body and life and mind. The exercise of conscious directive will, supported and illumined by a self-consciousness, that occurs with the advent of the Mind is a function of the Purusha, the self-conscious being, in the Mind; but this self-conscious being has been able to come up, manifest itself and be active, because of pressure of the underlying psychic personality that has formed here.

Thus we have three characteristics of the human personality accruing from the psychic consciousness that supports and inspires it: — (1) self-consciousness: an

animal acts, feels and even knows, but man knows that he acts, knows that he feels, knows even that he knows. This phenomenon of consciousness turning round upon itself is the hallmark of the human being; (2) a conscious will holding together and harmonising, fashioning and integrating the whole external nature evolved till now; (3) a purposive drive, a deliberate and voluntary orientation towards a higher and ever higher status of individualisation and personalisation, — not only a horizontal movement seeking to embrace and organise the normal, the already attained level of consciousness, but also a vertical movement seeking to raise the level, attain altogether a new poise of higher organisation.

These characters, it is true, are not clear and pronounced, do not lie in front, at the beginning of the human personality. The normal human person has his psyche very much behind; but it is still there as *antaryāmin*, as the secret Inner Controller. And whatever the vagaries of the outer instruments or their slavery to the mode of Ignorance, in and through all that, it is this Inner Guide that holds the reins and drives upward in the end.

Thus naturally there appear gradations of the human personality; as the consciousness in the human being rises higher and higher, the psychic centre organises a higher and higher — a richer, wider, deeper — personality. The first great conversion, the first turning of the human personality to a new mode of life and living, that is to say, living even externally according to the inner truth and reality, the first attempt at a conscious harmonisation of the psychic consciousness with its surface agents and vehicles is what is known as spiritual initiation. This may happen and it does happen even when man lives in his normal mental consciousness. But there is the possibility of growth and evolution and transformation of personality in a higher and higher spiritual degree through the upper reaches of the higher Mind, the varying degrees of the Overmind and finally the Supermind. These are the spheres, the fields, even the continents of the personality, but the stuff, the substance of the personality, the inner nucleus of consciousness-force is formed, first, by the flaming aspiration, the upward drive within the developing and increasing psychic being itself, and secondly, by the descent, to a greater and greater degree, of the original Being from which it emanated. The final coalescence of the fully and integrally developed psychic being with the supreme splendour of its very source, the Jivatman, occurs in the Supermind. When this happens the supramental personality becomes incarnate in the physical body: Matter in the material plane is transformed into a radiant substance made of pure consciousness, the human personality becomes a living form of the Divine. Thus the wheel comes full circle: creation returns to the point from which it started but with an added significance, a new fulfilment.

The mystery of rebirth in the evolution of the human personality is nothing but the mystery of the developing psyche. At first this psyche or soul is truly a being: “no bigger than the thumb” — it is the hardly audible “still small voice”. The experiences of life — sweet or bitter, happy or unhappy, good or bad, howsoever they may appear

to the outward eye and perception — all the dialectics of a terrestrial existence contribute to the growth and development of the psychic consciousness. Each span of life means a special degree or mode of growth necessitated by the inner demand and drive of the divine Individual seated within the heart. The whole end in view of this secret soul is to move always towards and be united again with its Oversoul, its original and high archetype in the Divine Consciousness: the entire course of its earthly evolution is chalked out and patterned by the exact need of its growth. Whatever happens in each particular life, all the currents of all the lives converge and coalesce, and serve the psychic consciousness to swell in volume and intensity and be one with the Divine Consciousness. Or, in a different imagery, one can say that the multifarious experiences of various lives are as fuel to the Inner Fire — this Psychic Agni which is just a spark or a thin tongue at the outset of the human evolutionary course; but with the addition of fuel from life to life this Fire flames up, indeed, becomes ultimately a conflagration that burns and purifies the entire outer vehicle and transforms it into radiant matter — a fit receptacle, incarnation of the supernal Light. The mounting Fire (the consciousness-energy secreted in the earth-bound heart of Matter) finally flares up, discloses itself in its full amplitude and calls and attracts into it the incandescent supramental Solar Sphere which is the type and pattern it has to embody and express. This is the marriage of Heaven and Earth, of which the mystics all over the earth in all ages spoke and sang — to which the Vedic Rishi refers when he declares:

*Dyaur me pitā mātā pṛthivī iyam.*¹

The supramentalisation of the personality which means the perfect divinisation of the personality is yet not the final end of Nature's march. Her path is endless, since she follows the trail of infinity. There are still higher modes of consciousness, or, if they cannot properly be called higher, other modes of consciousness that lie in waiting to be brought out and placed and established in the front of terrestrial evolution. Only, supramentalisation means the definite crossing over from Ignorance, from every trace and shadow of Ignorance, into the abiding and perennial Knowledge and Freedom. Thenceforward the course of Nature's evolution may be more of the kind of expression than ascension; for, beyond the Supermind it is very difficult to speak of a higher or lower order of consciousness. Everything thereafter is in the full perfect light — the difference comes in the mode or manner or stress of expression. However, that is a problem with which we are not immediately concerned.

We have spoken of four lines of Descent in the evolution and organisation of consciousness. There yet remains a fifth line. It is more occult. It is really the secret of secrets, the *Supreme Secret*. It is the descent of the Divine himself. The Divine, the supreme Person himself descends, not indirectly through emanations, projections,

1. The Heaven is my Father and this Earth my Mother.

partial or lesser formulations, but directly in his own plenary self. He descends not as a disembodied force acting as a general movement, possessing, at the most, other objects and persons as its medium or instrument, but in an embodied form and in the fullness of his consciousness. The Indian word for Divine Incarnation, *avatāra*, literally means *he who has descended*. The Divine comes down himself as a terrestrial being, on this material plane of ours, in order to raise the terrestrial and material Nature to a new status in her evolutionary course — even so He incarnated as the Great Boar who, with his mighty tusk, lifted a solid mass of earth from out of the waters of the Deluge. It is his purpose to effect ascension of consciousness, a transmutation of being, to establish a truly New Order, a New Dharma, as it is termed — *dharma-samsthāpanārthāya*. On the human level, he appears as a human person — for two purposes. First of all, he shows, by example, how the ascension, the transmutation is to be effected, how a normal human being can rise from a lower status of consciousness to a higher one. The Divine is therefore known as the Lord of Yoga — for Yoga is the means and method by which one consciously uplifts oneself, unites oneself with the Higher Reality. The embodied Divine is the ideal and pattern: he shows the path, himself walks the path and man can follow, if he chooses. The Biblical conception of the Son of God — God made flesh — as the intermediary between the human and the Divine, declaring, “I am the Way and the Goal”, expresses a very similar truth. The Divine takes a body for another — occult — reason also. It is this: Matter or terrestrial life cannot be changed — changed radically, that is to say, *transformed* — by the pure spiritual consciousness alone, lying above or within; also it is not sufficient to bring about only that much of change in terrestrial life which can be effected by the mere spiritual force acting in a general way. It looks as if the physical transformation which is what is meant by an ascension or emergence in the evolutionary gradient were possible only by a physical impact embodying and canalising the spiritual force: it is with his physical body that the Divine Incarnation seems to push and lift up physical Nature to a new and higher status.

The occult seers declare that we are today on the earth at such a crisis of evolution. Earth and Man and man’s earthly life need to be radically transfigured. The trouble and turbulence, the chaos and confusion that are now overwhelming this earth, indicate the acute tension before the release, the *détente* of a NEW MANIFESTATION.

NOLINI KANTA GUPTA

(*Collected Works of Nolini Kanta Gupta*, Vol. 3, pp. 32-54)

“ASPIRATION” — CORRESPONDENCE WITH SRI AUROBINDO

Sri Aurobindo —

Surely there is nothing *recherché* about this lyric — except perhaps a suspicion in the last line; but I don’t know if it was worth writing. Does it seem open to the charge of being too facile?

ASPIRATION

All things express themselves in hues
Which batter on the gates of sense;
But He to utter peace subdues
The fire of His omnipotence.

A calm soul-light belongs to Him:
My heart with deepest visioning word
Essays for ever but to limn
The secret smile of the Unheard.

I crave a tuneful ecstasy
Lit by a sun beyond earth-skies —
The in-soaring bird of mystery¹
Whose pinions are entranced eyes.

¹ I don’t suppose “reverie” is preferable to “mystery”.

Sri Aurobindo’s comment:

No, I find it very good.

[*To*¹] No.

14 September 1934

*

Sri Aurobindo —

In line 3 of the poem I have sent up, “utter” seems quite a clutter after “batter” of the previous line and “but” in the same. Is it advisable to substitute “perfect” for it?

Sri Aurobindo's answer:

“Utter” and “batter” may be a clutter and a clatter but “perfect” is much too flatter. So find something else which will fit more inevitably into the matter.

15 September 1934

*

Though leaning on the right side of meaning, the flatness of “perfect” may still blur fact, making its triumph too Pyrrhic; but surely “giant” is stronger and yet more pliant to the needs of my rousing lyric. However, if I am mistaken, even this can be forsaken.

“All things express themselves in hues
Which batter on the gates of sense;
But He to giant peace subdues
The fire of His omnipotence.”

Sri Aurobindo's comment:

I suppose it can go — but will not the giant also batter? Does it not lessen the force of the contrast suggested.

16 September 1934

* * *

ASPIRATION

All things express themselves in hues
Which batter on the gates of sense;
But He to giant peace subdues
The fires of His omnipotence.

A calm soul-light belongs to Him:
My heart with deepmost visioning word
Essays for ever but to limn
The secret smile of the Unheard.

I crave a tuneful ecstasy
Lit by a sun beyond earth-skies —
The in-soaring bird of mystery
Whose pinions are trance-lifted eyes.

(From *The Secret Splendour – Collected Poems of K. D. Sethna [Amal Kiran]*, 1993, p. 471)

AMAL KIRAN
(K. D. SETHNA)

ITINERARY OF A CHILD OF THE CENTURY

Pavitra's Correspondence with His Father (1918 – 1954)

(Continued from the issue of April 2009)

Chapter Two

Theosophy in Japan

In February 1921, when Philippe boarded a ship for Japan, his father was under the impression that a machination had been planned by a couple of Theosophists, Count Étienne Lubiencki and Countess Zina. They were of the same age and they made the voyage together. Zina was supposed to be a medium. She must have convinced Philippe that he was “the reincarnation of Mahatma Kuthumi” and that the latter was commanding him to go and found a new religion in the Far East.

The “reincarnation” in question seemed to be in a direct lineage, an accepted fact in the tradition of the Theosophical Society if one remembers the manipulations of Charles W. Leadbeater, first in London in 1906, then in India around 1909-1910. They suggested that the Mahatma Kuthumi¹ and some other Masters appeared to have transmigrated in the heart of a young boy, in the manner of Jiddu Krishnamurti at the time of the second attempt; these manoeuvres, in particular, have been denounced by René Guénon² and then by Jean Vernet.³

Monsieur Rauzin and Madame Potel, his brother and sister in Theosophy, staying in Paris, were in favour of his missionary enterprise; they had indisputably upheld Philippe's morale in moments of doubt and difficulties which had assailed him during his sojourn in Japan; Charles Blech, who was, — according to René Guénon⁴ — the Secretary General of the French Theosophical Society, had also corresponded with him and had published these writings in a magazine that he edited. The publication of these would expose the falsity of the fiction created by Philippe's parents, his friends, particularly Henri Lang, and the director of the personnel of the Ministry of the Public Works to permit Philippe to regain his post of Civil Engineer when he would return to reason. This director, Silvain Dreyfus, a friend of the family, had prepared a signed order placing him on leave without payment for reasons of health. When Philippe's

1. For the record, himself a reincarnation of the Greek Pythagoras according to Helena Petrovna Blavatsky!

2. *Theosophism, History of a Pseudo-Religion*, p. 201.

3. In *The New Age*, Pierre Téqui, published in Paris, 1990, page 69.

4. *Theosophism, History of a Pseudo-Religion*, p. 263.

presence in Japan became known, it was no longer a question of health but of a mission to Japan . . .

Philippe's relation with his parents rapidly grew more strained.

His mother soon stopped corresponding with him. She had written to him frankly about what she thought of Zina who had drawn her elder son far away from her; the latter, in reply, had termed these letters "hot-headed and clumsy". These qualifying adjectives were offensive. He had made another mistake. That was not to enquire regularly about her health; this was a serious omission because Madeleine had hypochondriac tendencies.

Six months after his arrival in Japan, the funds began to dwindle: the loans taken in Europe, from Henri Lang and some others, were exhausted and the production of handcrafted carpets, begun by the three, proved to be a commercial disaster. Philippe asked his father for money. The refusal was not late in coming. . . . The paternal philippics were difficult to write even for a professional pleader. In his File of Correspondence, Paul had preserved some of his own letters, — begun, then abandoned because not properly phrased, — some of which were already signed and ready to be put into the postbox, but a timely afterthought led to their being cancelled and then recopied; he had also kept the rough drafts of some lines at the end of the paper, attempts at perfecting a proper and strict expression of what he wanted to say. I have inserted in this book some of the rough drafts of his letters in order to try to re-establish the second voice of this correspondence.

His brother Albert gave him news of the family only rarely, because he did not like to write. On the other hand, he did not have any attraction for philosophy and religious questions. The communications between the brothers were resumed only after the death of their father in 1954, but their correspondence always remained matter of fact.

I was impressed by the declaration of affection and filial respect with which Philippe concluded his letters. Was the generation which preceded mine, freer to express their feelings? Were not these declarations and affirmations inspired by the Buddhist sentiments of compassion that Theosophy had revealed to him? Since undertaking the voyage to Pondicherry in 1999, I am convinced of his sincerity. The memory that he has left with those who had lived with him in the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo and which persists thirty years after his death, is, in effect, the same that Zina wrote about to Madeleine on November 18, 1923: "He is a rare being, radiating with goodness and sweetness . . .!" During their sojourn in Japan, Philippe experienced an intense feeling of abandonment and incomprehension; the pain felt by his parents, perhaps hardly legitimate — wasn't he 27 years old! — was surely authentic and profound. The suffering was on both sides . . . When he decided to explain to his father the circumstances of his departure from Paris, long afterwards because it was done from Pondicherry in 1929, Philippe wrote: "When you were trying to argue about the reason for my decision . . . I was seeking only one thing: mental silence, the

calming of all agitation so as to perceive in myself the light and the guidance which I needed.”

In Japan, he considered that the ordeals he was passing through were a preparation for the approaching creation “of a spiritual centre”, because “the masters use a great solicitude to prepare us for our future work and to generate in us the qualities which are necessary for us”. He continued to develop his intuition by the “pacification” of his mind. In the material and moral trials, he fortified his determination with the help of the theosophical texts that he had brought with him, Mabel Collins for example, or the wisdom of the Stoics; it was perhaps this latter which made him resume the study of physics, “the science and the knowledge of the world”. But what is one to think of his naïve confidence in Madame Lubienka?

* * *

Atami, May 1, 1921

Dear Maman,

I am writing to you in pencil from the seashore where we go to take a walk on Sunday. The Pacific Ocean is very beautiful and I have had a delightful dip this morning. Sunday is a day dedicated to a long walk and we carry our luncheon with us.

The weather is very fine, even though it often rains, but here the rain is not unpleasant nor gloomy for it is always warm.

Our little house is in a tiny little garden full of flowers, about a ten-minute walk from the sea. A week ago we have had the flowering of the cherry trees, which is a special event in Japan. I must say that it is a magnificent sight: the flowers are abundant and the trees have only a few leaves; one would say that the trees are sprinkled with white and pink dust, it is very pretty. The Japanese are truly fond of flowers, it is their great love. For example, we do not find many fruits. The orange trees of this country have magnificent fruits, but really poor in quality. I shall send you the photographs later once they are developed.

I have received the first letter from Papa and the first from Maman. You have not told me whether you have received all the picture postcards which I sent you from all the ports during my voyage.

I shall write a long letter to Albert asking him to send me some books, some that I have already and others, because I must continue to work on science and the knowledge of the world. I have a lot of work on my plate. So much the better, mine is the path of knowledge.

Papa's letter has saddened me a little, because it contained much reproach. And yet I swear to you that I have acted towards you as I ought to have done. My conscience

does not trouble me at all on that subject. I have done whatever I could so that you would understand. In this connection, I shall be very grateful if you continue your relationship with Rauzin and Madame Potel. Much will be offered to you through them, may your intuition guide you to them. If they have taken a step towards you, it is due to their friendship with me; they will not take a second step if you do not respond to their advances. I wish Papa would buy *The Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, perhaps they will bring back to him very distant memories.

Now, to speak of some of my connections here: I have been twice to Tokyo. I was invited to lunch by the ambassador, Monsieur Bapst who, however, will soon leave us to make place for his successor, Monsieur Paul Claudel. I have met various people at Yokohama; generally, nobody interesting till now. For the time being we are the only Europeans in Atami.

The ambassador has received my recommendation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It made a very good impression. Please thank Silvain Dreyfus. I too will write to him.

You must be at La Minelle; my thoughts often go to you. I would like all of you together to make the voyage that I have made; it is very beautiful and Papa will be happy to travel in this manner. Japan, at least the corner where we are, is truly enchanting. Here everything is harmonious. The Japanese are very artistic and nothing, apart from the runny noses of the children, shocks our European eyes; on the contrary, everyday we discover new beauties. Much work, but a very harmonious and beautiful life, that is it for the moment.

Continue to receive Lang at home. Is he going to get married? With all my heart I wish him that, he must be so lonely. I think that Albert will be in Paris for a while yet. I shall write to him there.

My tender and affectionate kisses, although from far away, to the two of you. Fond remembrance to all at La Minelle.

Affectionately,

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Atami, June 26, 1921

My dear Papa,

You must be fully settled at La Minelle where this letter will find you. My thoughts are often with you and I picture to myself your life which I know well. Of mine you know very little, firstly because it will require volumes, and moreover because life is made up of things which cannot be written in letters. I think that later, when our life

will have become more stable, not less laborious but more balanced and more harmonious, you will be able to follow me more easily. At present we are in a period of preparation; the realisation will follow. The Masters have a great solicitude to prepare us for our future work and to engender in us the qualities which are necessary for us. All this does not happen without ordeals for the inferior nature, as much inner as outer, ordeals which justly develop those very qualities the lack of which would make us slip later. But alongside this work (above all on myself), what spiritual joys which keep on enlarging constantly!

To be sure, during this preparatory period (it is chiefly oneself that one prepares), there is much work on the plate and little rest in prospect. One must go fast, even run.

I can tell you that, as Albert has probably told you, I am soon going to resume my scientific studies. It is on this path above all, and almost solely, that I know how to work. I know that this will please you, my dear Papa. The inspiration for this kind of study will surely not be lacking in me if I am in a state to receive it. You will see from the titles of the books that I have asked Albert for, what subjects specially interest me.

From the physical point of view, we are, and I hope shall be, for quite some time still, on the seaside at Atami. We shall hold an exhibition of carpets in Tokyo in October in the big shop of the City which is, really, very good, in the style of Printemps or Louvre, more chic. From now to then our means of existence are varied but limited, for besides the ordeals necessary and desired, there are others which are due to our inexperience and incompetence. But even those teach us something. Think of me with love, never with sorrow, dear little Papa.

Did you see Rauzin before leaving Paris? I have received such a sweet letter from him, so full of paternal counsel and affection! I know that he would like very much to shed a little light on all the subjects that trouble you and cause you anxiety. Perhaps he will succeed better than me. I wish it with all my heart and on this subject I assure you of the best thoughts that I may conceive. And I embrace you, as I do Maman with all my heart, in filial affection.

Signed: Philippe

P.S. Tell me in detail about your life, for, however far, you are always in my heart and very close to me.

For the record, we are expecting Madame Lubienska's entry into "lethargy" for occult reasons to happen at any moment. This "lethargy" will last for many months.

* * *

Atami, June 30, 1921⁵

Dear Papa,

In the two preceding pages I did not tell you fully about our situation, although what was said is correct.

I told you that in October we would have an exhibition at Mitsukoghi (it is the name of the shop), this is correct; the buyers have seen two of our carpets and have agreed to display them at their place. It is a very good thing as you can imagine, because it is a fashionable shop. But we cannot sell the carpets at present because we shall need them for this exhibition. Moreover, I think, it will be difficult to sell them without this publicity. We shall have to survive till then and, in addition, buy the wool for continuing with our work. What we have borrowed in Europe, as you well know, is not enough, either to let us survive or to build up the necessary stock.

We are giving lessons in French and English but that is a very small thing. It has some very good results only at the level of my morale. The Japanese like us a lot and we can do a lot of good to these cheerful and confident people. We have lived very plainly till now, even more than plainly, and we have sold everything we could to get money: clothes, binoculars, etc.

That is why, having confidence in you, in spite of what you have told me, I have sent you a telegram which you must have received. When you will receive this letter, much time will have elapsed since then⁶ and I hope that you will not have persisted in your intransigence. Our work proceeds as it must proceed but we really do not have the wherewithal to ensure its base. Besides, it will be quite different from what I thought in Paris: much vaster and more important. I cannot yet give you the details because that will depend on certain circumstances which I cannot control. In 1922, everything will be carried out in an extremely fine and harmonious manner. We shall have a spiritual (and material) centre infinitely prosperous in every respect. And I expect to be able to invite all three of you to make a voyage to Japan, myself bearing a part of the travel expenses.

My morale is splendid, although there have been moments when I was not very fine. Now things are better; it was also a lesson. The lower nature and above all the mind, is so difficult to conquer and to pacify that we need all the solicitude of the Great Beings to help us in our slow progress and to raise us from our frequent falls. Sometimes we even forget that They are watching over us and darkness and fear descends over the soul. The soul must become strong enough and must constantly give to the pacified lower nature the harmony and the peace that it enjoys.

Unfortunately, we are not very skilful nor are we very capable and we often let

5. This letter was sent in the same envelope as the preceding one and was in fact its continuation.

6. Letter posted from Yokohama on July 6, 1921 and received at Corre on August 4.

the material as well as the spiritual occasions pass by. Also, they have allowed me to approach you. That is to say, dear Papa, we hope that your soul will be strong enough to pierce the structure built by sixty years of experience of our old civilisation. Even I, who am not old, have had and still have and still face problems with my European mentality. So I am not surprised that you should find it difficult to follow your intuition. I hope and pray very strongly, my beloved Papa, that you understand and that you find peace in your heart and soul.

I embrace you very lovingly.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Telegram
June 28, 1921

Details of Service:

Origin: Atami. No: 228

Date: 28

Number of words: 15

Hour of Posting: 15.30

Via Malta Saint Hilaire Corre Haute Saône

Awaiting⁷ Exhibition Carpets October

[. . .] urgent prayer to send

by telegraph ten thousand francs⁸

* * *

Two picture postcards sent in one envelope:

The beach of Atami on the Pacific coast and the crater of Fuji-Yama

* * *

7. Original text of the telegram received.

8. About 8,000 Euros.

Atami, August 28, 1921

My dear Parents,

It has been a very long time that I have not written to you anything more than a simple card. I have so much to do that I do not find the time even to write a letter. Besides, I do not have great things to tell you which might interest you keenly because I do not want to pester you with material issues as you have made known to me your firm resolve — which I shall respect — of not being concerned with these matters.

I have received two letters from Maman, angry and awkward. But certainly it is not for me to judge you. May your love and your conscience guide you where you should go. I bear no ill-feeling towards you, believe me. Only my path is more and more difficult and a little thornier. But that must not sadden me because that is the fate of all those who have wanted to help humanity — to be forsaken by their parents and friends. I see from Maman's letter the fiction that you have imagined, and the calumny which is likely to ensue!

I am doing very well; do not worry about my health which at present is very good. At any rate, I am working very hard. Our work proceeds through struggles and joys. Many alternatives must be crossed before the soul is firm in pleasure as in pain. Our sister, Madame Lubienska, has just woken up after a sleep lasting almost a month in which she has passed many tests and received instructions.

I embrace you lovingly.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

*Draft of a letter from Paul to Philippe,
sent by registered post on September 5, 1921
from the Post Office of Corre to the following address:
Atami-Machi, Midzunachi, Midzutana bessu, Japan*

My dear Child,

I had pretty nearly given up writing to you, for what is the use? If it is to give you news of our health and to tell you the incidents of our life in which moreover you are hardly interested, your mother's letters should suffice; if it is to broach more serious questions which your departure raises, it can be only to say what one thinks, everything that one thinks, and if I say everything that I think, how I judge you, what opinion I hold of you, what sorrow, and what useless sorrow perhaps, will I not be causing you pain? Therefore, I did not write; I waited. I had seen you depart with

such a fierce, so obstinate a determination: (“Nothing will prevent me from going,” you said) that I felt your soul closed to all my suggestions. I waited for the future to unfold itself and judge the issue between us; I waited to see if my predictions or more modestly, my prognostics would prove true. I expected that experience would remove the scales from your eyes, harshly, by blows of misery; unfortunately, this is how experience must always be acquired, because the experience acquired by the parents also by dint of suffering can never be useful for the children.

And then there was your telegram, your request for money, your letter; I must nevertheless reply to you, I must tell you **why** I refuse. It makes me infinitely unhappy to express my thoughts in sentences which seem to me very hard, severe, and to think of the pain they will cause you. Our thoughts are so different that by exposing mine to you, I shall cause you pain, but assuredly no more than what you have caused us by revealing yours. I consider it my duty to do it today. It is now eight months since you left to live with your companions. Perhaps you can judge them better. Perhaps the experience has already taught you something, and the pain caused to both of us, will not have been useless.

You may be sure that since your departure, not a day has passed without my thoughts going back to you. Your words, your way of being, your actions during the weeks which preceded your departure ceaselessly returned to my mind. I sought to understand: you never made the task easy for me, because never have you opened yourself to me. On the contrary, you hid yourself from me. From the day when you began to associate with these people, — you who loved so much to chat with me and make the new ideas that you discovered in the books sparkle before my eyes, — from that day you were closed where I was concerned. You hid from me all the ideas that you discussed in your coterie, the actions that you were preparing, or at least the ideas with which they were cramming your head and the actions that they were preparing for or against you. I know very well that they imposed a vow of secrecy on you *vis-à-vis* your father. Generally, when one is enjoined to hide oneself from one’s father, it is a very bad sign. They mistrusted me. After making a vague attempt towards me which you had transmitted to me and to which I had replied by paraphrasing the fable of the Fox and the Crow — what presentiment! — they recognised that there was nothing doing, and they chose to hide themselves from me. Moreover, they have put you on your guard against me. In whose name? Is it in the name of Master K. H? Oh no, upon my word, because if the latter existed, he could have read my thoughts and he would have known that I would not be averse to the mission that he would have confided to you if I had had the conviction that there was no imposture or stupidity involved there; he would have been able also to foresee that one day he would give you the permission (I adore this euphemism) to ask me for money. No! The secret, it is the classic method of gaining possession of the mind of people, to prevent any argument to the contrary from turning up and destroying the work produced in the mind, and in this manner to prevent the perception of the other side of the idea. This

is the method employed by those who fear the light and the truth, and who are in need of darkness to hide their designs.

It was therefore only from some sentences which escaped from you that I could get an idea of what was going on. From what I could make out, Madame Lubienska must have revealed to you some of your so-called past lives, must have informed you that you have been reincarnated with the mission of becoming a disciple of Master K.H. and of obeying him; and it is she who transmits his orders to you and speaks in his name. Speaking of her, you told me: she is a medium. But what sort of medium is she? I know nothing about it. Does she go into trance? Is she **unaware** of the words that she pronounces or is she **conscious** of what she says? If she is a true medium, in trance, unconscious of the words that she pronounces, and on waking ignorant of what has happened, my objections against her will disappear. That would be a medium analogous with that little Queen of the painter, Cornillier, (you know the book that Colombel had lent me; on this subject, I had noticed that you did not want to read it, I thought that they had advised you, if not ordered you, not to read any more, so as to keep you away from all ideas which could perhaps be foreign to those that they have implanted in your mind). Nevertheless, she gave very surprising revelations on the astral, the evolution of the spirits. She was guided by a spirit claiming to be much evolved. She herself was, apparently, very much evolved, although in life she was no more than a little painter's model, very ignorant, but it was an exquisite temperament, conscientious and disinterested, and who, on waking up, was absolutely unaware of what she had said in her trance. If it were like this for you, I would not have the pretension to resolve the question of knowing what there was either true or false in similar revelations. I shall only remind you that one must not forget that the astral is a big deceiver, the grand illusionist. Monsieur Chevrin, to whom I spoke of it, was telling me: "I too, I have had similar revelations of a medium: during a period I obtained everything that I wanted, fortunately I was able to free myself from it." You have been, however, forewarned by your readings, against all the snares and seductions of the astral, and I am surprised that you allowed yourself to be taken in by it.

But I do not believe Madame Lubienska to be such a medium; I think she is perfectly conscious of what she says. Consequently, there is no question of any "mediumistic" quality, there is nothing but imagination, imagination which, I think consciously, or unconsciously, turns towards a personal gain, which is a fact of human nature, imagination supported by all that is published on this subject, imagination guided by the state of mind which she has recognised in you; this gullibility in which you have placed yourself by moving away from the control of reason, this belief in a Master K.H. And in this ground so well prepared, it was easy for her imagination to build up the romance which was bound to gain possession of your mind, by flattering your ego and your taste for the marvellous by the so-called revelation of past lives and the mission to be accomplished. This woman must have stirred in you a sensitive

layer to thus take hold of your mind and your conduct at her will; it seems to me to be very much a streak of pride. What can flatter one more than to be told that in one's past life one was such and such a figure, than to be told again that one has evolved to the point of being able to reincarnate oneself by choosing one's role, be the disciple of a Master and be practically invested with a divine mission? What will one not do then? What devotion will you not show the people who have revealed to you and who sustain you with such ideas? She is not the first to make use of this technique. This exploitation of religious sentiment is as old as the world.

When I review whatever little I know of this woman, I get the impression that she has played these tricks consciously, deliberately, for to me she seems suspect; after having recognised the terrain and having made an attempt on me who saw through her, she pretended no more to know of us so as not to reveal herself to eyes that see more clearly. Her pretended connections with the son of Dr. Jacquet whom she made a point of mentioning, were nothing but superficial connections, the phone call made from his house to make it seem that she was welcome there.

This mysterious organisation of the White Lodge, where, with the inadvertent help of Rauzin and Madame Potel, they warm you up and lead you to the desired state of mind in spite of the resistance of your inner spirit in which one reads the warning signs of anguish and fear. This is the secrecy that they have imposed on you and of which I have spoken to you earlier. These are the maxims that you serve us and which surely do not come from your own depths and which seem to be wise precautions:

“One must not probe into the past of people who are our spiritual brothers.”

“Parents who have given you the physical body (as if they have given you nothing but that!), do not count compared to the spiritual affinities.”

It is the example that you cite to us of this friend of Lubienski who has pawned her jewellery for them, in order to move us to give you the money.

It is the day that you chose to announce your resolution to me, taking me to the station in the morning, when I was going to be absent for several days and could not counteract or unmask them. When I returned, the departure two days later was already announced, all the arrangements already made.

It is the pretext for this precipitous flight which in reality strangely resembles an abduction, an insane pretext: the risks to Madame Lubienska in the astral planes of Paris.

Ah, my poor little one (in the past I called you my big boy when I was proud of you), how you have been manipulated, how you have been abducted, how you have fallen prey to this woman! This is not my opinion alone; it is the opinion of the entire Theosophical Society which is not without information about this woman and which had condemned her as an adventuress and had refused her all credibility in the Society; it is for that, moreover, that she does not show herself there any more. I have learnt that since, and other things besides, namely that she has brought misfortune to several persons. That these people threw themselves into such an adventure, I can easily

believe. They lived miserably in a hotel room, only one meal per day, the meagre salary of a bank clerk. The present was not happy, the future was menacing. They had to come out of that. What did they risk? The expenses of the voyage were paid by pawning the jewellery of their friend. They were leaving nothing behind and this enterprise presented them with an opportunity for an easier and less miserable life. They had an excellent trump card in their hand: it was you. They knew well how to play it.

For what motive would this woman have established her domination over you? For the simple motive that you represented an asset: firstly, she could have thought that you were the son of parents who seemed to be rich and from whom one day or the other they would know how to extract some allowance. The telegram and your letter did not exactly invalidate this suspicion. (A propos the telegram which reached me in a badly mutilated condition and which I had much trouble to restore, was it really **ten thousand francs** that you were asking me to send you telegraphically? This point deserves closer scrutiny.) Are they going to use other means, perhaps? I am expecting plenty to happen. And then what? Your mother and I will not be there forever. Ah, if ever a similar thought happens to cross your mind, may it be able to enlighten your mind about the merit of such a vocation which will lead to such ideas!

But above all you are an asset by yourself, by your intelligence, your education, your title (have you noticed how they have found it suitable to retain it?), your dynamism in work, and a woman with imagination ought to know how to take advantage of all of that. Your friend Rauzin who does not seem that proud of your departure any more and even seems quite disturbed, told me one day, "The Count is not much good for anything, the Countess is rather delicate, but Philippe is very courageous, he will work for all three." You will understand that this proposition of seeing my son become the purveyor of funds and a beast of burden of the household of Lubienski has nothing to make me happy; and yet it seems to be happening that way. It is so incomprehensible, — this woman taking possession of your soul and of your whole being, — that your mother thinks that another sentiment must be mixed up in it, a sort of mystic love to which your continence would make you prone. Could it be? I do not think so.

I think (forgive me for telling you all my thoughts) that you have fallen in this aberration as a consequence of an improper balance of your faculties. At the École Polytechnique you amply demonstrated a very high quality of intelligence, of understanding and of memory, but they are predominantly faculties of assimilation; one can compare them to soft wax on which lessons and readings imprint themselves admirably and from which they can be brought out at will. But was it perhaps at the cost of the faculties of judgement? The critical sense does not seem to have been developed proportionately. From there comes your gullibility. It seems that once your studies were over, at a time when it was a question of your acquiring a personality, to spread your wings, so to say, you did not measure up. You have launched yourself

following your nature, habit of mind, also a taste of the marvellous, in these studies which charmed you by their novelty, in these studies of Theosophy, of occultism, where you have shown the same qualities of assimilation, but always working on others' ideas without being able to exercise there too your critical sense and your faculty of discrimination; then when the occasion presented itself, you came under the grip of an alien thought which commands, judges for you and exempts you from making the necessary and continual effort which is a must for acquiring one's own personality.

The difficulties of life which impose themselves on us, seem to be fashioned to oblige us to make our daily effort, renewed endlessly, as much in the material sphere as in the spiritual, to put us to the exercise of developing our faculties of judgement and of decision, to use our free-will constantly and thus to acquire always a greater personality.

Nothing else counts, even and above all from the point of view of the idea of evolution. It is the only criterion which can judge the worth of an individual. Such were the advice and the opinion of all the masters in all countries and at all times. That is also the advice of Madame Besant⁹ and your guides in Theosophy or occultism. Listen to this sentence which I read recently in Éliphas Lévi (*Le Grand Arcane ou l'Occultisme dévoilé*, The Great Mystery or Occultism Unveiled):

Our will must depend only on our reason. . . All appeal to an unknown and foreign intelligence, whose existence has not been demonstrated to us and **whose aim is to substitute the guidance of our reason and our free-will by its own** ought to be regarded as a spiritual suicide, because it is a call to folly.

Well do I see the path that has led you to this impasse. It is the idea developed by Chevrier in his lecture: reason is limited; to attain a superior state, one must free oneself from it. Very well, I am willing to accept it, if I absolutely must; however, I believe that if Nature has endowed us with reason, it is so that we make use of it; we have no right to put it aside; anyway, Chevrier's idea may be accepted only on condition that reason should make place for intuition. Then one is a mystic. But there is the crux of the matter and the point from where springs your entire mistake; you do not obey **your intuition**, you obey **Madame Lubienska**. Everything shows that you do not obey your intuition. If you must, could you qualify as intuition the desire that you manifested to go to Adyar?¹⁰ I think it was the result of your readings and the ordinary state of all minds intoxicated by books; one must not mix things up and call it intuition when it is nothing but a desire. However, these were **your ideas**, I did not approve of

9. Who had succeeded Helena P. Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society.

10. The locality of Adyar, in Madras (now Chennai) in India, is the world headquarters of the Theosophical Society.

them, but I respected them. At least you seemed to be happy with them, radiant because they came from you and responded to your intimate sentiment; whereas you embarked on this adventure, not like the mystic, whatever he may be, who goes to his mission, even to martyrdom, with the beatitude and the inner contentment, but like a dog that is afraid of being beaten, like an animal being taken to the slaughterhouse, it was apparent in the suffering of your whole being. It is a fact that these ideas did not proceed from your own intuition; they were imposed upon you by a sort of suggestion. That was sufficient to judge them. Indeed, in this adventure, nothing is yours; everything is of this woman:

- the idea of going to Japan, which, moreover, she had before she knew you, and I am sure of it because her husband had requested the post of the Polish Consul at Yokohama;
- the idea of these expensive carpets, which is the most bizarre that may germinate in a feminine brain and most contrary to the ideas that you professed earlier;
- this pooling of all your resources;
- this group-living which must give to all of you a **simple** and **happy** life. For you said: “Don’t worry, I shall not have a difficult life.” Madame Potel told us at the station: “They are going to a field all prepared, people are waiting for them.”

I think that this life was supposed to permit you to fulfil a humanitarian goal, without which this goal would have appeared very petty, quite egoistic and incapable of seducing such evolved minds.

At the time of your departure I did not hide from you all the absurdities of your projects, putting you on your guard regarding any subsequent monetary help from me.

Judged rationally, your ideas seem insane. You claim that they elude reason. At least you must admit that one can judge them by the outcome, for one judges a tree by its fruits. For that you are in a better position than me.

If your goal had been that of the Buddha, the detachment from all worldly possessions and the miserable life of the physical body, you would surely be on the way, but this privation does not seem to be the ideal of Madame Lubenska who has not renounced, you said, neither the world nor her wardrobe. You yourself, having faith in her predictions, had taken your dinner jacket!

By the example of your harmonious existence, simple and full of inner contentment, you should attract disciples and bring about an evolution in the Japanese ideas, eventually a religious movement.

Are you approaching that goal?

In your letters, at least, there breathes the worry of material existence and the preoccupation with money, from which you have not been able to liberate yourself, and from which one cannot be liberated.

What then is the point of this adventure?

For you, the loss of a post which sheltered you from these material preoccupations and consequently permitted you to devote yourself to what you think to be your *dharma* and render humanity other services than what you can render it in the miserable position where you are going to find yourself. I do not have any hatred for anybody, but I cannot help judging this woman who has been as fatal to you as she has already been to others, and who quite light-heartedly, will have destroyed the career of a boy who seemed to have such a beautiful life before him.

I think that now you can begin to judge the value of the predictions of this woman.

In your letter you inform me that she is going to enter into lethargy for several months. You ought to know if, like the others, this prediction is realised; I know well that it is the same with the predictions as it is with heaven, mere compromises, and that for a woman endowed with even a little imagination, it is always easy to explain the new changes, especially when one speaks in the name of a Master to the faithful kneeling before one.

If these revelations through a medium, — who, according to people of experience, reflect, more or less, the secret desires and flatter the deepest arrogant obsessions of our being, — are nothing but the rantings of an unbridled imagination, where does that lead you? To what stupid and useless life have you devoted yourself?

What would it be then if this woman is not a medium, if she imagines consciously and guides this adventure by means of a similar imposture, if, finally, you find yourself to be naïve and a dupe?

You write to me that the path of knowledge is certainly the one destined for you; to me it seems that it is the path of submission and obedience that you are following.

Still, if you were a mystic . . . but you are not one, for a mystic depends uniquely on himself; he obeys a specially developed sense in himself. You, on the other hand, it is by an **operation of reason**, by calculation, that you act. They have told you, without any proof whatsoever: “You have reincarnated to obey Master K.H. in such-and-such-a-condition; that is the means you have chosen for achieving a certain evolution.” You believed it. Where do you find the intuition and the mystic in that? For my part, I see there nothing but a gullibility which seems to me infantile and a personal calculation. Your belief is not superior to that of the monk who dedicates his life or of the devout who gives away all his money with the aim of gaining life eternal: the calculation is the same.

It was not worth the trouble to despise the Roman Catholic religion so much just to fall into another even more puerile. You have, I believe, the pretension of establishing a new religion, and you think yourself to be invested with a quasi-divine mission. Tell yourself that there are already enough religions. For the minds that need them still, the existing ones are sufficient. The Catholic religion, in spite of its imperfection, is enough for brains which need to calculate and be encouraged by the lure of a reward. It has its defects, I agree, but it has sown its wild oats and one cannot deny its long

experience of handling human beings. It knows among other things that vanity is the biggest pitfall, which can most easily topple the human head; and it protects its flock with a jealous care by exalting a contrary virtue: humility.

The big fault that I find with the Theosophical Society is that it has not perceived the danger to which it exposes its neophytes with its theories of reincarnation and evolution. Nobody likes to see himself in his actual stage of evolution but always believes himself to be at a higher level; what an appalling allowance to the human pride, and what a dangerous weapon this flattery would be in the hands of either rascals who would deliberately make use of it against the gullible, or of people of poor, fragile imagination who would unconsciously employ it against them! What an infernal machine to damage the brains! Moreover, you are not the only victim, there are quite a few others, and I perceive the profound reasons which have led the Council of . . . , to dismiss these theories, which in addition, are so attractive, and which are at bottom so dangerous. And in this the Church has acted wisely and fulfilled its mission, for in reality, it is not concerned so much with seeking the truth which, moreover, it knows to be unknowable, but to fulfil its role which is to guide the human flock across the dangers and the pitfalls which threaten it, towards, I believe it, an evolution either of the individual or of the race.

This, my poor child, is the usual subject of my meditations when my thought turns to you! I am no longer proud of my boy and I am not happy with him. Are you sure that you have acted well with regard to me by hiding yourself from me and abandoning us, your mother who has raised you and protected you from so many dangers already, I who have shown you so much interest as to follow you in the multiple and changing stages of your thought and your reading? After all, it is your affair.

Since these eight months that you have been away, I know nothing of what is going on in you. If your ideas have evolved, as it is normal, if a little reason has returned to you looking at the outcome towards which you are heading, if at last, in a flash of lucidity and rediscovered dignity, you can regain your personality and escape from the suggestion in which this woman holds you, go, run to Yokohama, to J. F. Wagner, at 61 Yamashito Cho. He has instructions to furnish you (and only you) with the means to return.¹¹

N.B. I am sending this letter by registered post so that it may be returned to me in case it does not reach you.

* * *

11. On September 5, 1921 Paul had written to J. F. Wagner the following instructions: *Do not give him any money or any help that may permit him to prolong his stay in Japan. If he wants to come back, you may buy his ticket and give it to him only on board the ship together with 500 francs for his expenses en route.* But Philippe had already met J. F. Wagner before the instructions arrived and had been able to borrow 300 Yen, about 1,500 Euros, from him.

Note on Count Lubienski¹²

Count Lubienski-Stéphan, born on March 10, 1893 in Warsaw to Stanislas and Garnovka, Adolphan, of Polish nationality; was married on March 14, 1919 in Orzemgl to Rzaszinska, Marie, of Polish origin, born in Lodz (Poland) on September 8, 1894. He was childless. At the end of July 1919 the couple left Warsaw, secured Polish passports delivered at Warsaw in July 1919 and stamped at the French Consulate in Warsaw on July 29, 1919.

At first they went to London where they lived till the end of January, 1920.

Arriving in Paris on January 28, they lived till August 17 in No. 7, Rue de Lille where Monsieur Jacquet, son of the forensic surgeon, sublet to them a portion of his apartment for a monthly consideration of 525 francs. Subsequently they stayed in 14 Rue George-Sand on a monthly rent of 150 francs till December 30. Since this last date they are living at Hôtel des étrangers, 24 Rue Tronchet at a monthly rent of 300 francs paid regularly.

They are holders of identity cards given to them on April 4, 1920.

On his passport Count Lubienski is designated as "delegate of the Anglo-Polish Society". He also calls himself a Polish diplomat. Actually, in Japan he has been designated to occupy the post of the second secretary of the Polish legation at Yokohama. Nobody knows the reason why he has not joined duty again.

Till August 9, 1920 the Count has not held any remunerative post and was considered to have private means. Since August 9 last, he has been an ordinary employee at the Crédit Lyonnais at a monthly salary of 700 francs.

Reports speak well of them from the point of view of conduct and morality. However, while they lived in Rue de Lille and Rue George-Sand, they were visited by a certain number of foreigners, notably by the Russian Count "Le Fermoi" who was the object of a prolonged surveillance between March and April 1920 on the subject of the Osnobitchi affair. In addition, the manager of the boarding house George Sand declares that she was intrigued by the numerous visits of the foreigners whom the Count and the Countess received and that it was for this reason that she asked them to leave.

February 16, 1921

* * *

12. Here I am appending a note written in Paul's hand which was found attached to the preceding letter.

Postcard

Tokyo, October 16, 1921

My dear Papa and Maman,

We are here for a few days, where we are going to settle for the winter. Once that is done, I shall send you my address. Everything goes well, although slowly still and with many difficulties. We are approaching the end of the bad times; I say bad only from the material point of view. We have been surrounded by much help and friendship and we have a great fondness for the Japanese environment. The Polish embassy too is very good to us. Also the French embassy, but it is composed of people who are awaiting their return to France and who, moreover, have never tried to know Japan. Unfortunately, due to our inertia we are about to lose to Japan the moral benefit of the war. Japan has all the sympathy for France, we must profit from it but the present embassy is not up to the task.

I embrace you affectionately.

Signed: Philippe

* * *

Tokyo, November 29, 1921

My dear Papa,

It is already three weeks since I received your letter and I can tell you that whatever you may think to the contrary, I have been very happy to have it. Because finally they are your thoughts and your reasoning, and nothing was more painful to me than the silence in which you left me. In spite of all that has happened, I maintain for you the same esteem — without speaking of the affection and the deep feelings that I have for you — as when we used to discuss all the philosophical and occult problems. That is why I am very happy to have the subject of your thoughts and to follow you in the course of your ideas and, if I can do it, make you understand somewhat myself and my companions.

I must tell you that your letter is a marvel of logic and reasoning. With all the information that you have been able to collect, although much of it is erroneous, you reason correctly from the human point of view. Of course, your letter has caused me pain, but the severity and the hardness that they show, as you say it yourself, have not wounded me because in it I find much love and a total frankness.

I intend writing a long letter to you in which I shall tell you what we have done, as frankly as it is possible for me, in which I shall tell you all that I think of my companions, what a communal life of many months has revealed to me: their good qualities and their faults, for they have them too, mine own and the experiments that this leads us to make, for all imperfection immediately brings a painful lesson; the struggles and the suffering

of our personalities, how we support ourselves mutually, one person having what another lacks; our joys and our hopes. I will do it knowing your discretion, but shortly because just now I have neither the time nor a mind free enough, because we are in a sufficiently difficult period which demands contemplation and strength.

The way is long and hard, strewn with painful falls, but always the soul raises itself, supported as it is by love. Without this love and this help we would not have been able to go through what we have been through. Our life is full of miracles, if one may thus call the rescue that came our way in the desperate situations into which we let ourselves be dragged.

But I must write to you because my leave is coming to an end. I postpone that letter¹³ for which I hope there will soon be time. For now this is what I have to tell you:

I have already gone through many conflicts and battles; I have won many, also lost many. The tests before what the *Light on the Way* calls “the first great battle” are becoming more and more difficult. I hope that I shall pass them successfully and that I shall thus have acquired what is necessary for my work which will begin at once. Should it be otherwise, I shall not be able to be the instrument on which one counted and then, as much as I can understand, the best thing would be that I return to France. There too I shall have other useful work. Naturally that will be a big failure for my soul and sadness for my Master who had better expectations from me. But, anyway, I can envisage that eventuality, while requesting you not to wish for it.

Whatever happens, the first six months of 1922 will certainly decide my future which can be very beautiful and very useful, magnificent, when I think of my work. That is why in this letter I request you to obtain the extension of my leave¹⁴ for one year. I don’t think this will raise any difficulties. If a letter from me is required, please write to me. I think you will agree with me.

All the same, with this letter I can tell you that my friend too has parents who are very sad to learn that he is so far away from them, who write desperate letters to him because they are staunch Catholics and believe him to be on the way to perdition. I have read their letters. Constantly they ask him to leave everything and return to their estate in Poland. In spite of all the differences, their situation is analogous to yours, my very dear parents, and my friends, like me, suffer deeply the suffering of their parents.

Soon I shall speak to you at greater length. I embrace you with all my heart, as I do Maman and Albert.

Signed: Philippe

Care of the French Embassy in Tokyo.

* * *

13. . . . which will not be written till May 13, 1929, when Philippe will be in Pondicherry.

14. It is about the leave without pay for health reasons obtained from the administration.

Draft of a letter from Paul to Philippe

January 11, 1922

My dear Child,

This time I am replying to your letter because you condescend at last to employ the formula consecrated by tradition for those beings to whom one owes one's physical body and because you call me your dear father. Your ideas do not seem to have changed, but your tone has become more appropriate. I confess that I was painfully affected in my love and esteem for you on noticing that the refusal of money had inspired bitter sentiments in you which you could hardly conceal in your letters. Circumstances were no doubt playing with a few ironies by turning you against your father on a question of money, you who profess and are prone to scorn money.

With some curiosity I am awaiting the letter that you mentioned in replying to mine. Perhaps at last you will deign to give me some clarification, some plausible reasons for your thoughts and your conduct. I wish you will not content yourself with a few vague and imprecise sentences which will ill-conceal the emptiness of your ideas and fail to bring me any clarity. Well, we shall see.

In one of your postcards I pick up this sentence: "It is moreover the fate of those who offer themselves to humanity to be abandoned by their own." It seems to me a little pretentious and it is not just. First of all you must prove that you dedicate yourself to humanity, and that you are not like the many who only ride their hobby horse. And it is not true, for it seems to me in my human reasoning, that it is you who have abandoned us.¹⁵

You tell me not to wish for your return, because that will prove that you have not evolved enough. I wish for your return only to get my son back. But if you are the same as you were at the time of your departure, if you have not regained your own personality, if you remain submissive to an alien authority, if experience has not unsealed your eyes, I do not wish for your return: whether you are in Japan or in Paris, it will be the same for me, because I would not get my son back; because I am still waiting for an explanation of your ideas and your conduct. For, it is not a panegyric of your companions that I ask for and that does not interest me. It is the depth of your thought, that which has caused you to believe in the existence of a Master and in the authority of Madame Lubienska. That is the crux of the matter and so long as you do not explain yourself on this point, I shall consider that you lack frankness *vis-à-vis* your father.

Your mother tells me to inform you that she will see Silvain Dreyfus for the

15. Some time after writing the draft of the letter this paragraph was crossed out with a blue pencil; it is probable that it was not recopied.

extension of your leave even though he is no longer the head of personnel; he holds another position.

It is possible that the law of *karma* exists and that one pays for the faults against the moral law in later lives. But certainly in this life, the faults against good sense, common sense cost very dear and it will be surprising that you would be an exception to the general rule. . . Your mother tells me to tell you that if her letters have been tactless, yours have been wanting in affection!

Your affectionate father.

(To be continued)

PHILIPPE BARBIER SAINT HILAIRE

(Translated by Aniruddha Sircar from the original French *Itinéraire d'un enfant du siècle* by Philippe Barbier Saint Hilaire, published by Buchet/Chastel, Paris, 2001. We are grateful to the author and the publishers for permission to publish the translation.)

Correction

We regret two slips that occurred in the article 'The Large Hadron Collider' by S. N. Ganguli, published in the March 2009 issue of the journal.

On p. 242: the height of the ALICE detector should have been 16m.

Also on the same page: there are 12 institutions from India (and not 12 scientists) participating in the experiments.

WANDERING IN THE ARCHIVES OF MEMORY

(Continued from the issue of April 2009)

8. For Yogeshwara Shiva

INDIANS somehow manage to see during their lifetime a cobra sway with its hood upraised. It was so at least some decades ago. The snake charmer with his basket came to the periphery of the village, and news went out: “The *pāmbāṭṭi* has come!” One who made the snake dance. Permission granted, the children of our family would march behind Narayana Chithya and join the group that circled the snake charmer who played his *magudi* (gourd-pipe) to make the snake sway and dance. I would pull back while the uncle gripped my hand and asked us not to be afraid, the snake had no ‘teeth’, they had been pulled out by the snake charmer. And yet the dread remained, so I never could enjoy the spectacle of a snake dance.

How much more dreadful the experience of having seen an unattended cobra, rise to about two feet and sway, turning slowly side to side? We children were perched on the first floor, quaking but unable to resist the spectacle from our safe perch. Our neighbour’s house was now unpeopled, its rafters had fallen and there were no doors. Plants had sprouted everywhere and the large central hall was a mass of *dhatūra* bushes. We had been warned not to go near the house, be it day or night. When my brother and cousin, both of whom were in their early teens swore to younger siblings like me that they had encountered a very beautiful lady go in and out of the bushes and that she had hands of a tiger and was a ghost, our dread was compounded.

It was noon, the hot sun was blazing above when the warning came. Children, ladies, go upstairs! Uncle had seen a snake standing guard at what was once the entrance to the house and it seemed angry, it was hissing. So it was. The menfolk gathered with long sticks in their hands, speaking in hushed tones. Did the snake sense it was surrounded by armed soldiers? If so, it could easily have slithered back into the *dhatūra* bushes. Obviously it had come out for a change, and what is life if one must spend all of it in darkness, holed up in a ruined house when there was such brilliant sunshine to enjoy? I still have no idea why it did not go back to the safety of its hole. Or was it sure that the legend of the village Kotakanallur would leave it unharmed?

My grandmother had told me this beautiful legend. It was night and time to go to sleep. I lay beside my grandmother on a mat and the main oil lamp had been put off. The village had no electricity in those days. Throughout the night a ‘chimney lamp’ in the corner of the room remained lit. I asked grandmother why she was keeping this lamp as it set three giant shadows on the wall and that I felt afraid. “Oh, chimney *vilakku*? Snakes will not come in if the lamp is on.” She realised that I was badly

frightened as I clung to her tightly.

Patting me she said, “No, no, do not be afraid. Snakes will never harm anyone of our place. That is why we call our place Kotakanallur. Long, long ago . . .”

“Even before I was born?”

“Oh, it was a thousand years ago. You remember Vedanta Desika’s sloka I taught you? About the many snakes carried by Garuda?”

“It is hard to remember. So many names.”

“Don’t say that. It is *apachāram*.¹ Just eight names which you can easily remember.” She began to recite: *Vāme Vaikuntha sayyā*. . .

He has Sheshanag as a bracelet
 On his left hand: Vasuki is his sacred thread;
 Takshaka is his waist-chain; his garland
 Is the beautiful Karkotaka; on his right ear
 Padma and on his left, Mahapadma;
 Shankapala is his crown; Gulika is shoulder-band
 On the right. Ornamented thus,
 May Garuda guard us!

She makes me recite it and count the snakes on my fingers (Shesha, Vasuki, Takshaka, Karkotaka, Padma, Mahapadma, Shankapala and Gulika), saying it would keep me safe from any serpent. I am not frightened now because grandma is holding me near her, stroking my back.

And there is the story which she is telling that absorbs me. That same beautiful Karkotaka (*chāru* Karkotaka) had once come to this place. One early morning an ancestor of our family had gone to the Tambraparni at dawn for his bath and had seen a serpent writhe in pain. A thorn had got stuck in its throat. Unafraid, he had put his hand into the mouth of the snake and removed the thorn. Karkotaka had blessed him saying snakes would not harm people born in this place. And they called the place Karkotakanallur which in course of time became Kotakanallur.

I believe the story. It may have been a latter-day version of the Nala story though. Vyasa’s *Nalopakhyana* tells us how Nala saved the Karkotaka snake from fire and was helped by the snake to retrieve his kingdom. There must have been some originating deed of compassion for a cobra that has made the name of this snake very important in one’s daily prayers. In earlier days we were taught to recite the sloka:

*Karkotakasya nagasya, damayantya Nalasya cha,
 Rituparnasya rajarṣeh kirtanam Kali nāśanam*

1. A misdemeanour towards God.

(Speak of the Karkotaka snake, Damayanti, Nala and the royal sage Rituparna — to destroy the effects of Saturn)

Library-addict that I am, I get lost in literature, sacred or secular. But when we watched the moving snake, I was innocent of such tomes. The sight alone was real, not the imagination that surrounded it. When the men closed in with their sticks on the snake with the raised hood, most of us ran away to the inner balcony, shrieking. For days together, the older children gave us lurid details of the actual killing of the snake and how it was buried in the same spot near the *dhatūra* bushes and how they poured pots and pots of milk over it in expiation. The *dhatūra* bushes grew even thicker in the subsequent years. But ten years ago, a distant owner came back to claim possession of the plot and cleared the entire place. On my recent visit, I found a charming house with a well-laid garden in the front. As I spoke to the resident, my eyes seemed to relive the past, the bushes, the hissing snake.

When I shared this early memory with a cousin who had been with me during the incident, he assured me that there were perhaps a few bushes of *dhatūra* near the river, but the street was clear of it. However, the snakes are definitely around, for there are now several peacocks in the village too. Anyway, the presence of the peacocks gives us a sense of safety, he said.

I do have a closeness with flowers like roses and jasmynes and of course *pārijāta*, but the early association with the dancing snake must have kept me away from *dhatūra*. Yes, from a distance it looks wonderful and the flower is beautiful and it is worn by Yogeshwara Shiva lost in tapasya on the silvery top of the Himalayas. But we children who used to trek two miles to go to our school across the Tambraparni river past a crematorium had been given strict instructions not to do several things. We were not to go anywhere near the cremation ground but walk straight ahead on the country road. We were not to play with wayside bushes. The *dhatūra* and the *madar* were strictly taboo. They were said to be very poisonous. The leaves, the stem, the attractive flowers. The *madar* also was Shiva's favourite and yet we were not to play with the flowers. You broke a stem of the *madar* and white milk oozed out. It was fun and so we did do this now and then but immediately washed our hands thoroughly in the waters of the Tambraparni.

Yet, in a strange way the *dhatūra* became a daily companion for me for years and years. We had gone to the village for our holidays when my mother fell seriously ill with asthma. My grandmother was distraught. Then the doctor (an L.M.P. who served in Tirunelveli and visited nearby villages) brought a tin and scooped out a spoonful of powder and set it alight. A pungent scent rose from it, and the doctor made amma inhale the smoke. It was altogether a weird scene but the cure was near-miraculous. My mother could breathe now with considerable ease. Thus the *dhatūra* entered our house as a friend, after all.

The dread of the snake and the terror of the poison withdrew gradually while

mother's sitting with a cup in her hand, smoke rising from it became a daily affair. In fact, I came to like the strong smell of that stramonium weed. Always the scholar, father got together details about the medicine and gave us an academic talk on how this wonderful powder shipped from the United Kingdom was nothing but our own *dhatūra* in the village. His phenomenal memory would find him reciting a poem associated with the properties of *dhatūra* when helping amma get the stramonium powder lighted, while she was struggling for breath.

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
 Wolf's bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
 Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kist
 By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
 Make not your rosary of yew-berries
 Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
 Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
 A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
 For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.²

Deep within, father was a worried man, for he had two teenage children on hand. His work as a professor was heavy and he had heavier commitments as a writer. But his was no tragedy-seeking heart. He turned even the dread of stramonium smoke into a matter for laughter. While my mother smiled and wheezed and the smoke reached out everywhere in the room, father would be moving around declaiming,

Go and catch a falling star,
 Get with child a mandrake root,
 Tell me where all past years are,
 Or who cleft the devil's foot . . .³

By now I was a student of English literature and so could enjoy the rhythm and the emotion that father poured into his casual recitations. *Dhatūra* and stramonium ceased to be words that inspired dread in me and I closeted myself with 'Rappaccini's Daughter' often. Father had told me the story when I was a child, but the teenager's approach is different and here is romance unparalleled, touched by dread, love and tragedy. I realised that Rappaccini was growing "witches' weeds" in his garden and Nathaniel Hawthorne's description of the patch could plunge one into a romantic cauldron:

2. John Keats, 'Ode to Melancholy'.

3. John Donne, 'Song'.

All about the pool into which the water subsided, grew various plants, that seemed to require a plentiful supply of moisture for the nourishment of gigantic leaves, and, in some instances, flowers gorgeously magnificent. There was one shrub in particular, set in a marble vase in the midst of the pool, that bore a profusion of purple blossoms, each of which had the lustre and richness of a gem; and the whole together made a show so resplendent that it seemed enough to illuminate the garden, even had there been no sunshine.

I knew straightaway Hawthorne was referring to the *dhatūra* that is of lavender purple colour and is said to be highly toxic. One leaf could stun you into a long, if not lethal, doze! The tin of stramonium powder amma used had a warning printed that it should not be taken orally. And I came to realise that *dhatūra* held the key to the tragedy of Hawthorne's tale.

When I came to know that the Mother had given the significance of the *dhatūra* flower as 'tapasya', I kept wondering. Why refer to such a poisonous weed as tapasya? Is it because Shiva is associated with it? Why is Shiva who is referred to as Yogeshwara associated with the flower? Was he balancing poisons with snakes as ornaments, the *dhatūra* on his crown and the *Halahala* venom gleaming blue in his throat? I vaguely remember asking father about it but I have forgotten his reply.

But *dhatūra*-tapasya will not leave me alone. It is one of the strongest of my childhood memories; its smoke was a companion in the years of my adolescence. And now in my old age, it is in 'Tapasya' that I find the happiest days of my life. Ah, dear reader, do not mistake me to be one lost in deep meditation. I am lying on the comfortable bed of the guest room in the 'Tapasya' building in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Delhi. The Delhi Ashram has been my haven for more than four decades. I have never stayed in any other place in Delhi. Of course, the 'Tapasya' building is a new creation in the Ashram but within the last fifteen years it has entered my heart even as I enter it dragging my strolley. Who decided upon the name for this building? Was it Tara Jauhar? I asked Bhuvana and she confirmed it. Practically the entire structure has been the vision of Tara. It does not surprise me. Obviously a child brought up by the Mother cannot help dreaming of turning impossibilities into practical achievements.

How could anyone imagine such a transformation happening in this area full of buildings built at random, with the Shrine of Sri Aurobindo's relics alone providing the firm centripetal force? But the transformational touch of the Mother is seen everywhere, whether it is Auroville near Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo Ashram in New Delhi or Sathiaththin Sannidhanam in Pudur Uttamanur. The Mother has set the ball rolling not only for the transformation of material areas but the moulding of the human beings into adventurous achievers in a big way. Aswapati's vision was not mere imagination, after all:

I saw the Omnipotent's flaming pioneers
 Over the heavenly verge which turns towards life
 Come crowding down the amber stairs of birth;
 Forerunners of a divine multitude,
 Out of the paths of the morning star they came
 Into the little room of mortal life.
 I saw them cross the twilight of an age,
 The sun-eyed children of a marvellous dawn,
 The great creators with wide brows of calm,
 The massive barrier-breakers of the world
 And wrestlers with destiny in her lists of will,
 The labourers in the quarries of the gods,
 The messengers of the Incommunicable,
 The architects of immortality.⁴

How did the Mother manage to do it? It is winter in New Delhi and I am snuggling inside the blanket at night with just my hands outside, holding *Growing up with the Mother*. I peer into the thought-currents set in motion by the questions of Tara and the answers of the Mother. Who are these flaming pioneers, the sun-eyed children, the massive barrier-breakers seen by Aswapati? Suddenly the answer comes from the Mother, thanks to a simple question by Tara: "What is the work of the Overmind?"

The overmind is the region of the gods, the beings of divine origin who have been charged with supervising, directing and organising the evolution of the universe; and more specifically, since the formation of the earth they have served as messengers and intermediaries to bring to the earth the aid of the higher regions and to preside over the formation of the mind and its progressive ascension.⁵

The messengers! The messengers of the Incommunicable! The role-models for others to follow, then. This is how the Mother went on injecting her children with high ideals, a fearlessness to go ahead and *do it*, and not look before and after and pine for the ephemeral. She enthused the group of Tara by referring to them as "The Conquerors of Impossibility"!

At the same time, the growing up must have been great fun as the Mother sketched two birds from two drops of ink that had fallen on a paper, or devised new games like The Magic Circle for them. Heaven must have lain about these Conquerors of Impossibility in those days, literally and metaphorically! I think of how inspirational

4. *Savitri*, CWSA, Vol. 33, pp. 343-44.

5. *Some Answers from the Mother*, CWM, Vol. 16, pp. 233-34.

it must have been to be an Ashram child sixty years ago. It is fascinating to know how Tara was drawn to take a deeper look into flowers when the Mother taught the children The Game of Flowers. This game was to lead to the entire project of organising flowers with their spiritual significances arrived at by the Mother in her meditations.

I am alone in my room in 'Tapasya', and the solitary electric light is revealing the words in the book. I smile to myself almost with a touch of ecstasy imagining those days far away and long ago, as I read in Tara's book:

Each day, I would spend all my mornings in the gardens collecting flowers to take to the Mother. The Ashram gardeners were a great support and started growing rare flowers so that the Mother could write about them. In their enthusiasm they even produced many new flowers for which they got seeds from all over the world. Some of these flowers were grown in the refrigerator, as they required special temperatures.

Grow flowers in a fridge! What next? But that is tapasya, isn't it? The askesis one undertakes to conquer the impossible? Like drawing out life-sustaining medicine from sheer poison! And yet there must have been some keen observer centuries ago who had found out that the poisonous *dhatūra* need not just be a killer. It can be a saviour too. He must have been a hero for *dhatūra* is an attractive plant for the eyes but not for hands. The trumpet-shaped flowers wilt easily when plucked. I have often touched its fruits, which are spiny capsules, green in colour. But till date never dared to put my finger into the split fruit that releases a bunch of seeds. The unknown hero and all those who came after him did precisely that and with experimentation found out its medicinal properties to help people breathe, clearing the passage-ways in a moment.

Years ago when my mother was using stramonium smoke, father would warn us to wash our hands, if we helped mother at that time. "Why are you so strict?" I asked him once. "*Payithium pidichudum!*" he said. "You will become mad! Don't you know we call it *Oomathai*?⁶ The Tamil word is from *Unmatta*, madness."

After all, a very thin line divides tapasya and the state of *unmatta*. What is tapasya but the desire to lose our identity in the higher consciousness? My wandering that began with a cobra in the ruined house is now withdrawing from it all, for the Greek deity Hypnos has come to play his daily game of cards with me. I fold the book in my hand, keep it on the tiny side-table, cover my head with the blanket and go to sleep.

(To be continued)

PREMA NANDAKUMAR

6. *Oomathai* is the Tamil name for *Dhatūra*.