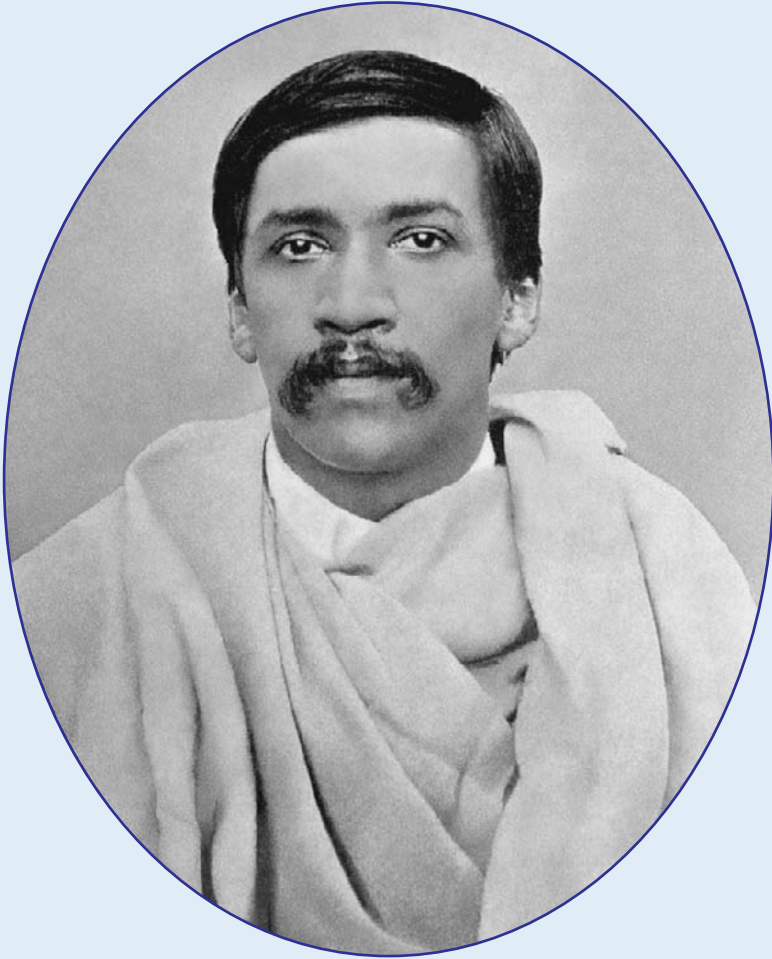


Letters on Himself
and the Ashram



Sri Aurobindo

VOLUME 35
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Publisher's Note

This volume contains letters in which Sri Aurobindo referred to his life and works, his sadhana or practice of yoga, and the sadhana of members of his ashram. Many of the letters appeared earlier in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (1953) and *On Himself: Compiled from Notes and Letters* (1972). These previously published letters, along with many others, appear here under the new title *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*.

The letters included in the present volume have been selected from Sri Aurobindo's extensive correspondence with members of the Ashram and outside disciples between November 1926 and November 1950. Letters he wrote before November 1926 are published in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. That volume also contains remarks by Sri Aurobindo on his life and works that were written as corrections of statements made by biographers and others, public messages on world events, letters to public figures, and public statements on his ashram and path of yoga.

The letters on the sadhana of members of the Ashram selected for publication in Part Four of the present volume differ from those published in *Letters on Yoga*, volumes 28–31 of THE COMPLETE WORKS, in that they are framed historically by events and conditions in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram between 1926 and 1950. The dates and the questions of Sri Aurobindo's correspondents that accompany many of the letters in the present volume make the historical context clear. The letters included in *Letters on Yoga* were also written to Ashramites and outside disciples during the 1926–1950 period, but they deal with Sri Aurobindo's yoga in a more general way, and thus are less in need of the contextualisation provided by the questions and dates.

The letters in the present volume have been arranged by the editors in five parts, the last of which includes mantras and messages. The texts have been checked against all available handwritten, typed and printed versions.

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Part One

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Section One

Reminiscences and Remarks on Events in His Outer Life

His Life and Attempts to Write about It

Knowing about Things in His Past

For a long time I have wanted to hear something about the early days in Pondicherry from those who lived with you then. This morning I approached X and asked him. He agreed to tell me and a few friends some stories and anecdotes. Do you think it undesirable or objectionable in any way?

I do not know whether it is of much utility. Besides, it would be only myself who could speak of things in my past, giving them their true form and significance. But as you have arranged it, it can be done.

11 August 1933

On Writing His Biography

This [*a proposed book in Telugu*] is not a publication for which the Asram is responsible. If the outer facts of the life are corrected there is no harm, but nothing should be said about the inner things of the life here. It is not necessary to give the book so much importance or try to make it an authoritative biography.

14 May 1933

*

[B. R. DHURANDHAR TO A. B. PURANI:] My friend and colleague Mr. P. B. Kulkarni is the author of several books in Marathi, including a life of C. R. Das. He is now writing a biography of Sri Aurobindo Ghose. He has been collecting material for many years and has already written around 200 pages. As he wants the biography to be authentic he is trying to approach persons who have come into contact with Sri AG. Please be kind enough to extend your cooperation to him.

I am not interested in my own biography. Who is this Dhurandhar or this Kulkarni?

Is there any reply to be sent to this letter?

I don't think a reply is necessary. If I am to be murdered in cold print, it had better be done without my disciples becoming abettors of the crime.

24 June 1933

*

This idea of a "Life" going into details and personalities is itself an error. I wrote the brief life given to Dilip as containing all that I wanted to be said about me for the present.¹ The general public can know about my philosophy and Yoga and general character of my work, it has no claim to know anything about the personal side of my life or of that of the Asram either.

30 October 1935

*

First of all what matters in a spiritual man's life is not what he did or what he was outside to the view of the men of his time (that is what historicity or biography comes to, does it not?) but what he was and did within; it is only that that gives any value to his outer life at all. It is the inner life that gives to the outer any power it may have, and the inner life of a spiritual man is something vast and full and, at least in the great figures, so crowded and teeming with significant things that no biographer or historian could ever hope to seize it all or tell it.

9 February 1936

*

Here is a tempting offer. A publisher writes to me: "We are beginning a series of biographies. . . . We propose that you take up Sri Aurobindo's biography. We shall give you very good terms, as you are well qualified for the task." If I decline

¹ The "brief life" referred to here is "Sri Aurobindo: A Life Sketch", reproduced on pages 5–10 of *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. See also *Sri Aurobindo's letters to Dilip Kumar Roy about the "Life Sketch" and about biography in general on pages 11–13 of the same volume.* — Ed.

I am sure they will just get it done by someone else. What do you say?

There is no one who can write my biography nor is this the time to do it, supposing it has to be done at all. If the outward facts of the life are meant, anybody can do that and it has no importance — the best thing is to have some outsider to do that mess, if mess there must be.

Comments on the Work of a Biographer

Girija's writings are of no importance.² I don't think there is anything on which we can call upon them to stop his articles. He will claim the right to personal judgment and interpretation of facts, as regards the mask of spirituality over the secret society and the "ruthless murders" and there is nothing else on which objection can be based. Let him go his way unnoticed.

² *Girijashankar Raychaudhuri was the author of a Bengali study of Sri Aurobindo's early life. See Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, pp. 88 and 562. — Ed.*

His Name

“Aurobindo”

But look at the irony of human decisions and human hopes. My father who wanted all his sons to be great men — and succeeded in a small way with three of them — in a sudden inspiration gave me the name Aurobindo, till then not borne by anyone in India or the wide world, that I might stand out unique among the great by the unique glory of my name. And now look at the swarm of Aurobindos with their mighty deeds in England, Germany and elsewhere! Don't tell me it is my fault because of my indiscretion in becoming famous. When I went to the National College in the Swadeshi days which was my first public step towards the ignominies of fame, there was already an Aurobindo Prakash waiting for me there with the sardonic comment of the gods printed on his learned forehead. Aurobindo Prakash, indeed!

“AG”

I do not use the initials AG — they have been discarded long ago.

14 September 1933

Life in England, 1879–1893

An Early Memory

I am not at all concerned about Nicodemus and what seems to me his stupid and ignorant question; he brings a fantastic physical notion across Christ's teaching and I am afraid I must hold him partially responsible for Freud's sexual meanderings and his craze for going back into his mother's womb. I don't myself remember any blissful sojourn in that locality in my case and I don't believe in it and I am quite sure I never felt any passion for returning there. The great Sigismund must have had it, I suppose, and remembered that blissful period and felt a longing for beatific return and I suppose others must have had it unless its acceptance is only a result of a general acceptance of the papal infallibility of Sigismund in psycho-analytical matters, about which few people have any direct reliable knowledge or can form a truly independent conviction based on truly independent evidence. I believe the practical methods and evidence for the success of psycho-analysis are made up mostly of suggestion and auto-suggestion; for suggestion and auto-suggestion can do almost anything and can make you believe in anything and everything. Many of these suggestions seem to me quite artificial and their forced connection with sex to be quite groundless. For instance, there is the suggestion of the dream of being stabbed with a knife, which they say is a rendering by the subliminal of an actual sex-probe, and of that you can obviously persuade a patient who is under your influence. I myself had when a boy of 8 or 9 a vivid dream which I never forgot of myself alone in my bed—I used to be sent to bed much earlier than my brothers—and lay there in a sort of constant terror of the darkness and phantoms and burglars till my brothers came up [*incomplete*]

Exposure to Christianity

[*Lines from a poem submitted to Sri Aurobindo:*]

Soul of poet, thine be quiet
Of the Virgin's prayerful countenance . . .

[*Underlining "prayerful countenance":*] Lord God! you bring me back to my childhood's agonies in an English Nonconformist chapel.

11 September 1933

Education in England

This afternoon I was doing japa as usual and dropped off to sleep. Then I saw a curious dream. . . . I sang and the song was on Shiva, and was so ecstatic that you got up and blessed me, joining in the hymn. . . . Tell me, however, do you ever sing — I don't mean music of the spheres but our mortal songs with musical intervals as we understand, as for instance Mother does?

No — I don't sing on the physical plane. My education in England was badly neglected — though people say to the contrary. I filled in most of the *lacunae* afterwards, but some remained of which the musical gap is one. But that is no reason why I should not sing on the supraphysical plane where you met me. There is no exact correspondence between the formation here and the formations there. On the contrary on these inner planes the subliminal as they call it in Europe — that is to say, our inner selves — is full of powers which have not emerged — yet at least — in the physical consciousness. And especially as I was full of Shiva in your experience there is no reason why I should not have sung for I suppose Shiva sings as well as dances?

31 August 1933

I.C.S. Examination

Do you think your I.C.S. examination answer papers of 1892 have been preserved by the authorities? I was thinking of

getting them if possible, in order to preserve them as a relic with us. Perhaps they do not give them out or they might have disposed of them.

Not likely that they keep such things.

1 May 1936

A Cambridge Anecdote

While we all agree that we all lie, X thinks she is incapable of lying.

Lies? Well, a Punjabi student at Cambridge once took our breath away by the frankness and comprehensive profundity of his affirmation: “Liars! But we are all liars!” It appeared that he had intended to say “lawyers”, but his pronunciation gave his remark a deep force of philosophic observation and generalisation which he had not intended! But it seems to me the last word on human nature. Only the lying is sometimes intentional, sometimes vaguely half-intentional, sometimes quite unintentional, momentary and unconscious. So there you are!

Learning Languages

It seems most people read more than they assimilate. They read lots of French stories, novels and dramas very rapidly and as a result they hardly assimilate the idioms, phrases, grammatical peculiarities, etc. I find it surprising that X and Y commit elementary errors when they speak. I think one ought to read a book three to four times.

I suppose most learn only to be able to read French books, not to know the language well. X writes and reads fluently but he does not know the grammar — he has only just begun to learn it. Y does not know French so well — he has learned mostly by typing a lot of things in French. It is not many who know French accurately and idiomatically. Z was the best in that respect. I don't think many people would consent to make a principle of reading each book 3 or 4 times in the way you advocate, for very few have the scholarly mind — but two or three books should

be so read—I learnt Sanskrit by reading the Naladamayanti episode in the Mahabharat like that with minute care several times. 25 March 1937

First Reading of the Upanishads

Is it true that the deep significance of mantras like “OM Shanti Shanti Shanti” and of words like “paix” in the Mother’s *Prayers* is lost because of too much familiarity?

Yes, it must be the familiarity—for I remember when I first read the OM Shanti Shanti Shanti of the Upanishads it had a powerful effect on me. In French it depends on the form or the way in which it is put. 14 February 1936

The European Temperament

How is it that most Europeans manage to remain cheerful, while in India there is so much gloom and moroseness in family life, and cunning, strategy and selfishness in social life? Half of the cheerfulness in Europeans, I suspect, comes not so much from intrinsic joy or humour as from the discipline of having good manners.

It is largely the latter—to show one’s bad moods in society is considered bad form and indicating want of self-control; so people in Europe usually keep their worse side for their own house and family and don’t show it outside. Some do but are considered as either neurasthenic or as having a “sale caractère”. But apart from that Europeans have, I think, more vitality than Indians and are more elastic and resilient and less nervously sensitive. There are plenty of exceptions, of course, but generally, I think, that is true. In family life it is more of the rajasic ego than gloom and moroseness that creates trouble. Gloom and moroseness generally meet with ridicule as a “Byronic” or tragic affectation, so it is very soon discouraged. Cunning, strategy and selfishness in social life is considered in France at least to be more a characteristic of peasant life—in the middle class it is supposed to be the sign of the “arriviste”. 6 January 1937

Life in Baroda, 1893–1906

The Swaying Sensation

I was standing on a scaffolding which was swinging to and fro. At one point I saw the walls nearby swinging like a pendulum. I understood the reason, but the sight of swinging walls was so vivid that I put my hand on the wall nearby to convince myself that it was not moving — yet the “eye-mind” refused to accept the evidence of the “touch-mind”!

But what was it due to? The sense of swinging of the scaffolding communicating itself to the walls as it were in the impression upon some brain centre? After travelling long in a boat I had once or twice the swaying sense of it after coming off it, as if the land about me was tossing like the boat — of course a subtle physical impression, but vivid enough. 4 April 1935

Maharashtrian Cooking

I was just invited by the Dewas Maharaja for tea. I hope he will give me good cakes!

I hope it did not turn out like my first taste of Mahratti cookery — when for some reason my dinner was *non est* and somebody sent to my neighbour, a Mahratta professor, for food. I took one mouthful and only one. Oh God! sudden hell-fire in the mouth could not have been more surprising. Enough to burn down the whole of London in one wild agonising swoop of flame!

15 September 1936

An Attack of Smallpox

A book says one attack of smallpox generally protects for life; but second attacks are not uncommon.

Well, there are people who say that smallpox attacks immunise for only a few years.

But if it is as you say, then there are others, I suppose. There is X among the servants for instance who nearly died of small-pox. I myself had a slight attack in Baroda soon after I came from England — so you needn't try to come up and vaccinate me.

13 April 1937

The Power of Prayer

As for prayer, no hard and fast rule can be laid down. Some prayers are answered, all are not. An example? The eldest daughter of my Mesho, K.K. Mitra, editor of *Sanjibani*, not by any means a romantic, occult, supraphysical or even imaginative person, was abandoned by the doctors after using every resource, all medicines stopped as useless. The father said "There is only God now, let us pray." He did, and from that moment the girl began to recover, typhoid fever and all its symptoms fled, death also. I know any number of cases like that. Well? You may ask why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they be? It is not a machinery — put a prayer in the slot and get your asking. Besides, considering all the contradictory things mankind is praying for at the same moment, God would be in a rather awkward hole, if he had to grant all of them — it wouldn't do.

7 October 1936

The Charm of Kashmir

Quite agree with your estimate of Kashmir. The charm of its mountains and rivers and the ideal life dawdling along in the midst of a supreme beauty in the slowly moving leisure of a houseboat — that was a kind of earthly Paradise — also writing poetry on the banks of the Jhelum where it rushes down Kashmir towards the plains. Unfortunately there was the over-industrious Gaekwar to cut short the Paradise! His idea of Paradise was going through administrative papers and making myself and others write speeches for which he got all the credit. But after

all, according to the nature, to each one his Eden.

7 November 1938

The Age of Swami Brahmananda

Captain Guha, an Assistant Surgeon, asked me whether there was any proof that Swami Brahmananda of Chandod lived for 400 years. Could you possibly enlighten me?

There is no incontrovertible proof. 400 years is an exaggeration. It is known however that he lived on the banks of the Narmada for 80 years and when he arrived there, he was already in appearance at the age when maturity turns towards over-ripeness. He was when I met him just before his death a man of magnificent physique showing no signs of old age except white beard and hair, extremely tall, robust, able to walk any number of miles a day and tiring out his younger disciples, walking too so swiftly that they tended to fall behind, a great head and magnificent face that seemed to belong to men of more ancient times. He never spoke of his age or of his past either except for an occasional almost accidental utterance. One of these was spoken to a disciple of his well known to me, a Baroda Sardar, Mazumdar (it was on the top storey of his house by the way that I sat with Lele in Jan. 1908 and had a decisive experience of liberation and Nirvana). Mazumdar learned that he was suffering from a bad tooth and brought him a bottle of Floriline, a toothwash then much in vogue. The Yogi refused saying, "I never use medicines. My one medicine is Narmada water. As for this tooth I have suffered from it since the days of Bhao Girdi." Bhao Girdi was the Maratha general Sadashiv Rao Bhao who disappeared in the battle of Panipat and his body was never found. Many formed the conclusion that Brahmananda was himself Bhao Girdi, but this was an imagination. Nobody who knew Brahmananda would doubt any statement of his — he was a man of perfect simplicity and truthfulness and did not seek fame or to impose himself. When he died he was still in full strength and his death came not by decay but by the accident of blood poisoning through a rusty nail that entered into his

foot as he walked on the sands of the Narmada. I had spoken to the Mother about him, that was why she mentioned him in her *Conversations* which were not meant for the public — otherwise she might not have said anything as the longevity of Brahmananda to more than 200 years depends only on his own casual word and is a matter of faith in his word. There is no “legal” proof of it. I may say that three at least of his disciples to my knowledge kept an extraordinary aspect and energy of youth even to a comparatively late or quite advanced age — but this perhaps may be not uncommon among those who practise both Raja and Hatha Yoga together.

1 February 1936

Learning Gujarati

I learned Gujarati not for the literature but because it was the language of Baroda where I had to live for 13 years. I have now picked it up again because there are so many Gujarati sadhaks who do not know English — just as I am picking up Hindi now.

25 December 1935

Political Career, 1906–1910

Mother India

When you wrote that you looked upon India not as an inert, dead mass of matter, but as the very Mother, the living Mother, I believe that you *saw* that Truth.

My dear sir, I am not a materialist. If I had seen India as only a geographical area with a number of more or less interesting or uninteresting people in it, I would hardly have gone out of my way to do all that for the said area.

Is there something in what you wrote? Or was it just poetic or patriotic sentiment?

Merely a poetic or patriotic sentiment — just as in yourself only your flesh, skin, bones and other things of which the senses give their evidence are real, but what you call your mind and soul do not really exist being merely psychological impressions created by the food you eat and the activity of the glands. Poetry and patriotism have of course the same origin and the things they speak of are quite unreal. Amen.

11 February 1936

Two Wings of the Independence Movement

It is common today to read and hear the statements of influential Indian leaders condemning the revolutionary efforts of their compatriots in by-gone years. Yet I think that there is little doubt but that the Bengali “revolution”, to name one phase of the larger movement, was of paramount importance in the understanding and realisation of the goals for which the nationalism of the 20th century was heading.

Sri Aurobindo has received your letter.¹ He says there were two

¹ *Written by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary, who replied to the correspondent. — Ed.*

wings to the Independence Movement. First, there was the external political and constitutional movement. And secondly there was the revolutionary movement which meant a preparation for an armed revolt. He considered both the movements necessary and had his share in preparing both. 19 April 1949

The Swadeshi Movement (1905 – 1910) and Later Developments

When I read the speeches you delivered before 1910, it seems to me as if Gandhi had almost copied everything from that — Swaraj, Samiti, Non-cooperation, and so on. If not outwardly he must have received these things from you in an occult way.

The whole of Gandhi's affair is simply our passive resistance movement given an ethical instead of a political form, applied with a rigid thoroughness which human nature except in a minority cannot bear for long and given too a twist which seems to me to make it harmful to the sane balance and many-sided plasticity necessary for national life. What with Gandhi, Hitler and the rest (very different people but all furiously one-sided and one-ideaed) a large part of humanity seems to have gone off its balance in these times. 21 September 1934

*

Did you enjoy the article "Fifty Years of Growth" by K. R. Kripalani in the *Visva-Bharati*?² Fifty years of growth refers by the way to the Congress. About the Swadeshi period he writes: "A long time was to elapse before we were to appreciate the infinite possibilities of the muddy waters at hand. In the meantime something startlingly romantic happened. . . .

"The fountain [of undefiled water] was cut by the fiery shafts of Tilak, Vivekananda, and Aurobindo, among others. They gave to Indian Nationalism its fiery basis in India's ancient cultural glory and its modern mission. . . . It is always more beautiful and more inspiring to contemplate the Idea

² K. R. Kripalani, "Fifty Years of Growth", *The Visva-Bharati Quarterly*, vol. I, part IV, New Series (February–April 1936), pp. 53–60.

and be drunk with it than to face the actual facts and touch the running sores. . . .

“But this spirit, fiery and beautiful as it was, was fraught with grave dangers. The glory that it invoked and the passion that it aroused were so intensely Hindu that Muslims were automatically left out. Not that they were deliberately excluded. . . . However that may be, it seems now not unlikely that had the influence of Tilak and Aurobindo lasted in its original intensity, we might have had two Indias today—a Hindu-istan and a Pak-istan, both overlaying and undermining each other. . . .

“However that be, the fact remains that the conditions of our country being what they were, the beneficial effects of Tilak’s and of Aurobindo’s political personalities were soon exhausted, and might, if prolonged, have proved dangerous, if Gandhiji had not come on the scene. . . .”

Subject, politics,—taboo. Writer Kripalani a “romantic” and “idealistic” visionary without hold on realities, living only in academic ideas—so not worth commenting. All the present Congress lot seem to be men who live in ideas only, mostly secondhand, borrowed from Europe (Socialism, Communism etc.), borrowed from Gandhi, borrowed from tradition or borrowed from anywhere; Kripalani looks down on the old Moderates for being in a different way exactly what he himself is—only they were classics and not romantics. So what is the use of reading their “histories”? However quite privately and within brackets³ I will enlighten you on one or two points.

(1) The Swadeshi movement was idealist on one side (no great movement can go without an ideal), but it was perfectly practical in its aims and methods. We were quite aware of the poverty of India and its fallen condition, but we did not try to cure the poverty by Khaddar and Hindi prachar. We advocated the creation of an industrial India and made the movement a Swadeshi movement in order to give that new birth a field and favourable conditions—cottage industries were not omitted in

³ *Sri Aurobindo put brackets at the beginning and end of this reply to indicate that it was not to be circulated in the Ashram at that time. — Ed.*

our view, but there were no fads. The Swadeshi movement created the following very practical effects:

(a) It destroyed the Moderate reformist politics and spread the revolutionary mentality (as Jawaharlal now calls it) and the ideal of independence.

(b) It laid the foundations of an industrial India (not of course wholly industrial, that was not our intention) which is however slowly growing today.

(c) It brought in the commercial classes and the whole educated middle class into the political field—and not the middle class only, while Moderatism had touched only a small fringe.

(d) It had not time to bring in the peasantry, but it had begun the work and Gandhi only carried it farther on by his flashy and unsound but exciting methods.

(e) It laid down a method of agitation which Gandhi took up and continued with three or four startling additions, Khaddar, Hindiism, Satyagraha = getting beaten with joy, Khilafat, Harijan etc. All these had an advertisement value, a power of poking up things which was certainly livelier than anything we put into it. Whether the effects of these things have been good is a more doubtful question.

(2) As a matter of fact the final effects of Gandhi's movement have been

(a) A tremendous fissure between the Hindus and Mahomedans which is going to be kept permanent by communal representation.

(b) A widening fissure between caste Hindus and Harijans, to be made permanent in the same way.

(c) A great confusion in Indian politics which leaves it a huge mass of division, warring tendencies, no clear guide or compass anywhere.

(d) A new constitution which puts the conservative class in power to serve as a means of maintaining British domination or at least as an intolerable brake on progress—also divides India into five or six Indias, Hindu, Moslem, Pariah, Christian, Sikh etc.

(e) A big fiasco⁴ of the Non-Cooperation movement which is throwing politics back on one side to reformism, on the other to a blatant and insincere Socialism.

That, I think, is the sum and substance of the matter.

As for the Hindu-Moslem affair, I saw no reason why the greatness of India's past or her spirituality should be thrown into the waste-paper basket in order to conciliate the Moslems who would not at all be conciliated by such a stupidity. What has created the Hindu-Moslem split was not Swadeshi, but the acceptance of the communal principle by the Congress, (here Tilak made his great blunder), and the farther attempt by the Khilafat movement to conciliate them and bring them in on wrong lines. The recognition of that communal principle at Lucknow made them permanently a separate *political* entity in India which ought never to have happened; the Khilafat affair made that separate political entity an organised separate political power. It was not Swadeshi, Boycott, National Education, Swaraj (our platform) which made this tremendous division, how could it? Tilak whom the Kripalani man blames along with me for it, is responsible not by that, but by his support of the Lucknow affair — for the rest, Gandhi did it with the help of his Ali brothers.

There you are. On a tabooed subject — it is, I think, enough. Not at all for circulation you understand and quite confidential.

14 April 1936

Living Dangerously

There is a coward in every human being — precisely the part in him which insists on “safety” — for that is certainly not a brave attitude. I admit however that I would like safety myself if I could have it — perhaps that is why I have always managed instead to

⁴ I am referring to my prophecy made at the beginning of the Non-Cooperation movement, “It will end in a great confusion or in a great fiasco.” I was not a correct prophet, as I have pointed out before. It should have run, “It will end in a great confusion *and* a great fiasco.” But after all I was not speaking from the supramental which alone can be infallible.

live dangerously and follow the dangerous paths dragging so many poor X's in my train. 5 January 1935

*

You wrote the other day that you have lived dangerously. All that we know is that you were a little hard up in England and had just a little here in Pondicherry at the beginning. In Baroda we know that you had a very handsome pay and in Calcutta you were quite well off. Of course, that can be said about Mother, but we know nothing about you.

I was so astonished by this succinct, complete and impeccably accurate biography of myself that I let myself go in answer! But I afterwards thought that it was no use living more dangerously than I am obliged to, so I rubbed all out. My only answer now is !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I thank you for the safe, rich, comfortable and unadventurous career you have given me. I note also that the only danger man can run in this world is that of the lack of money. Karl Marx himself could not have made a more economic world of it! But I wonder whether that was what Nietzsche meant by living dangerously? 15 January 1935

*

I was grieved to see that you rubbed off what you wrote. We want to know so much of your life, of which we know so little!

Why the devil should you know anything about it?

Of course I didn't mean that lack of money is the only danger one can be in. Nevertheless, is it not true that poverty is one of the greatest dangers as well as incentives? Lives of great men show that.

You are writing like Samuel Smiles. Poverty has never had any terrors for me nor is it an incentive. You seem to forget that I left my very safe and "handsome" Baroda position without any need to it, and that I gave up also the Rs. 150 of the National College Principalship, leaving myself with nothing to live on. I

could not have done that if money had been an incentive.

I know that the idea has obvious fallacies, but isn't it broadly true?

Not in the least.

But what is the use of telling me what Nietzsche meant by living dangerously, and how am I to know that you mean the same?

Certainly not the commercial test. I was quoting Nietzsche — so the mention of him is perfectly apposite.

Kindly let us know by your example what you mean by living dangerously.

I won't. It is altogether unnecessary besides. If you don't realise that starting and carrying on for ten years and more a revolutionary movement for independence without means and in a country wholly unprepared for it meant living dangerously, no amount of puncturing of your skull with words will give you that simple perception. And as to the Yoga, you yourself were perorating at the top of your voice about its awful, horrible, pathetic and tragic dangers. So —

16 January 1935

*

I beg to submit my apologies. I committed this folly because of ignorance of facts. Believe me, I did not know that you were the brain behind the revolutionary movement and its real leader till I read the other day what Barinbabu has written about you. I only knew that you were an extremist Congress leader, for which the Government was shadowing and suspecting you. Now that it is confirmed by you, I know what is meant by the phrase "living dangerously".

Wait a sec. I have admitted nothing about "Barinbabu" — only to having inspired and started and maintained while I was in the field a movement for independence. That used at least to be

a matter of public knowledge. I do not commit myself to more than that. My dear fellow, I was acquitted of sedition twice and of conspiracy to wage war against the British Raj once and each time by an impeccably British magistrate, judges or judge. Does not that prove conclusively my entire harmlessness and that I was a true Ahimsuk?
17 January 1935

Politics and Truth-Speaking

Would it not sometimes be dangerous to speak truth, e.g., in politics, war, revolution? The truth-speaking moralist who would always insist on not concealing anything may bring disaster by revealing the plans and movements of one side to the opposite side.

Politics, war, revolution are things of stratagem and ambush — one cannot expect the truth there. From what I have heard Gandhi himself has played tricks and dodges there. Das told me it was impossible to lead men in politics or get one's objects without telling falsehoods by the yard and he was often feeling utterly disgusted with himself and his work, but supposed he would have to go through with it to the end.

There is no necessity to reveal one's plans and movements to those who have no business to know it, who are incapable of understanding or who would act as enemies or spoil all as a result of their knowledge. Secrecy is perfectly admissible and usual in spiritual matters except in special relations like that of the shishya to the guru. We do not let people outside know what is going on in the Asram but we do not tell any lies about it either. Most Yogis say nothing about their spiritual experiences to others or not until long afterwards and secrecy was a general rule among the ancient Mystics. No moral or spiritual law commands us to make ourselves naked to the world or open up our hearts and minds for public inspection. Gandhi talked about secrecy being a sin but that is one of his many extravagances.

17 May 1936

Some Political Associates

I knew very well Sister Nivedita (she was for many years a friend and a comrade in the political field) and met Sister Christine, — the two closest European disciples of Vivekananda. Both were Westerners to the core and had nothing at all of the Hindu outlook; although Sister Nivedita, an Irishwoman, had the power of penetrating by an intense sympathy into the ways of life of the people around her, her own nature remained non-Oriental to the end. Yet she found no difficulty in arriving at realisation on the lines of Vedanta.

*

I knew Satish Mukherji when he was organising the Bengal National College (1905–7), but afterwards I had no contact with him any longer. Even at that time we were not intimate and I knew nothing about his spiritual life or attainments — except that he was a disciple of Bijoy Goswami — as were also other political coworkers and leaders, like Bipin Pal and Manoranjan Guha. I knew Satish Mukherji only as a very able and active organiser in the field of education — a mission prophetically assigned to him, I was told, by his guru, — nothing more.

3 December 1932

*

Charu Dutt, I.C.S., wrote a review of Jawaharlal's *Autobiography* in the *Visva-Bharati* review last month. Did you know him well of yore? Political?

Charu Dutt? Yes, saw very little of him, for physically our way lay far apart, but that little was very intimate, one of the kind of men whom I used to appreciate most and felt as if they had been my friends and comrades and fellow-warriors in the battle of the ages and could be so for ages more. But curiously enough my physical contact with men of his type — there were two or three others — was always brief. Because I had something else to do this time, I suppose.

28 September 1936

The Surat Congress (1907)

I happened to read an article in which the author mentions the Surat Congress, but strangely enough he does not even mention your name whereas Tilak, Lal, Pal take the prominent place. It is impossible he could not have known the part you played. In a Gujarati novel, K. M. Munshi has brought you in and indicated you were the central figure, putting certain things in movement and keeping behind the veil. X also says that Tilak used to consult you. How is it these things are forgotten by these Gandhiites?

Probably they know nothing about it, as these things happened behind the veil. History very seldom records the things that were decisive but took place behind the veil; it records the show in front of the curtain. Very few people know that it was I (without consulting Tilak) who gave the order that led to the breaking of the Congress and was responsible for the refusal to join the new-fangled Moderate Convention which were the two decisive happenings at Surat. Even my action in giving the movement in Bengal its militant turn or founding the revolutionary movement is very little known.

22 March 1936

Leaving Politics

I may also say that I did not leave politics because I felt I could do nothing more there; such an idea was very far from me. I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my Yoga and because I got a very distinct adesh in the matter. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence. There was not the least motive of despair or sense of futility behind my withdrawal. For the rest, I have never known any will of mine for any major event in the conduct of the world affairs to fail in the end, although it may take a long time for the world-forces to fulfil it. As for

the possibility of failure in my spiritual work, I shall deal with that another time. Difficulties there are, but I see no cause for pessimism or for the certification of failure. October 1932

Inability to Participate in Politics

There was a report in the *Hindu* that a deputation was coming from London to Pondicherry to ask you to take the helm of politics as a successor to Gandhi. The report says that you know 35 languages and have written 500 books.

I have read the wonderful screed from London. Truly I am more marvellous than I thought, 35 languages and 500 books! As to the seven pilgrims, they must be men of the Gita's type, *niṣkāma-karmīs*, to be prepared to come all these thousands of miles for nothing. 2 September 1934

*

Sri Aurobindo says that it is impossible for him to take up political action and enter the political field which would involve a sacrifice of his spiritual work.⁵

His spiritual help is given to the country and individually to all those who aspire for it. He is ready to continue this help and even to increase it if it is necessary. But he is convinced that written messages alone are not sufficient to have a permanent effect or even a sufficiently wide effect.

Among the members of the Ashram he sees nobody whom he can send to represent him effectively.

⁵ This reply was written by the Mother at Sri Aurobindo's dictation or under his instructions. — Ed.

Outer Life in Pondicherry 1910–1950

Meeting Paul Richard

I would like to know the mystery behind M. Paul Richard's meeting with Sri Aurobindo. I have heard that when he started for Pondicherry you [*i.e. the Mother*] gave him some signs or some questions to be solved by an Indian Yogi. And they were solved by Sri Aurobindo.

I don't think there was any mystery. He came for political purposes and enquired of Naidu or perhaps from Shankar Chettiar in whose house I was living whether there was any Indian Guru here and my name was mentioned and they brought him to see me. He showed me some signs employed in Indian, Egyptian and other occultisms, some of which I had seen — they happened to be, he said, the Indian ones. That was all. 26 June 1936

Fasting

I have myself fasted first 10 days and then 23 days just to see what it was like and how far one could live without food, and certain things like that. I found that it was no good. To take with equanimity whatever comes (or does not come) seemed to me more the thing than any violent exercises like that.

4 May 1935

Start of the *Arya*

It is said that the *Arya* began on the day the world war broke out or just before it. Has this not some significance? Was it not a kind of parallel movement?

The *Arya* was decided on on the 1st June and it was agreed that it would start on the 15th August. The war intervened on the 4th. "Parallelism" of dates if you like, but it was not very close

and certainly nothing came down at that time.

9 September 1935

Walking and Standing

X is experiencing pain in her heel. There is no bone or joint tenderness, just tenderness in the pad of fat in the heel.

It may be “policeman’s disease” as the French call it, “maladie de sergent de ville”; I have forgotten the technical name for it, but it is supposed to come from too much standing. I had it myself for something like a year because of walking or standing all day — that was when I used to meditate while walking. The Fr. medical dictionary says there is no remedy but rest. I myself got rid of it by application of force without any rest or any other remedy. But X is not a policeman and she does not walk while she meditates — so how did she get it?

29 May 1935

The Mother’s Taking Charge of the Ashram

On what date in 1926 did Mother take up the work of the sadhana?

Mother does not at all remember the exact date. It may have been a few days after 15th August. She took up the work completely when I retired.

17 May 1936

Bushy and the Meditation House

Today I felt like writing a story. I cast it in the form of an autobiography of Bushy the great cat. In the opening statement she claims to be one of the greatest personalities in the world.

Bushy was the cat who introduced us to this house (Meditation) running before us and showing us all the rooms. That ought to find a place in her autobiography.

12 October 1934

**Relations with the Government
of French India, 1934–1935**

But how is it that people can have such an idea?¹ There is no fund and there has never been a fund. All money has been given to myself or to the Mother. If there were a fund I suppose there would be trustees and a secretary and a treasurer and all the rest of it! The houses are ours, the money ours and it is to us in our houses that people come for learning the methods of Yoga. There is no association or public institution and nothing belonging to an association or institution. 16 February 1934

*

I have not wantonly stopped the books or free letter-writing nor have I become impatient with you or anyone. I am faced with a wanton and brutal attack on my life-work from outside and I need all my time and energy to meet it and do what is necessary to repel it during these days. I hope that I can count not only on the indulgence but on the support of those who have followed me and loved me, while I am thus occupied, much against my will.

I do hope you will not misunderstand me. I have not altered to you in the least and if I wrote laconically it was because I had no time to do otherwise.

My prohibition of long letters was of a general character and I had to issue it so that the stoppage of the books might not result in a flood of long letters which would leave me no time for making the concentration and taking the steps I have to take. I have said that you can send your poems and write too when you feel any urgent need — I had no feeling to the contrary at all. 17 February 1934

*

¹ Shortly before writing this letter, Sri Aurobindo learned that the Government of French India planned to launch an inquiry into the status of the Asbram. It appears that this move was provoked by reports that the Asbram was a formal “institution” that had a “common fund”. Had this been the case, it ought to have been registered with the government as a legal entity. — Ed.

I do not know that your going later to Bombay is at all necessary — since it is decided, it may be better to get it over quickly. It is too early to say whether the menace to the Asram is conquered or still hangs over it.

19 February 1934

*

Of course, one must use these external means and there one must be careful so as to have as many factors as possible on one's side and give as little handle as possible to adverse forces. But no outward action can be for us sure of success unless behind it is the growing Yogic vision and Yogic power. We have had ourselves serious difficulties from the outside, petitions made against us to the Minister of Colonies in Paris and a report demanded from the Governor here which if acted on would have put the Asram in serious jeopardy. We used outward means of a very slight and simple character, i.e. getting the Mother's brother (Governor in French Equatorial Africa) to intervene with the Ministry (and also an eminent writer in France, a disciple), but for the most part I used a strong inner Force to determine the action of the Colonial Office, to get a favourable report from the Governor here, to turn the minds of some who were against us here and to nullify the enmity of others. In all these respects I succeeded and our position here is much stronger than before; especially a new and favourable Governor has come. Nevertheless we have to remain vigilant that the situation may not be again threatened. Also one disadvantage has resulted, that we have been asked not to buy or rent more houses, but to build instead. This is difficult without land near here and much money; so we are for the moment unable to expand. In certain respects however this is not a disadvantage, as I have been long wishing to put off farther expansion and consolidate the inward life of the Asram in a more completely spiritual sense. I give this as an example of how things have to be dealt with from the Yogic point of view.

20 March 1935

*

X has passed along these two pieces of news about the Asram: (1) During his tour Mahatma Gandhi went to Pondicherry and with a view to meet Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to him. In reply Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to the Mahatma, which the local authorities withheld. It was after this that Sri Aurobindo published his statements about the Asram and his teaching.² (2) The French authorities at Pondicherry have enacted a law, the effect of which was to prevent the Mother from purchasing any more houses in the town for the purposes of the Asram.

You can write about the stories of the Asram that they are not true. The publication had no connection with Gandhi's visit to Pondicherry. No "law" has been passed by the French Government, nor could be. The relations of the Asram with the French Government are very friendly. But there was a housing crisis in Pondicherry and some complaints from the officials that they could not get houses to live in because the Asram had occupied so much of the better part of the town, so it was suggested to us that we might build houses in future rather than buy them.

1 July 1935

² The "statements" referred to here were first published in a newspaper on 20 February 1934 and later brought out in pamphlets and as a booklet. See Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 530–31 and 547–50. For Gandhi's visit to Pondicherry see pp. 442–44 of the same volume. — Ed.

Section Two

General Remarks on His Life

Remarks on His Life in Pondicherry after 1926

On His Retirement

What harm would there be if you would talk for a few minutes to each sadhak at least once a year?

There would be no gain from it and my retirement is necessary for the inner work. 25 May 1933

*

When will you come out of your retirement?

That is a thing of which nothing can be said at present. My retirement had a purpose and that purpose must first be fulfilled. 25 August 1933

*

The psychic is not responsible for my aloofness or retirement —it is the mass of opposition that I have to face which is responsible for that. It is only when I have overcome by the aid of the psychic and (excuse me!) your other *bête noire*, the supermind, that the retirement can cease. 21 January 1935

*

Sardar Vallabhbhai asked X when you would come out and guide people. X replied that that was not to be expected. I rather suspect that Vallabhbhai spoke sarcastically and X failed to catch it.

Perhaps not. Vallabhbhai is not likely to understand more than others that a spiritual life can be led by me without a view to a comeback hereafter for the greatest good of the greatest India (or world). Tagore expected the latter and is much disappointed

that I have not done it.

9 March 1935

*

Will you come out of your retirement after the supramental descent?

That will be decided after the descent.

23 September 1935

*

[SWAMI SAMBUDDHANANDA:] In connection with the celebration of the Birth Centenary of Sri Ramakrishna, a Parliament of Religions will be held in Calcutta from the 1st to 7th March, 1937. It is the unanimous and seriously considered view of the organisers that nobody in India today is in a more appropriate position than you are to direct the proceedings of the International Assembly. We shall be highly obliged if you would kindly consent to preside over the session of the Parliament.

Write to him on my behalf that I regret I am unable to accept his invitation as I have adopted a rule of life which prevents me from appearing in public or taking any personal part in public activities. This rule is still valid for me and I am unable to depart from it.

Or perhaps you [*Sri Aurobindo's secretary*] can type the answer as from me and I will sign it.

17 October 1936

On His Modified Retirement after 1938

By the way, no one sees me daily and talks with me except the Mother and those who have been in attendance on me since the accident. Anything to the contrary you may have heard is incorrect.

31 March 1942

*

My retirement is nothing new, even the cessation of contact by correspondence is nothing new, — it has been there now for a long time. I had to establish the rule not out of personal preference or likes or dislikes, but because I found that the correspondence occupied the greater part of my time and my energies

and there was a danger of my real work remaining neglected and undone if I did not change my course and devote myself to it, while the actual results of this outer activity were very small — it cannot be said that it resulted in the Asram making a great spiritual progress. Now in these times of world-crisis when I have had to be on guard and concentrated all the time to prevent irremediable catastrophes and have still to be so and when, besides, the major movement of the inner spiritual work needs an equal concentration and persistence, it is not possible for me to abandon my rule. (Moreover, even for the individual sadhak it is in his interest that this major spiritual work should be done, for its success would create conditions under which his difficulties could be much more easily overcome.) All the same I have broken my rule, and broken it for you alone; I do not see how that can be interpreted as a want of love and a hard granite indifference.

29 May 1942

*

It is not possible to accept his suggestion about joining with those who are in personal attendance upon me. They were not admitted as a help to their sadhana but for practical reasons. In fact here also there is some misconception. Continual personal contact does not necessarily bring out the action of the Force. Hriday had that personal contact with Ramakrishna and the opportunity of personal service to him, but he received nothing except on one occasion and then he could not contain the Force and the realisation which the Master put into him. The feeling of losing himself which X had was on the special occasions of the Darshan and the pranam to the Mother. That he had this response shows that he can answer to the Force, that he has the receptivity, as we say, and that is a great thing; all do not have it and those who have it are not always conscious of its cause but only of its result. But he should reason less and rather try to keep himself open as he was in those moments. The Force is not a matter for reasoning or theory but of experience. If I have written about the Force, it is because both the Mother and myself have had many thousand experiences in which it acted

and produced results of every kind. This idea of the Force has nothing to do with theory or reasoning but is felt constantly by every Yogin; it is part of his yogic consciousness and his constant spiritual activity.

18 May 1945

Demands on His Time

It is quite impossible for me to do any literary work (original or revision) just now, if that is what he wants.

July 1930

*

As to the book, I am afraid I have no time for such things. The twenty-four hours are already too short for what I have to do.

3 September 1930

*

Sri Aurobindo regrets his inability to accept the position offered to him in connection with the Indian Research Institute, with the objects of which he has every sympathy, as he would be unable to discharge the obligations however light attached to the position. All his time and energies are occupied by his own work and he has made it a rule to abstain from all other activities in order to give to this his undivided attention.

11 July 1933

*

I hope that will be *éclaircissement* enough for you — for I have no time for more — certainly none for writing sonnets — my energy is too occupied in very urgent and pressing things (quite apart from correspondence) to “dally with the rhythmic line”.

2 August 1934

*

Won't you please look at my essay tomorrow and give me your impression of it, pointing out, of course, whatever awkwardness of style that might draw your attention?

Let the floods pass! let the floods pass! I have four eight-twelve-sixteen-page letters still unanswered, one in Bengali closely written, one in Gujarati (decently large letters), one in Hindi (close-packed) and one in English. How the belettered devil am I to deal with essays under such polypageous circumstances?

23 February 1935

*

My only free time is between 9.30 and 10.30 or 11 at night.
What can one write in an hour or an hour and a half?

Good Lord! what can one write in 1 or $1\frac{1}{2}$ hour? If I could only get that time for immortal productions every day! Why in another three years *Savitri* and *Iliad* and I don't know how much more would be all written, finished, resplendently complete.

6 December 1935

*

Sri Krishna must have had more leisure than you have. In those days the art of writing had not developed so much and so he had not to reply to questions, though sometimes he had sudden calls as when Durvasa came with a host of thousands of disciples asking for food when there was not a morsel. Perhaps he had to perform more miracles than you have to, though I should not forget that constant calls must be coming to you also for help in illnesses and many others in many ways. Moreover, Sri Krishna never actually became the Guru of a number of people.

Well, he may have been rather wise in that and fortunate in the infrequency of correspondence in those days — but that did not save him. There is a poignant chapter in the Mahabharat describing his miseries and bothers with his people in Dwarka which is very illuminating. Unfortunately I have forgotten where it is. The calls don't matter much, for putting the Force is a subjective thing which does not take time, except in cases when it is a daily or frequently recurring difficulty. As for Durvasa if he turned up, it would be met by an order to X "Go and manage" or else an intimation to Durvasa not to be unreasonable. 4 September 1936

*

What about my planning to read Meredith, Hardy, Shelley, Keats and the Continental and Russian writers?

Lord, Sir, I wish I had time to follow out a programme as massive as yours. I have none even to dilate upon yours.

22 September 1936

Reading in Pondicherry

I said to a visitor, "Sri Aurobindo has not read a single book in the last twenty years yet there is no knowledge in the world that is unknown to him."

That is a rather excessive statement. I have learned my own philosophy from Adhar Das, for instance, and read something about Sunlight Treatment for the eyes, etc. etc.

17 January 1935

*

I have not Boccaccio's tales. I am afraid my library is mainly composed of my own and the sadhaks' works and books presented to me by people as a personal offering which I can't therefore send to the library — and some stray volumes, dictionaries etc. — that is all.

16 February 1935

Passing Away of Customary Illnesses

I may say that I see no reason for alarm or apprehension about my eyesight; it has happened before and I was able to recover, even getting a better reading eyesight than before. These things are for me a question of the working of the Yogic force. Many customary illnesses have passed away from me permanently after an intimation that they would occur no more. In my last days in Calcutta that happened with regard to colds in the head, and when I was in the rue des Missions Étrangères with regard to fever. I had no cold or fever after that. So also with regard to things like the bad cough I had for many years; it was intimated some time ago that these things would fade out, and it has been

so happening — only vestiges remain. So it will happen with what ailments remain, I expect. 25 February 1945

Correspondence and Literary Work, 1948–1949

As for my going far away, your feeling is based on my slackness in giving answers to your letters but this slackness had no such cause. My love and affection have remained always the same and it is regrettable if by my slackness in answering your letters I have produced the impression that I was moving farther and farther away from you. I think your recent letters have been mostly about persons recommended for Darshan or applying for it or about accommodation, things which have to be settled by the Mother, and these were naturally most conveniently conveyed to you through X's oral answer. I suppose I must have unduly extended that method of answer to other matters. I must admit that for many reasons the impulse of letter writing and literary productivity generally have dwindled in me almost to zero and that must have been the real cause of my slackness. The first reason is my inability to write with my own hand, owing to the failure of the sight and other temporary reasons; the sight is improving but the improvement is not so rapid as to make reading and writing likely in the immediate future. Even *Savitri* is going slow, confined mainly to revision of what has already been written, and I am as yet unable to take up the completion of Parts II and III which are not yet finally revised and for which a considerable amount of new matter has to be written. It is no use going into all the thousand and one reasons for this state of things, for that would explain and not justify the slackness. I know very well how much you depend on my writing in answer to your letters as the one physical contact left which helps you and I shall try in future to meet the need by writing as often as possible. 10 July 1948

*

As to my silence, this does not arise from any change of feeling towards you or any coldness or indifference. I have not

concealed from you the difficulty I feel now that I cannot write my own letters or, generally, do my own writing but I do not think I have neglected anything you have asked for when you have written. There is the question of the interview which you want to publish, but this I have to consider carefully as to what parts can be published as soon as I have been able to go through it. At the moment I have been very much under pressure of work for the Press which needed immediate attention and could not be postponed, mostly correction of manuscripts and proofs; but I hope to make an arrangement which will rid me of most of this tedious and uninteresting work so that I can turn my time to better purposes. I am conscious all the same that my remissness in writing has been excessive and that you have just cause for your complaint; but I hope to remedy this remissness in future as it is not at all due to any indifference but to a visitation of indolence of the creative will which has extended even to the completion of the unfinished parts of *Savitri*. I hope soon to get rid of this inability, complete *Savitri* and satisfy your just demand for more alertness in my correspondence with you.

4 March 1949

*

You also seem to have misunderstood something I said to X about pressure and difficulties as indicating some unwillingness on my part to write to you; nothing was farther from my mind, I said that only to explain my remissness in writing to you before. I was not referring to the pressure caused by the necessity of hastening the publication of my yet unpublished books or those that need to be republished — there is much work of that kind pressing to be done and much else not pressing but still needing to be done while there is still time, such as *The Future Poetry* or other works like the first part of *Savitri* which has to be revised for early publication in book-form. All that could have nothing to do with it — I was referring only to personal difficulties of my own and the difficulties concerning the Ashram which I had to face and which owing to their gravity and even danger had too much preoccupied my mind. That I have mentioned as an

explanation of my earlier remissness and not as an excuse, — there could be no valid excuse. Certainly, that had nothing to do with your present trouble and the letter, — the present one, — which I had sent word through X that I was starting to write yesterday.

7 December 1949

His Temperament and Character

The Battle of Life

But what strange ideas again — that I was born with a supramental temperament and had never any brain or mind or any acquaintance with human mentality — and that I know nothing of hard realities. Good God! my whole life has been a struggle with hard realities, from hardship and semi-starvation in England through the fierce difficulties and perils of revolutionary leadership and organisation and activity in India to the far greater difficulties continually cropping up here in Pondicherry, internal and external. My life has been a battle from its early years and is still a battle, — the fact that I wage it now from a room upstairs and by spiritual means as well as others that are external makes no difference to its character. But of course as we have not been shouting about these things, it is natural, I suppose, for the sadhaks to think I am living in an august, glamorous, lotus-eating dreamland where no hard facts of life or nature present themselves. But what an illusion, all the same!

November 1935

Change of Nature

It is perfectly possible to change one's nature. I have proved that in my own case, for I have made myself exactly the opposite in character to what I was when I started life. I have seen it done in many and I have helped myself to do it in many. But certain conditions are needed. At present in this Asram there is an obstinate resistance to the change of nature — not so much in the inner being, for there are a good number who accept change there, but in the outer man which repeats its customary movements like a machine and refuses to budge out of its groove. X's case does not matter — his vital has always wanted to be

itself and follow its own way and his mental will cannot prevail over it. The difficulty is far more general than that.

That however would not matter — it would be only a question of a little more or less time, if the divine action were admitted whole-heartedly by the sadhaks. But the conditions laid down by them and the conditions laid down from above seem radically to differ. From above the urge is to lift everything above the human level, the demand of the sadhaks (not all, but so many) is to keep everything on the human level. But the human level means ignorance, disharmony, strife, suffering, death, disease — constant failure. I cannot see what solution there can be for such a contradiction — unless it be Nirvana. But transformation is hardly more difficult than Nirvana.

17 October 1934

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People of sattwic temperament in the ordinary life behave practically in the same manner as sadhaks who realise spiritual peace as a result of Yoga. Can it be said that in sattwic people the peace descends but in a hidden manner? Or is it due to their past lives?

Of course they have gained their power to live in the mind by a past evolution. But the spiritual peace is something other and infinitely more than the mental peace and its results are different, not merely clear thinking or some control or balance or a sattwic state. But its greater results can only be fully and permanently manifest when it lasts long enough in the system or when one feels spread out in it above the head and on every side stretching towards infinity as well as penetrated by it down to the very cells. Then it carries with it the deep and vast and solid tranquillity that nothing can shake — even if on the surface there is storm and battle. I was myself of the sattwic type you describe in my youth, but when the peace from above came down, that was quite different. *Sattvaguna* disappeared into *nirguna* and negative *nirguna* into positive *traigunyatita*.

23 July 1935

Keeping Silence

I suppose I am silent, first, because I have no “free-will” and, secondly, because I have no Time.

Less metaphysically and more Yogically, there are periods when silence becomes imperative, because to throw oneself outward delays the “work that has to be done”.

I suppose someday I will write about Free Will, but for the moment there is no effective will, free or otherwise, to do it.

7 April 1931

Peace and Ananda

My own experience is *not* limited to a radiant peace; I know very well what ecstasy and Ananda are from the Brahmananda down to the *śārīra ānanda*, and can experience them at any time. But of these things I prefer to speak only when my work is done — for it is in a transformed consciousness here and not only above where the Ananda always exists that I seek their base of permanence.

4 August 1934

The Burden of Love

It is only divine love which can bear the burden I have to bear, that all have to bear who have sacrificed everything else to the one aim of uplifting earth out of its darkness towards the Divine. The Gallio-like “Je m’en fiche”-ism (I do not care) would not carry me one step; it would certainly not be divine. It is quite another thing that enables me to walk unweeping and unlamenting towards the goal.

April 1934

Solid Strength

If silence does not contain the fire within, will it not be the silence of a dead man? What can one accomplish without fire, zeal, enthusiasm?

Zeal and enthusiasm are all right and very necessary but the spiritual condition combines calm with intensity. Psychic fire is different — what you are speaking of here is the rajasic vital fire of self-assertion, aggressive self-defence, exerting lawful rights etc.

Fire is the active expression of solid strength. But I feel that this fire is more necessary than solid strength in dynamic work.

I speak from my own experience. I have solid strength, but I have not much of the fire that blazes out against anybody who does not give me lawful rights. Yet I do not find myself weak or a dead man. I have always made it a rule not to be restless in any way, to throw away restlessness — yet I have been able to use my solid strength whenever necessary. You speak as if rajasic force and vehemence were the only strength and all else is deadness and weakness. It is not so — the calm spiritual strength is a hundred times stronger; it does not blaze up and sink again — but is steady and unshakable and perpetually dynamic.

21 November 1933

Rudra Power

I have dropped using the Rudra power — its effects used to be too catastrophic and now from a long disuse the inclination to use it has become rusty. Not that I am a convert to Satyagraha and Ahimsa, — but Himsa too has its inconvenience. So the fires sleep.

26 June 1936

Neither Rejection nor Attachment

I have no special liking for the ideal of Shiva, though something of the Shiva temperament must necessarily be present. I have never had any turn for rejection of the money power nor any attachment to it; one has to rise above these things as your Guru did but it is precisely when one has risen above that one can

more easily command them.

15 January 1936

*

It depends on what is meant by asceticism. I have no desires but I don't lead outwardly an ascetic life, only a secluded one. According to the Gita, *tyāga*, the inner freedom from desire and attachment, is the true asceticism.

9 July 1937

Not Grim and Stern

The Overmind seems so distant from us, and your Himalayan austerity and grandeur take my breath away, making my heart palpitate!

O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! every blasted thing that I never was! I groan in an unAurobindian despair when I hear such things. What has happened to the common sense of all of you people? In order to reach the Overmind it is not at all necessary to take leave of this simple but useful quality. Common sense by the way is not logic (which is the least commonsense-like thing in the world), it is simply looking at things as they are without inflation or deflation — not imagining wild imaginations — or for that matter despairing “I know not why” despairs.

23 February 1935

*

The mistake was an old obstinate suggestion returning so as to bring about the old reactions which have to be got over. It is your old error of the greatness and “grimness” of God, Supramental etc. which was used to bring back the wrong ideas and the gloom. All this talk about grimness and sternness is sheer rot — you will excuse me for the expression, but there is no other that is adequate. The only truth about it is that I am not demonstrative or expansive in public — but I never was. Nevinson seeing me presiding at the Surat Nationalist Conference — which was not a joke and others were as serious as myself — spoke of me as that most politically dangerous of men — “the man who never smiles” which made people who knew me smile very much. You

seem to have somewhere in you a Nevinson impression of me. Or perhaps you agree with X who wrote demanding of me why I smiled only with the lips and complained that it was not a satisfactory smile like the Mother's. All the same, whatever I may have said to Y or Y may have said to you, I have always given a large place to mirth and laughter and my letters in that style are only the natural outflow of my personality. I have never been "grim" in my life — that is the Stalin-Mussolini style, it is not mine; the only trait I share with the "grim" people is obstinacy in following out my aim in life, but I do it quietly and simply and have always done. Don't set up some gloomy imaginations and take them for the real Aurobindo.

By the way, if you get such imaginations like the Nrisinha Hiranyakashipu one, I shall begin to think that the Overmind has got hold of you also. I don't know the gentleman (Nrisinha) personally, but only by hearsay; if he was there I certainly did not recognise him. I always thought of him as a symbol — or perhaps a divinised Neanderthal man who sent for Hiranyakashipu (whoever H. was) and cut him open in the true Neanderthal way! For myself I was sitting there very quiet and as pacific as anybody at Geneva itself — more so in fact and receiving the stream of people with much inner amiability and, outwardly, a frequent "lip-smile" — so where the deuce was room for Nrisinha there? Besides it seems to me that I have long overpassed the man-beast stage of evolution — perhaps I flatter myself? — so again why Nrisinha. At the most there may have been some Power behind me guarding against the stream of "grim" difficulties — really grim these — which had been cropping up down to the Darshan eve. If so, it was not part of myself nor was I identified with it. So exit Nrisinha.

February 1935

*

I do not know that I can say anything in defence of my unlovable marbleness — which is also unintentional, for I feel nothing like marble within me. But obviously I can lay no claims to the expansive charm and grace and lovability of a Gandhi or Tagore. For one thing I have never been able to establish a cheerful

hail-fellow contact with the multitude, even when I was a public leader; I have been always reserved and silent except with the few with whom I was intimate or whom I could meet in private. But my reference to Nevinson and the Conference was only casual; I did not mean that I regard the Darshan as I would a political meeting or a public function. But all the same it is not in the nature of a private interview; I feel it is an occasion on which I am less a social person than a receptacle of a certain Power receiving those who come to me. I receive the sadhaks (not X or others) with a smile however unsatisfactory or invisible to you — but I suppose it becomes naturally a smile of the silence rather than a radiant substitute for cordial and bubbling laughter. *Que voulez-vous?* I am not Gandhi or Tagore.

All that I really wanted to say was that the inwardness and silence which you feel at the time of Darshan and dislike is not anything grim, stern, ferocious (Nrisinha) or even marble. It is absurd to describe it as such when there is nothing in me that has any correspondence with these epithets. What is there is a great quietude, wideness, light and universal or all-containing oneness. To speak of these things as if they were grim, stern, fierce and repellent or stiff and hard is to present not the fact of my nature but a caricature. I never heard before that peace was something grim, wideness repellent, light stern or fierce or oneness hard and stiff like marble. People have come from outside and felt these things, but they have felt not repelled but attracted. Even those who went out giddy with the onrush of light or fainted like Y, had no other wish but to come back and they did not fly away in terror. Even casual visitors have sometimes felt a great peace and quiet in the atmosphere and wished that they could stay here. So even if the sadhaks feel only a terrifying grimness, I am entitled to suppose that my awareness of myself is not an isolated illusion of mine and to question whether grimness is my real character and a hard and cold greatness my fundamental nature.

I suppose people get a sense of calm and immobility from my appearance. But what is there terrifying in that? Up till now it used to be supposed that this was the usual Yogic poise and that

it could soothe and tranquillise. Am I to understand that I have turned it into something fierce and Asuric which terrifies and is fierce, grim and repellent? I find it rather difficult to believe. Or is it that I live too much within and have too much that is unknown and incomprehensible? I have always lived within, and what else could be expected of me? There is something to be manifested and it is only within that it can be found — there is a world struggling to be born and it is only from within that one can find and release it.

24 February 1935

*

All this insistence on grandeur and majesty makes me remember Shakespeare's remarks — the greatness that is thrust on one. I am unaware, as of grimness, so of any stiff majesty or pompous grandeur — the state of peace, wideness, universality I feel is perfectly easy, simple, natural, *dégagé*, more like a robe of ease than any imperial purple. Between X's palpitating testimony to my grandeur and your melancholy testimony to my majesty — it appears I sit like the Himalayas and am as remote as the stratosphere — I begin to wonder whether it is so and how the devil I manage to do the trick. Unconscious hypnotism? No, for I begin to feel not like the juggler but like the little boy who has to climb his rope and perch there in a perilous and uncomfortable elevation — and it seems to be rather a self-hypnotism by the spectators of the show. All the same it was a relief to find someone writing of a beautiful and “loving” darshan and others who describe it in a similar tone. From which I conclude that the quality of the object lies in the eye of the seer — নানা মুনির নানা মত.

1935

Sense of Humour

The Divine may be difficult, but his difficulties can be overcome if one keeps at Him. Even my smilelessness was overcome which Nevinson had remarked with horror more than twenty years before — “the most dangerous man in India”, Aurobindo Ghose “the man who never smiles”. He ought to have added, “but who

always jokes”; but he did not know that, as I was very solemn with him, or perhaps I had not developed sufficiently on that side then. Anyhow if you could overcome that, you are bound to overcome all the other difficulties also. 11 February 1937

*

[From a report of a meeting with Sri Aurobindo:] “He laughed till his body shook; it was rollicking. . . .”

This won't do. It is a too exhilarating over-description. It calls up to my mind a Falstaff or a Chesterton; it does not fit in my style of hilarity. It is long since my laughter has been continuous and uncontrolled like that. For that to be true I shall have to wait till the Year 1, S.D. (Supramental Descent). And “rollicking”? The epithet would have applied to my grandfather but not to his less explosive grandson. 1945

Rising above Depression

I am still not able to maintain the right attitude in my own sadhana and yet I try to pose as an adviser and instructor.

Well, one can give good advice even when one does not follow it oneself — there is the old adage “Do what I preach and not what I practise.” More seriously, there are different personalities in oneself and the one that is eager to advise and help may be quite sincere. I remember in days long past when I still had personal struggles and difficulties, people came to me from outside for advice etc. when I was in black depression and could not see my way out of a sense of hopelessness and failure, yet nothing of that came out and I spoke with an assured conviction. Was that insincerity? I think not, the one who spoke in me was quite sure of what he spoke. The turning of all oneself to the Divine is not an easy matter and one must not be discouraged if it takes time and other movements still intervene. One must note, rectify and go on अनिर्विण्णेन चेतसा. 24 February 1935

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We hear that you also had to undergo a lot of suffering and despair — to the extent of wanting to commit suicide!

What nonsense! Suicide! Who the devil told you that? Even if I knew that all was going to collapse tomorrow, I would not think of suicide, but go on to do what I still could for the future.

21 June 1935

Attitude towards Work

It is not a question of liking but of capacity — though usually (not always) liking goes with the capacity. But capacity can be developed and liking can be developed or rather the *rasa* you speak of. One cannot be said to be in the full Yogic condition — for the purposes of this Yoga — if one cannot take up with willingness any work given to one as an offering to the Divine. At one time I was absolutely unfit for any physical work and cared only for the mental, but I trained myself in doing physical things with care and perfection so as to overcome this glaring defect in my being and make the bodily instrument apt and conscious. It was the same with some others here. A nature not trained to accept external work and activity becomes mentally top-heavy — physically inert and obscure. It is only if one is disabled or too physically weak that physical work can be put aside altogether. I am speaking of course from the point of view of the ideal — the rest depends upon the nature.

As for the deity presiding over control of servants, godown work as well as over poetry or painting, it is always the same — the Shakti, the Mother.

11 December 1934

*

I have such a push to write poetry, stories, all kinds of things,
in Bengali!

Ambitions of that kind are too vague to succeed. You have to limit your fields and concentrate in order to succeed in them. I don't make any attempt to be a scientist or painter or general. I have certain things to do and have done them, so long as the

Divine wanted; others have opened in me from above or within by Yoga. I have done as much of them as the Divine wanted.

19 September 1936

Genius for Lolling

I intend to loll for a day or two after weeks of protracted hard work. How best to loll is a problem. By the way please note I am taking a regular sea-bath. It is doing me a lot of good.

All right about the sea-baths. As for lolling there is no how about it, — one just lolls, — if one has the genius for it. I have, though opportunities are now lacking for showing my genius. But it can't be taught, nor any process invented — it is just a gift of Nature.

25 April 1936

Heredity, Past Lives, Astrology

Heredity and Past Lives

It is true that we bring most of ourselves from past lives. Heredity only affects the external being and all the effects of heredity are not accepted, only those that are in consonance with what we are to be or not preventive of it at least. I may be the son of my father or mother in certain respects, but most of me is as foreign to them as if I had been born in New York or Paraguay.

3 June 1935

Speculations about His Past Lives

It is reported that you were Kalidasa and Shakespeare. I suppose it is true, at least regarding Kalidasa — isn't it?

As to the report, who is the reporter? and in what "Reincarnation Review" have these items been reported? 31 March 1932

*

We have various guesses about your previous lives. The other day I happened to ask X whether you were Shakespeare. He was diffident. My own belief is that you have somehow amalgamated all that was precious in those that manifested as Homer, Shakespeare, Valmiki, Dante, Virgil and Milton: if not all, at least the biggest of the lot. Kindly let us know the truth. Among your other and non-poetic incarnations, some surmise Alexander and Julius Caesar.

Good Heavens, all that! You have forgotten that Mrs. Besant claims Julius Caesar. I don't want to be prosecuted by her for misappropriation of personality. Alexander was too much of a torrent for me; I disclaim Milton and Virgil, am unconscious of Dante and Valmiki, diffident like X about the Bard (and money-lender?) of Avon. If, however, you can bring sufficiently cogent

evidence, I am ready to take upon my back the offences of all the famous people in the world or any of them; but you must prove your case.

Seriously, these historical identifications are a perilous game and open a hundred doors to the play of imagination. Some may, in the nature of things must be true; but once people begin, they don't know where to stop. What is important is the lines, rather than the lives, the incarnation of Forces that explain what one now is — and, as for particular lives or rather personalities, those alone matter which are very definite in one and have powerfully contributed to what one is developing now. But it is not always possible to put a name upon these; for not one hundred-thousandth part of what has been has still a name preserved by human Time.

1 April 1932

*

On both occasions when Paul Brunton saw you, he had the impression of you as a Chinese sage. In the early days of my stay here, you struck me as a king of Hungarian gypsies! And when I say Hungarian, I mean the Magyar element which I suppose has mid-Asiatic characteristics. Do these ideas point to some occult truth or some outstanding fact of previous birth?

Confucius? Lao-Tse? Mencius? Hang-whang-pu? (Don't know who the last was, but his name sounds nice.) Can't remember anything about it. As for the Hungarian gypsy, I suppose we must have been everything at one time or another, on this earth in some other cycle. But I am not aware of any particularly Magyar or Chinese element in me. However, when I came here, I was told I looked just like a Tamil sanniyasi and some Christians said I was just like Christ. So it may be.

More seriously, Brunton seems to have thought I was Lao-Tse. Maybe, I can't say it is impossible.

7 December 1936

*

The Mother or you are said to have declared that a divine descent was attempted during the Renaissance, with Leonardo

da Vinci as its centre — a very credible report since we believe you were Leonardo and the Mother Mona Lisa. I shall be much interested to know something about the inner side of this phenomenon. Was Leonardo aware of a semi-avatarhood or a pressure of spiritual planes?

Never heard before of my declaring or anybody declaring such a thing. What Leonardo da Vinci held in himself was all the new age of Europe on its many sides. But there was no question of Avatarhood or consciousness of a descent or pressure of spiritual planes. Mysticism was no part of what he had to manifest.

15 July 1937

His Horoscope

This year is said to be your brightest year according to the horoscope, Sir.

Horoscope by whom? According to a famous Calcutta astrologer (I have forgotten his name) my biggest time comes much later, though the immediately ensuing period is also remarkable. Like doctors, astrologers differ.

3 January 1936

*

X told me that today [4 April] is the birthday of Pondicherry because you came here on this date. If one can place oneself in the year 2036 A.D. he may find that 4th April is celebrated as the birthday of the Earth's spiritual life. Perhaps the horoscope of the Earth may show this more accurately; but is there a horoscope of the Earth as there are horoscopes of some villages?

Pondicherry was born long ago — but if X means the rebirth, it may be, for it was absolutely dead when I came. I don't know that there is a horoscope of the Earth. There was nobody present to note the year, day, hour, minute when she came into existence. But some astrologer could take the position of the stars at the moment when I got out of the boat and build up the terrestrial consequences upon that perhaps! Unfortunately he would probably get everything wrong, like the astrologer who

predicted that I would leave Pondicherry in March 1936 and wander about India till 1948 and then disappear while bathing in a river among my disciples. I believe he predicted it on the strength of the Bhrigu Samhita — the old dodge; but I am not sure. Long ago I had a splendiferous Mussolinic-Napoleonic prediction of my future made to me on the strength of the same old mythological Bhrigu.

4 April 1936

*

Astrologers tell all sorts of things that don't come true. According to one I was to have died last year, according to another I was to have gone out from Pondicherry in March or May last year and wandered about India with my disciples till I disappeared in a river (on a ferry). Even if the prediction were a correct one according to the horoscope it need not fulfil itself, because by entering the spiritual life one opens to a new force which can change one's destiny.

22 August 1937

*

It is no doubt possible to draw the illnesses of others upon oneself and even to do it deliberately, the instance of the Greek king Antigonus and his son Dimitrius is a famous historical case in point: Yogis also do this sometimes; or else adverse forces may throw illnesses upon the Yogi, using those round him as a door or a passage or the ill wishes of people as an instrumental force. But all these are special circumstances connected, no doubt, with his practice of Yoga; but they do not establish the general proposition as an absolute rule. A tendency such as X's to desire or welcome or accept death as a release could have a force because of her advanced spiritual consciousness which it would not have in ordinary people. On the other side there can be an opposite use and result of the Yogic consciousness: illness can be repelled from one's own body or cured, even chronic or deep-seated illnesses and long-established constitutional defects remedied or expelled and even a predestined death delayed for a long period. Narayan Jyotishi, a Calcutta astrologer, who predicted, not knowing then who I was, in the days before my name was politically known,

my struggle with Mlechchha enemies and afterwards the three cases against me and my three acquittals, predicted also that though death was prefixed for me in my horoscope at the age of 63, I would prolong my life by Yogic power for a very long period and arrive at a full old age. In fact I have got rid by Yogic pressure of a number of chronic maladies that had got settled in my body, reduced others to a vanishing minimum, brought about steadily progressing diminution of two that remained and on the last produced a considerable effect. But none of these instances either on the favourable or unfavourable side can be made into a rule; there is no validity in the tendency of human reason to transform the relativity of these things into an absolute.

8 December 1949

Knowledge of Astrology

I can't say anything about the horoscope, as I have forgotten the little astrology I knew.

14 September 1936

Section Three

Remarks on Himself as a Writer and on His Writings

On Himself as a Writer

Yoga and Intellectual Development

Can it be that in course of the sadhana, one may have certain intellectual or other training by the direct power of yoga? How did your own wide development come?

It came not by “training”, but by the spontaneous opening and widening and perfecting of the consciousness in the sadhana.

4 November 1936

Yoga and Literary Expression

Suppose you had not studied English literature; would it be still possible for you to say something about it by Yogic experience?

Only by cultivating a special siddhi, which would be much too bothersome to go after. But I suppose if I had got the Yogic knowledge (in your hypothetical case) it should be quite easy to add the outer one.

29 December 1934

*

When one hears that you had to plod through a lot, one wonders whether the story of Valmiki’s sudden opening of poetic faculties is true — whether such a miracle is really possible.

Plod about what? For some things I had to plod — other things came in a moment or in two or three days like Nirvana or the power to appreciate painting. The “latent” philosopher failed to come out at the first shot (when I was in Calcutta) — after some years of incubation (?) it burst out like a volcano as soon as I started writing the *Arya*. There is no damned single rule for these things. Valmiki’s poetic faculty might open suddenly like a

champagne bottle, but it does not follow that everybody's will do like that.

1 April 1935

Avoidance of Certain Subjects

If I write about these questions from the Yogic point of view, even though on a logical basis, there is bound to be much that is in conflict with your own settled and perhaps cherished opinions, e.g. about "miracles", persons, the limits of judgment by sense data etc. I have avoided as much as possible writing about these subjects because I would have to propound things that cannot be understood except by reference to other data than those of the physical senses or of reason founded on these alone. I might have to speak of laws and forces not recognised by physical reason or science. In my public writings and my writings to sadhaks I have not dwelt on these because they go out of the range of ordinary knowledge and the understanding founded on it. These things are known to some, but they do not usually speak about it, while the public view of such of them as are known is either credulous or incredulous, but in both cases without experience or knowledge. So if the views founded on them are likely to upset, shock or bewilder, the better way is silence.

December 1935

On His Philosophy in General

I do not mind if you find inconsistencies in my statements. What people call consistency is usually a rigid or narrow-minded inability to see more than one side of the truth or more than their own narrow personal view or experience of things. Truth has many aspects and unless you look on all with a calm and equal eye, you will never have the real or the integral knowledge.

22 December 1934

*

One Kishorlal G. Mashriwala has written a book in which he says that your "language" has been responsible for creating confusion, etc. X seems to have written to him about this and

got a reply that Kishorlal has not been satisfied with your philosophy nor with any of your disciples whom he has seen, but that he may change his views if he gets a quarter of an hour's talk with you.

Well, there seems evidently to be a confusion in his ideas about my philosophy, — though what has been responsible for creating it? — well, it is perhaps the goodness of his thinking! I fear the pleasure and honour of having a quarter of an hour's talk with the Yogi Kishorlal is too high a thing for me to wish to attain to it in this life. I must try to obtain *punya* first and strive to be born again in order to deserve it.

13 April 1935

*

I am thinking of writing a book on your teachings in a systematic Western form in three main sections: (1) Metaphysics, (2) Psychology, (3) Ethics. But to make it presentable in the academic fashion would require a large reading of some past and present Western philosophers and psychologists. And where is the time for it?

I am afraid it would be a rather too colossal affair. But why ethics? I don't think that there is any ethics; because ethics depends upon fixed principles and rules of conduct, whereas here any such thing can only be for sadhana purposes as conditions for getting the spiritual or higher consciousness and afterwards everything is freely determined by that consciousness and its movements and dictates.

26 July 1936

*

You wrote to X that though people call you a philosopher you have never learnt philosophy.¹ Well, what you have written in the *Arya* is so philosophical that the greatest philosopher of the world can never expect to write it. I don't mean here the bringing down of the new Truth, but the power of expression, the art of reasoning and arguing with intellect and logic.

¹ See the letter of 31 August 1934 on page 70. — Ed.

There is very little argument in my philosophy — the elaborate metaphysical reasoning full of abstract words with which the metaphysician tries to establish his conclusions is not there. What is there is a harmonising of the different parts of a many-sided knowledge so that all unites logically together. But it is not by force of logical argument that it is done, but by a clear vision of the relations and sequences of the knowledge.

4 November 1936

Writing for Publication

Unwillingness to Write for Newspapers and Magazines

If I allow the *Orient* to publish something yet unpublished by me, I lose my defence against demands from outside which is that I have ceased to contribute to magazines, newspapers *et hoc genus omne* and have made it indeed a rule not to do so. Therefore —

*

I am afraid X is asking from me a thing psychologically impossible. You know that I have forbidden myself to write anything for publication for some time past and some time to come — I am self-debarred from press, platform and public. Even if it were otherwise, it would be impossible under present circumstances to write at a week's notice. You will present him my excuses in your best and most tactful manner.

27 August 1931

*

The answer to Woolf was written long ago at the time Woolf's article appeared in the *New Statesman and Nation* — a London weekly. It was X who drew my notice to it and asked for an answer. Y this time wanted something of mine for the *Onward* August 15th number and chose this one.

24 August 1934

*

I have not begun writing in the papers — what is being published in the magazines is excerpts from the unpublished things in the *Arya* or translations such as X is making. So I cannot give anything.

As for past writings, I never take the initiative for publication in papers. Y, X or Z sometimes ask for leave to publish this

or that somewhere where it is asked for and I consent — that is all. circa 1936

*

The initiative is always X and I do not send anything myself or intervene in his action, but he takes the sanction from me.

All that you need to write to Delhi is that Sri Aurobindo is not writing articles for the papers; the things that appear from time to time are old writings of his not yet published in book form and sent to the papers at their request with his sanction. He is not writing any new things nowadays, as his time is entirely occupied with his work. This is simply to prevent demands on me for new contributions which I cannot satisfy. 2 July 1936

*

As to the Foreword, I had made a strict rule not to publish anything of the kind or anything except the books from the *Arya* and letters, so as to avoid any call on me from anyone. I don't know if I can break this rule now. In any case I shall have to read and consider, and I have now no time for anything but the correspondence and the work of concentration that is necessary — the pressure is too great for reading anything. So they should not depend on me for this Foreword. 28 September 1936

*

X must not expect the rather portentous article or essay he demands from me. You know I have made it a rule not to make any public pronouncement; the Cripps affair was an exception that remains solitary; for the other things on the war were private letters, not written for publication. I do not propose to change the rule in order to set forth a programme for the Supermind energy to act on if and when it comes down now or fifteen years after.¹ Great Powers do not publish beforehand, least of all in a journalistic compilation, their war-plans or even their peace-plans; the Supermind is the greatest of all Powers and we can

¹ *Sri Aurobindo was asked to write an article about what the world would be like fifteen years after the supramental descent. — Ed.*

leave it to its own secrecy until the moment of its action.

14 January 1945

*

What has happened to my letter of request for a Message to grace the Special Number of *Mother India* of August 15? I have heard nothing from you.

I have been trying to get you informed without success about the impossibility of your getting your expected Message from me for the 15th August. I had and have no intention of writing a Message for my birthday this year. It is psychologically impossible for me to manufacture one to command; an inspiration would have to come and it is highly improbable that any will come in this short space of time; I myself have no impulse towards it. But how is it that you have clean forgotten my rule of not writing any article for an outside paper, magazine or journal — I mean other than those conducted from the Asram and by the Asram — and even for these I write nothing new except for the *Bulletin* at the Mother's request, — also my reasons for this fixed rule? If I started doing that kind of thing, my freedom would be gone; I would have to write at everybody's command, not only articles but blessings, replies on public questions and all the rest of that kind of conventional rubbish. I would be like any ordinary politician publishing my views on all and sundry matters, discoursing on all sorts of subjects, a public man at the disposal of the public. That would make myself, my blessings, my views and my Messages exceedingly cheap; in fact, I would be no longer Sri Aurobindo. Already *Hindusthan Standard*, the *Madrass Mail* and I know not what other journals and societies are demanding at the pistol's point special messages for the 15th for themselves and I am supposed to stand and deliver. I won't. I regret that I must disappoint you, but self-preservation is a first law of Nature.

3 August 1949

Writing Philosophy

Look here! Do these people expect me to turn myself again into a machine for producing articles? The times of the *Bande Mataram* and *Arya* are over, thank God! I have now only the Asram correspondence and that is “overwhelming” enough in all conscience without starting philosophy for standard books and the rest of it.

And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never was a philosopher — although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry — I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher! How I managed to do it? First, because Richard proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review — and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse: and then he had to go to the War and left me in the lurch with 64 pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there, automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!

I don't know how to excuse myself to Radhakrishnan — for I can't say all that to him.² Perhaps you can find a formula for me? Perhaps — “so occupied not a moment for any other work; can't undertake because I might not be able to carry out my promise”. What do you say? 31 August 1934

*

Anilbaran says that he can compile something out of *The Life Divine* for Radhakrishnan. Can he do it?

No, I think not.

10 September 1934

*

² Sri Aurobindo's letter to Dr. Radhakrishnan, turning down his request to contribute an article to a book Radhakrishnan was editing, is published in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 444–45. — Ed.

As to Radhakrishnan, I don't care whether he is right or wrong in his eagerness to get the blessed contribution from me. But the first fact is that it is quite impossible for me to write philosophy to order. If something comes to me of itself, I can write, if I have time. But I have not time. I had some thought of writing to Adhar Das pointing out that he was mistaken in his criticism of my ideas about consciousness and intuition and developing briefly what were my real views about these things. But I have never been able to do it—I might as well think of putting the moon under my arm, Hanuman-like,—though in his case it was the sun—and going for a walk! The moon is not available and the walk is not possible. It would be the same if I promised anything to Radhakrishnan—it would not get done, and that would be much worse than a refusal.

And the second fact is that I do not care a button about my having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind the curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It was the confounded British Government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known and a “leader”. Then again I don't believe in advertisement except for books etc., and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines. But for serious work it is a poison. It means either a stunt or a boom—and stunts and booms exhaust the thing they carry on their crest and leave it lifeless and broken high and dry on the shores of nowhere—or it means a movement. A movement in the case of a work like mine means the founding of a school or a sect or some other damned nonsense. It means that hundreds or thousands of useless people join in and corrupt the work or reduce it to a pompous farce from which the Truth that was coming down recedes into secrecy and silence. It is what has happened to the “religions” and is the reason of their failure. If I tolerate a little writing about myself, it is only to have a sufficient counterweight in that amorphous chaos, the public mind, to balance the hostility that is always aroused by the presence of a new dynamic Truth in this world of ignorance. But the utility ends there and too much advertisement would

defeat that object. I am perfectly “rational”, I assure you, in my methods and I do not proceed merely on any personal dislike of fame. If and so far as publicity serves the Truth, I am quite ready to tolerate it; but I do not find publicity for its own sake desirable.

This “Contemporary Philosophy”, British or Indian, looks to me very much like bookmaking and, though the “vulgarisation” of knowledge — to use the French term — by bookmaking may have its use, I prefer to do solid work and leave that to others. You may say that I can write a solid thing in philosophy and let it be bookmade. But even the solid tends to look shoddy in such surroundings. And besides my solid work at present is not philosophy but something less wordy and more to the point. If that work gets done, then it will propagate itself so far as propagation is necessary — if it were not to get done, propagation would be useless.

These are my reasons. However let us wait till the book is there and see what kind of stuff it is. 2 October 1934

Philosophical Theft

Radhakrishnan, in his lecture published in the *Hindu*,³ has stolen not only most of your ideas but has actually lifted several sentences *en masse*. I wonder how such piracy in philosophical literature passes unchastised. I am thinking either of writing to him deploring the theft or informing the *Hindu*.

I don't think it is worth while doing anything. The thefts are obvious, but if he wants to add some peacock plumes to his dun colours! 24 July 1936

*

Professor Mahendranath Sircar and others would like to write to Radhakrishnan, asking him why he used passages from your works without acknowledgement.

³ “*World Fellowship through Faith . . . Sir S. Radhakrishnan's Address*”, *The Hindu*, 20 July 1936.

No. I have said no public notice should be taken of the matter. I consider it inadvisable, so the letters should not be sent.

*

From the Yogic point of view one ought to be indifferent and without sense of ownership or desire of fame or praise. But for that one must have arrived at the Yogic poise — such a detachment is not possible without it. I do not mind Radhakrishnan's lifting whole sentences and paragraphs from my writings at the World Conference as his own and getting credit for a new and quite original point of view.

But if I were eager to figure before the world as a philosopher, I would resent it. But even if one does not mind, one can see the impropriety of the action or take measures against its repetition, if one thinks it worth while. 5 August 1936

The Sale of His Books

The question of the royalty can be deferred till X has seen the translation. If it is not approved, the question of royalty does not arise. You can tell him that the Asram is not supported by public subscriptions but by what is given by disciples and private sympathisers. Therefore Sri Aurobindo's publications cannot be given free, they are sold and the proceeds counted among the available resources just as is the case with the publications of the Ramakrishna Mission. 19 September 1936

On His Published Prose Writings

Publication Plans, 1927

There is no intention of withdrawing support. The small book *The Mother* was given to Rameshwar because it was necessary to bring it out without delay and the A.P.H. [*Arya Publishing House*] was already occupied with the *Essays on the Gita* which it had not been able to bring to completion.

It was hoped that Rameshwar's joining the A.P.H. would unite all interests, but since you have not been able to agree together, it will be necessary to give him something from time to time as the long-standing connection with him cannot be broken — there being no reason for giving him up any more than for giving up A.P.H. This will not stand in the way of my giving my principal books to A.P.H. — provided always that the A.P.H. can keep its side of the arrangement by publishing them properly and without inordinate delay.

I can understand that there have been financial and other difficulties in putting A.P.H. on a sound footing and I have not insisted either on publication or money or anything else. At the same time I am bound to say that the methods of work seem to be loose and haphazard, e.g. the enormous time taken to publish the Second Series [*of Essays on the Gita*], the endless delay in sending me my copies of the First Series, the absence of all information regarding the condition of the concern or of any regular accounts of my dues from the House etc. I hope that things will be better in the future.

It is not necessary or possible to publish all my books together; hardly any of them can go out without revision and as I have very little time for this kind of work revision will take time.

The Ideal of Human Unity. I was revising, but as there seemed to be no progress with the *Gita* and I had other work to do, I dropped it. I will now complete the revision and I expect it will not take more than another two months.

The Defence of Indian Culture. Not finished. I will look through it and revise and add two or three chapters to finish. The time taken will depend on the amount of revision necessary — probably not very extensive alterations are needed.

The Katha Upanishad. This also needs revision before it can be published; but it is not likely to take very long.

The Kena Upanishad. My present intention is not to publish it as it stands. This must be postponed for the present.

=

It would be no use coming to see me, as I am seeing nobody, not even those who are living here. Nor is there any necessity for the journey, as I have not any present intention of altering the existing arrangement.

30 November 1927

Political Writings

I am an Indian student working for the Ph.D. degree at Harvard University. For my thesis subject I have selected "Contemporary Political Thought in India". You of course will be one of the authors I will be considering. Unfortunately your books are not available here. Please send me a list of books related to my subject, and the address of your publisher.

Refer him to A.P.H. Tell him that my political writings appeared in the daily *Bande Mataram* and the weekly *Karmayogin* and have for the most part not been separately published. You can mention however *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, *The Renaissance in India*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *War and Self-Determination* as books that may be useful for his subject, as the two former are partly concerned with or touch upon Indian politics, and the two latter are written upon international questions. I do not remember any others; if there are any, they may be included in the list. Ask A.P.H. to send him a complete list of my published works.

11 April 1928

Speeches

Now that they have written, I remember that in fact the *Speeches* were transferred from the Prabartak to A.P.H. But then how is it that Rameshwar asked for it? I gave permission under the impression that it must be in his share of the already published books. You had better write to him about it. After receiving his answer I will decide. 6 May 1929

*

I find it impossible to decide about the *Speeches*; the whole matter has got twisted up in a very undesirable way. It would be better if they settle it themselves amicably; otherwise I shall have to promise it to whoever can bring it out soonest or in the best style or put it up to auction or toss heads or tails. This whole matter of the publications being split up between half a dozen Arya Aurobindo houses is reaching the point of a *reductio ad absurdum* if not *ad impossible*. But nothing however absurd seems impossible here. 10 July 1931

*

Regarding *Speeches of Sri Aurobindo* — there has been a great demand for it in the market. If you kindly allow us to omit those speeches which may come under the Press Act, we could print the book. Please let us know your decision.

But who will decide what may come under the Press Act? It is a legal point and the law of sedition is exceedingly elastic.

September 1935

The Ideal of the Karmayogin

Have you seen my review of *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*?

Yes, I have seen it, but I don't think it can be published in its present form as it prolongs the political Aurobindo of that time into the Sri Aurobindo of the present time. You even assert that I have "thoroughly" revised the book and these articles are an

index of my latest views on the burning problems of the day and there has been no change in my views in 27 years (which would surely be proof of a rather unprogressive mind). How do you get all that? My spiritual consciousness and knowledge at that time was as nothing to what it is now — how would the change leave my view of politics and life unmodified altogether? There has been no such thorough revision; I have left the book as it was, because it would be useless to modify what was written so long ago — the same as with *Yoga and Its Objects*. Anyway the review would almost amount to a proclamation of my present political views — while on the contrary I have been careful to pronounce nothing — no views whatever on political questions for the last I don't know how many years. 21 April 1937

*

In the new edition of *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* there is this announcement: —

Fourth Edition — January, 1937

(Thoroughly Revised by the Author)

Radhakanta is repeating the above formula in all your old books which are really reprints. May I ask him not to do it?

Evidently it is an untrue statement and cannot be allowed to continue as it creates a false impression. But I think it will be necessary for me to write myself — otherwise he may not listen. Or you may write that I have asked you to inform him that I want this to be discontinued in future editions as it creates a wrong impression — since in fact these are reprints and I have not revised or rewritten any part of them. 23 April 1937

A System of National Education

I readily give the permission you request to embody my *System of National Education* as a chapter in the book projected by your Institute.¹ I have no time to go again through it, but I am

¹ This letter was drafted by one of Sri Aurobindo's secretaries and extensively revised by Sri Aurobindo. He wrote the last sentence in his own hand. — Ed.

asking my publishers, the Arya Publishing House of Calcutta, to send you a copy of the corrected and authorised edition. The Madras edition is unauthorised and full of gross errors. The book is only a series of preliminary essays never worked out or completed, but I shall be glad if, even as it is, you think it can be of some use.

Yogic Sadhan

The Yogi from the North (Uttara Yogi)² was my own name given to me because of a prediction made long ago by a famous Tamil Yogi, that thirty years later (agreeing with the time of my arrival) a Yogi from the North would come as a fugitive to the South and practise there an integral Yoga (Poorna Yoga), and this would be one sign of the approaching liberty of India. He gave three utterances as the mark by which this Yogi could be recognised and all these were found in the letters to my wife.

As for *Yogic Sadhan* it was not I exactly who wrote it, though it is true that I am not a Mayavadin.

*

Your name was not printed on the first two editions of *Yogic Sadhan*. But the third edition (brought out by A.P.H.) has your name on it.

No need of name. The publication of the name in the third edition of *Yogic Sadhan* was unauthorised and is in fact a falsehood. 6 June 1931

*

As to *Yogic Sadhan*, it is *not my* composition nor its contents the essence of my Yoga, whatever the publishers may persist in saying in their lying blurb in spite of my protests. 4 May 1934

*

The *Yogic Sadhan* has its use, but it is not one of the main or

² On the title page of the book *Yogic Sadhan* (first published in 1911) the editor is given as "The Uttara Yogi". — Ed.

most important books published among mine, nor is it my own writing. 6 December 1935

Passages from *Yogic Sadhan*

It is said in *Yogic Sadhan*: “The Will when it begins to act, will be hampered by the Swabhava; therefore until you are able to act on the Swabhava, you will not, should not bring your Will to bear upon life.”³ I don’t understand what this means.

I don’t remember the passage. Possibly it means that till you can act on the real nature in you and use the true will and consciousness, you should go on trying for that, and not try to shape life with an imperfect will and imperfect instrument.

18 September 1933

*

In *Yogic Sadhan*, Sri Aurobindo has said: “You have so many milestones to pass; but you may pass them walking, in a carriage, in a railway train, but pass them you must” [p. 1378]. What are the main milestones on the Shakti *marga*?

Answer as under.⁴

The *Yogic Sadhan* is not Sri Aurobindo’s writing — only communicated to him. The statement of the publishers that it contains the essence of Sri Aurobindo’s Yoga is an error propagated by them against his own protest. He cannot therefore say what particular milestones were meant. It is true as a general rule, but can be partly cancelled by a concentrated movement.

I suppose there are different milestones on different paths?

Necessarily.

Again, while discussing the law of resistance, Sri Aurobindo says: “They [*old rules, habits or tendencies*] are supported by

³ *Yogic Sadhan*, in *Record of Yoga, volume 11 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO*, p. 1375.

⁴ *Written by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary, who replied to the correspondent.* — Ed.

an army of forces or spiritual beings who surround you and live upon your experiences and enjoyments" [p. 1377]. What are these "spiritual beings"?

They are powers, forces or beings of the mental, vital or subtle physical worlds. There are some that simply want to utilise, there are others that want to possess, oppose or destroy and are known by us as "the hostile forces". 14 April 1936

*

What does the author of *Yogic Sadhan* mean by saying "when the man himself becomes God" [p. 1378]?

He means "when he becomes identified with the Divine", or "when he feels himself to be only a portion of the Divine and thinks and acts as such." 24 September 1933

*

"It [*the Manas*] catches thoughts on their way from the Buddhi to the Chitta, but in catching them it turns them into the stuff of sensations . . ." [p. 1383]. Has Manas any right to catch these thoughts? If so, what is the way to stop it so that it does not turn them into stuff of sensations?

The terms Manas etc. belong to the ordinary psychology applied to the surface consciousness. In our Yoga we adopt a different classification based on the Yoga experience. What answers to this movement of the Manas there would be two separate things — a part of the physical mind communicating with the physical vital. It receives from the physical senses and transmits to the Buddhi — i.e. to some part or other of the Thought-Mind; it receives back from the Buddhi and transmits idea and will to the organs of sensation and action. All that is indispensable in the ordinary action of the consciousness. But in the ordinary consciousness everything gets mixed up together and there is no clear order or rule. In the Yoga one becomes aware of the different parts and their proper action, and puts each in its place and to its proper action under the control of the higher consciousness or else under the control of the Divine Power.

Afterwards all gets surcharged with the spiritual consciousness and there is an automatic right perception and right action of the different parts because they are controlled entirely from above and do not falsify or resist or confuse its dictates.

13 September 1933

*

What is “the conceptual activity of the Manas” [p. 1385] and how can one still it?

The real conceptual activity belongs rather to the Buddhi — that of the Manas is simply a rendering of perceptions and impressions into thought-forms. There is no necessity of specially stilling this function — it comes best with a general stillness of the mind.

12 September 1933

*

It is written in *Yogic Sadhan*: “Adharma is often necessary as a passage or preparation for passing from an undeveloped to a developed, a lower to a higher Dharma” [p. 1387]. How is this?

I don’t remember the context; but I suppose he means that when one has to escape from the lower Dharma, one has often to break it so as to arrive at a larger one. E.g. social duties, paying debts, looking after family, helping to serve your country, etc. etc. The man who turns to the spiritual life, has to leave all that behind him often and he is reproached by lots of people for his Adharma. But if he does not do this Adharma, he is bound for ever to the lower life — for there is always some duty there to be done — and cannot take up the spiritual dharma or can do it only when he is old and his faculties impaired. That is a point in instance.

14 September 1933

*

“I come next to Prana, the nervous or vital element in man which is centralised below the Manas and Chitta in the subtle body and connected with the navel in the Sthula Deha” [p. 1388]. What is that subtle body? Also, I don’t understand

the phrase “connected with the navel in the Sthula Deha”.

How is it you do not know these elementary things? Man has not a gross (*sthūla*) visible body only, but a subtle body (*sūkṣma deha*) in which he goes out of the *sthūla deha* at his death.

The navel is the vital center in the physical body — but the native seat of the vital is in the vital sheath of the subtle body, which sheath it pervades, but for action through the gross body its action is centred at the navel and below it.

16 September 1933

*The Yoga and Its Objects, Yogic Sadhan
and The Synthesis of Yoga*

Sri Aurobindo is the author of *Yoga and Its Object*.⁵ It must be by an error of the printers that his name has been omitted.

But the book represents an early stage of Sri Aurobindo’s sadhana and only a part of it is applicable to the Yoga as it has at present taken form after a lapse of more than twenty years.

The *Yogic Sadhan* is not Sri Aurobindo’s own writing, but was published with a note by him, — that is all. The statement made to the contrary by the publishers was an error which they have been asked to correct. There is no necessity of following the methods suggested in that book unless one finds them suggestive or helpful as a preliminary orientation of the consciousness — e.g. in the upbuilding of an inner Will etc.

A book giving some hints about the Yoga compiled from letters to the sadhaks is about to be published,⁶ but it cannot be said to be complete. There is no complete book on the subject; for even *The Synthesis of Yoga*, published in the *Arya* but not yet republished in book form, gives only the theory of different components of the Yoga (Knowledge, Works, Devotion) and remains besides unfinished; it does not cover the more recent developments of the Yoga.

28 October 1934

⁵ *When first published in 1921, The Yoga and Its Objects was entitled The Yoga and Its Object. — Ed.*

⁶ *The reference is to Lights on Yoga, first published in February 1935. — Ed.*

The Yoga and Its Objects

A friend says there are no books in Gujarati that he can give to people who want to know about Sri Aurobindo's yoga. So he suggested I translate *The Yoga and Its Object*.

The Yoga and Its Object is not at all suitable for the purpose as it was written very long ago and expresses things that belong to the early stages of my sadhana, not the fullness of the integral and supramental sadhana. 16 August 1934

Passages from *The Yoga and Its Objects*

“To those who demand from him, God gives what they demand. . . .”⁷ Is this true?

It is not meant that He gives always whatever anyone demands — but that what they demand is all He gives — they cannot get anything else. 9 January 1934

*

“For behind the Sad Atman is the silence of the Asat which the Buddhist Nihilists realised as the *śūnyam* and beyond that silence is the Paratpara Purusha (*puruṣo vareṇya ādityavarṇas tamasaḥ parastāt*)” [p. 76].

The passage in *Yoga and Its Objects* is written from the point of view of the spiritualised Mind approaching the supreme Truth directly, without passing through the Supermind or disappearing into it. The Mind spiritualises itself by shedding all its own activities and formations and reducing everything to a pure Existence, Sad Atman, from which all things and activities proceed and which supports everything. When it wants to go still beyond, it negates yet farther and arrives at an Asat, which is the negation of all this existence and yet Something inconceivable to mind, speech or defining experience. It is the silent Unknowable, the Turiya or featureless and relationless Absolute of the monistic

⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Yoga and Its Objects*, in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, volume 13 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 74.

Vedantins, the Sunyam of the nihilistic Buddhists, the Tao or omnipresent and transcendent Nihil of the Chinese, the indefinable and ineffable Permanent of the Mahayana. Many Christian mystics also speak of the necessity of a complete ignorance in order to get the supreme experience and speak too of the Divine Darkness — they mean the shedding of all mental knowledge, making a blank of the mind and engulfing it in the Unmanifest, — the *param avyaktam*. All this is the mind's way of approaching the Supreme — for beyond the *avyakta, tamasaḥ parastāt*, is the Supreme, the Purushottama of the Gita, the Para Purusha of the Upanishads. It is *āditya-varṇa* in contrast to the darkness of the Unmanifest; it is a metaphor, but not a mere metaphor, for it is a symbol also, a symbol visually seen by the *sūkṣma dṛṣṭi*, the subtle vision, and not merely a symbol, but, as one might say, a fact of spiritual experience. The sun in the Yoga is the symbol of the supermind and the supermind is the first power of the Supreme which one meets across the border where the experience of spiritualised mind ceases and the unmodified divine Consciousness begins the domain of the supreme nature, *parā prakṛti*. It is that Light of which the Vedic mystics got a glimpse and it is the opposite of the intervening darkness of the Christian mystics — for the supermind is all light and no darkness. To the mind the Supreme is *avyaktāt param avyaktam*, but if we follow the line leading to the supermind, it is an increasing affirmation rather than an increasing negation through which we move.

Light is always seen in Yoga with the inner eye and even with the outer eye, but there are many lights; all are not and all do not come from the *param jyotiḥ*. 18 August 1932

*

“Matter itself, you will one day realise, is not material, it is not substance but form of consciousness, *guṇa*, the result of quality of being perceived by sense-knowledge” [p. 77].

There is no need to put “the” before “quality” — in English that would alter the sense. Matter is not regarded in this passage as a quality of being perceived by sense; I don't think that would have any meaning. It is regarded as a result of a certain power

and action of consciousness which presents forms of itself to sense perception and it is this quality of sense-perceivedness, so to speak, that gives them the appearance of Matter, i.e. of a certain kind of substantiality inherent in themselves — but in fact they are not self-existent substantial objects but forms of consciousness. The point is that there is no such thing as the self-existent Matter posited by nineteenth-century Science.

“chitta” and “chetas”

Chitta is ordinarily used for the mental consciousness in general, thought, feeling, etc. taken together with a stress now on one side or another, sometimes on the feelings as in *citta-pramāthī*, sometimes on the thought-mind — that is why I translated it [*on p. 75*] “heart and mind” in its wider sense. Chetas can be used in the same way, but it has a different shade of sense, properly speaking, and can include also the movements of the soul, covering the whole consciousness even; [*on p. 82*] I take it in its most general sense. The translation is not meant to be literal but to render the thought in the line in its fullness. *Adhyātmacetasā* practically amounts to what in English we would describe as a spiritual consciousness.

“throw our arms around” [*p. 78*]

It is a figure meaning to comprehend in our consciousness with love and Ananda.

“the nature” [*p. 81, lines 29, 31, 33*]

Nature here means the parts of Prakriti in the human being: as it is the condition of the Prakriti that changes with shifting of the gunas and it is this condition of the Prakriti that will become illumined by the transformation of *sattva* into *jyotiḥ*.

“*lokasaṅgrahārthāya*” [*p. 85*] — Does this mean the present order?

No. It is in a more general sense the maintenance of the world order which may be a developing, not necessarily a stationary one, an order spiritual, moral etc. and not merely a social order.

“Maya means nothing more than the freedom of Brahman from the circumstances through which he expresses himself” [p. 89].

The sentence is rather loose in expression. It does not mean that Maya is Brahman’s freedom, but “the doctrine of Maya simply comes to this that Brahman is free from the circumstances through which he expresses himself.” This limited play is not He, for He is illimitable; it is only a conditioned (partial) manifestation, but He is not bound by the conditions (circumstances) as the play is bound. The world is a figure of something of Himself which he has put forth into it, but He is more than that figure. The world is not unreal or illusory, but our present seeing or consciousness of it is ignorant, and therefore the world *as seen by us* can be described as an illusion. So far the Maya idea is true. But if we see the world as it really is, a partial and developing manifestation of Brahman, then it can no longer be described as an illusion, but rather as a Lila. He is still more than his Lila, but He is in it and it is in Him; it is not an illusion. 16 October 1931

The Arya

The *Arya*⁸ is a work of spiritual philosophy founded on personal realisation; it is obviously not meant for minds that do not think out spiritual things in all their aspects.

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For understanding *Arya* one must have a sufficiently trained and developed intellect or else a basis of experience along with a capacity of mentalising experience. X as yet has neither. It is

⁸ *The monthly journal (1914–1921) in which The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga and many other works by Sri Aurobindo first appeared. Before these works were published as separate books, they were referred to collectively as “the Arya”.*—Ed.

sufficient if he can get accustomed to forming general ideas and thinking coherently about them. 22 September 1933

*

What is meant by: 1. the psychic nature, 2. spiritual nature, 3. supramental nature, 4. divine nature?

To answer these questions it would be necessary to write a volume. I have written some letters about the psychic being and the self — you can get hold of those and read them.

Supramental nature can only be understood if one understands what supermind is and that is not altogether possible for mind so long as it does not open into the higher planes. So far as a mental account can be given, I have done it in the *Arya*.

Divine Nature is the nature of the divine Consciousness, Truth, Peace, Light, Purity, Knowledge, Power, Ananda on whichever plane it manifests. Supermind is one plane of the Divine Nature. The Divine is Sachchidananda.

18 October 1938

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I do not find it easy to answer the few brief and casual sentences in Angus' letter, — precisely because they are so brief and casual.⁹ Not knowing him or the turns of his mind, I do not exactly seize what is behind this passage in his letter. It would be easier to reply if I had some notion of the kind of thought or experience on which he takes his stand when he dismisses so cavalierly the statement of spiritual truth put forward in the *Arya*. As it is, I am obliged to answer to what *may* be behind his sentences and, as there is much that possibly stands behind them, the reply becomes long and elaborate and is in danger of seeming long and discursive. I could of course answer easily myself by a few brief and trenchant sentences of the same calibre, but in that kind of discussion there is no profit.

⁹ The paragraphs that follow are from a letter-draft that was not revised or sent in this form to the correspondent. — Ed.

Let me say that he makes an initial mistake — quite natural for him, since he has not read the *Arya*, — when he describes the extract sent to him as a “theological fragment”. I must insist that there is no theology in the *Arya*. Nothing there is written to support or to develop any kind of religious belief or dogma or to confirm or enunciate the credo of any old or new religion. No less does he miss the mark when he describes as a scholastic distinction the substance of the passage. The teaching there is not taken from books, nor, although put in philosophic language, is it based upon abstract thought or any formal logic. It expresses a fundamental spiritual experience, dynamic for the growth of the being, confirmed and enlarged and filled with detail by almost thirty years of continuous sadhana, and, as such, it cannot be seriously challenged or invalidated by mere intellectual question or reasoning, but, if at all, then only by a greater and wider spiritual experience. Moreover, it coincides (not in expression, it may be, but in substance) with the experience of hundreds of spiritual seekers in many paths and in all parts of the world since the days of the Upanishads — and of Plotinus and the Gnostics and Sufis — to the present time. It is hardly admissible then to put it aside as the thought of a tyro or beginner in spiritual knowledge making his first clumsy potshots at a solution of the crossword enigma of the universe. That description seems to show that he has missed the point of the passage altogether and that also makes it difficult to reply; for where there is no meeting point of minds, discussion is likely to be sterile.

I was a little surprised at first by this entire lack of understanding, shown still more in his cavil at the two Divines — for I had somehow got the impression that Angus was a Christian and the recognition of “two Divines” — the Divine Transcendent and the Divine Immanent — is, I have read, perfectly familiar to Christian ideas and to Christian experience. The words themselves in fact — transcendent and cosmic — are taken from the West. I do not know that there is anything exactly corresponding to them in the language of Indian spiritual thinking, although the experiences on which the distinction rests are quite familiar. On another side, Christianity insists not only on a double but a triple

Divine. It even strikes me that this triple Godhead or Trinity is not very far off at bottom from my trinity of the individual, cosmic and transcendent Divine — as far at least as one can judge who has not himself followed the Christian discipline. Christ whether as the human Incarnation or the Christos in men or the Godhead proceeding from the Father, seems to me to be quite my individual Divine. The Father has very much the appearance of the One who overstands and is immanent in the cosmos. And although this is more obscure, yet if one can be guided by the indications in the Scripture, the Holy Ghost looks very much like a rather mysterious and inexpressible Transcendence and its descent very much like what I would call the descent of Light, Purity, Peace — that passeth all understanding — or Power of the supramental Spirit. In any case these Christian and Western ideas show surely that my affirmation of a double or a triple Divine is not anything new and ought not to be found startling or upsetting and I do not see why it should be treated as (in itself) obscure and unintelligible.

Again, are these or similar distinctions very positively made in the Christian, Sufi or other teachings mere theoretical abstractions, scholastic distinctions, theological cobwebs, or metaphysical puzzles? I had always supposed that they corresponded to very living, very dynamic, almost — for the paths to which they relate — indispensable experiences. No doubt, for those who follow other ways or no way at all or for those who have not yet had the illuminating and vivifying experience, they may seem at first a little difficult or unseizable. But that is true of most spiritual truth — and not of spiritual truth alone. There are many very highly intelligent and cultured people to whom a scientific explanation of even so patent and common a fact as electricity and electric light (this is a reminiscence of an article by Y. Y. in the *New Statesman and Nation*) seems equally difficult to seize by the mind or to fix either in the memory or the intelligence. And yet the distinction between positive and negative electricity, both necessary for the existence of the light, — like that of the passive and active Brahman (another scholastic distinction?) both necessary for the existence of the universe, — cannot be

dismissed for that reason as something academic or scholastic, but is a very pertinent statement of things quite dynamic and real. No doubt the unscientific man does not and perhaps need not trouble about these things and can be content to enjoy the electric light (when he is allowed to do so by the grace of the Pondicherry Municipality), without enquiring into the play of the forces behind it: but for the seeker after scientific truth or for the practical electrician it is a different matter. Now these distinctions in the spiritual field are a parallel case; they seem theoretical or abstract only so long as experience has not made them concrete, but once experienced they become living stuff of the consciousness and, after a certain stage, even the basis of action and growth in the spiritual life.

Here I am driven to a rather lengthy digression from the main theme — for I am met by Angus' rather baffling appeal to Whitham's History of Science. What has Whitham or Science to do with spiritual truth or spiritual experience? I can only suppose that he condemns all intrusion of anything like metaphysical thought into the spiritual field — a position excessive but not altogether untenable — and even perhaps proposes to bring the scientific method and the scientific mentality into spiritual experience as the sole true way of arriving at or judging the truth of things. I should like to make my view clear as to that point, because here much confusion has been created about it, and more is possible. And the first thing I would say is that if metaphysics has no right to intervene in spiritual experience, neither has Science. There are here three different domains of knowledge and experience each with its own instrumentation, its own way of approach and seeing, suited for its own task, but not to be imposed or substituted in these other fields of knowledge, — at least unless and until they meet by some kind of supreme reconciling transmutation in something that is at the source of all knowledge. For knowledge may be essentially one, but like the one Divine, it manifests differently in different fields of its play and to abolish their distinctions is not the way to arrive at true understanding of experience.

Science deals effectively with phenomenon and process and

the apparent play of forces which determine the process. It cannot deal even intellectually in any adequate way with ultimate truths, that is the province of the higher, less external mind — represented up till now by metaphysics, though metaphysics is not its only possible power. If Science tries to fix metaphysical truth by forcing on this domain its own generalisations in the physical field, as people have been doing for almost the last century, it makes a mess of thought by illegitimately extended conclusions and has in the end to retire from this usurpation as it is now beginning to retire. Its discoveries may be used by philosophy, but on the grounds proper to philosophy and not on the grounds proper to Science. The philosopher must judge the scientific conceptions of relativity or discontinuity or space-time, for instance, by his own processes and standards of evidence. So too, Science has no instrumentation or process of knowledge which can enable it to discover spiritual truth or to judge or determine the results of spiritual experience. There is a field of knowledge of process in the spiritual and the occult domain, in the discovery of a world of inner forces and their way of action and even of their objective dynamisation in the mind and life and the functioning of the body. But the mathematical exactitudes and rigid formulas of physical Science do not apply here and the mentality created by them would hamper spiritual experience.

The Life Divine

There is possible a realistic as well as an illusionist Adwaita. The philosophy of *The Life Divine* is such a realistic Adwaita. The world is a manifestation of the Real and therefore is itself real. The reality is the infinite and eternal Divine, infinite and eternal Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss. This Divine by his power has created the world or rather manifested it in his own infinite Being. But here in the material world or at its basis he has hidden himself in what seem to be his opposites, Non-Being, Inconscience and Insentience. This is what we nowadays call the Inconscient which seems to have created the material universe by its inconscient Energy; but this is only an appearance, for we

find in the end that all the dispositions of the world can only have been arranged by the working of a supreme secret intelligence. The Being which is hidden in what seems to be an inconscient void emerges in the world first in Matter, then in Life, then in Mind and finally as the Spirit. The apparently inconscient Energy which creates is in fact the Consciousness-Force of the Divine and its aspect of consciousness, secret in Matter, begins to emerge in Life, finds something more of itself in Mind and finds its true self in a spiritual consciousness and finally a supramental consciousness through which we become aware of the Reality, enter into it and unite ourselves with it. This is what we call evolution which is an evolution of consciousness and an evolution of the Spirit in things and only outwardly an evolution of species. Thus also, the delight of existence emerges from the original insentience first in the contrary forms of pleasure and pain and then has to find itself in the bliss of the Spirit or as it is called in the Upanishads, the bliss of the Brahman. That is the central idea in the explanation of the universe put forward in *The Life Divine*.

A Passage from *The Life Divine*

“This opens the way for other explanations which make Consciousness the creator of this world out of an apparent original Inconscience. . . . All these things we see around us are then the thoughts of an extra-cosmic Divinity, a Being with an omnipotent and omniscient Mind and Will. . . .”¹⁰

The phrase “extra-cosmic Divinity” is used here in *The Life Divine* because in that stage of the reasoning nothing more emerged as positively established. In fact Sri Aurobindo regards the Divinity, the Reality behind and in the universe as at once supracosmic or transcendent of cosmos and immanent in it, and all, constituting the universe by its being, consciousness and force and by that too bringing out from the Inconscient the evolution and developing its stages inevitably according to a truth

¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, volume 21 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 316.

in things which is its element of Necessity and the possibilities of the Consciousness and Force (seen by the human mind as Chance) through which the truth works itself out.

The Synthesis of Yoga

The Synthesis of Yoga is being revised and largely rewritten for publication; so I don't think it is possible to send out copies of it like this. For the time the revision has been stopped, because I have not a moment free, but I hope to resume it shortly; the publishers are in fact pressing for the book. It was why I wrote to X that it could not be sent outside. December 1932

*

X would like to see the six revised chapters of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, as he has translated the unrevised ones. May I send him a copy?

These six chapters cannot be translated and published separately or along with the other unrevised chapters. It can only be done when the revision of the whole book is complete.

3 September 1936

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What about the publication of the *Synthesis*? They are all asking me about it. So many are eager that it should see the light, fed up as we all are with the analysis of the universe through science of mind and ignorance of life, what?

I hope you are not referring to the whole colossal mass of the *Synthesis*, — though that too *may* be ready for publication before the next world war (?) or after the beginning of the Satya Yuga (new World Order?). If you mean the Yoga of Works, I am writing or trying to write four or five additional chapters for it. I hope they will be ready in a reasonable time, — but my daily time is short and chapters are long. In the absence of exact prophetic power, that is all I can say. 2 March 1944

Passages from *The Synthesis of Yoga*

“Often, we see this desire of personal salvation overcome by another attraction which also belongs to the higher turn of our nature and which indicates the essential character of the action the liberated soul must pursue. . . . It is that which inspires a remarkable passage in a letter of Swami Vivekananda. ‘I have lost all wish for my salvation,’ wrote the great Vedantin, ‘may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls, — and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death nor going nor coming, in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols.’

“The last two sentences contain indeed the whole gist of the matter. . . .”¹¹

As to the extract about Vivekananda, the point I make there does not seem to me humanitarian. You will see that I emphasise there the last sentences of the passage quoted from Vivekananda, not the words about God the poor and sinner and criminal. The point is about the Divine in the World, the All, *sarva-bhūtāni* of the Gita. That is not merely humanity, still less only the poor or the wicked; surely even the rich or the good are part of the All and those also who are neither good nor bad nor rich nor poor. Nor is there any question (I mean in my own remarks) of philanthropic service; so neither *daridra* nor *sevā* is the point. I had formerly not the humanitarian but the humanity view — and something of it may have stuck to my expressions in the *Arya*. But I had already altered my viewpoint from the “Our Yoga for the sake of humanity” to “Our Yoga for the sake of the Divine”. The Divine includes not only the supracosmic but

¹¹ *Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, volume 23 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 269–70.*

the cosmic and the individual — not only Nirvana or the Beyond but Life and the All. It is that I stress everywhere. But I shall keep the extracts for a day or two and see what there is, if anything, that smacks too much of a too narrow humanistic standpoint. I stop here for today.

29 December 1934

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“This concentration proceeds by the Idea . . . ; for it is through the Idea that the mental being rises beyond all expression to that which is expressed, to that of which the Idea itself is only the instrument. By concentration upon the Idea the mental existence which at present we are breaks open the barrier of our mentality and arrives at the state of consciousness, the state of being, the state of power of conscious-being and bliss of conscious-being to which the Idea corresponds and of which it is the symbol, movement and rhythm” [p. 321].

I have not the original chapter before me just now; but from the sentences quoted it seems to be the essential mental Idea. As for instance in the method of Vedantic knowledge one concentrates on the idea of Brahman omnipresent — one looks at a tree or other surrounding objects with the idea that Brahman is there and the tree or object is only a form. After a time if the concentration is of the right kind, one begins to become aware of a presence, an existence, the physical tree form becomes a shell and that presence or existence is felt to be the only reality. The idea then drops, it is a direct vision of the thing that takes its place — there is no longer any necessity of concentrating on the idea, one sees with a deeper consciousness, स पश्यति. It should be noted that this concentration on the idea is not mere thinking, मननम् — it is an inner dwelling on the essence of the Idea.

27 August 1933

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“ . . . we must not only cut asunder the snare of the mind and the senses, but flee also beyond the snare of the thinker, the snare of the theologian and the church-builder, the meshes of the Word and the bondage of the Idea” [p. 330]. Would you explain this to me?

It would take too long. You can get it explained to you by someone, it is not difficult. The central idea is that the Divine Truth is greater than any religion or creed or scripture or idea or philosophy — so you must not tie yourself to any of these things.

18 September 1933

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“Therefore the psychic life-energy presents itself to our experience as a sort of desire-mind, which we have to conquer if we mean to get back to the true self” [p. 350].

It means the life-energy which comes from within and is in consonance with the psychic being — it is the energy of the true vital being, but in the ordinary ignorant vital it is deformed into desire. You have to quiet and purify the vital and let the true vital emerge. Or you have to bring the psychic in front, and the psychic will purify and psychicise the vital and then you will have the true vital energy.

11 September 1933

The Synthesis of Yoga, The Mother and Lights on Yoga

Does the method of sadhana as given in *The Synthesis of Yoga* apply now in our practice? What one finds when one reads the *Synthesis* seems to differ a great deal from what one finds in *The Mother* and *Lights on Yoga*.

The Synthesis of Yoga was not meant to give a method for all to follow. Each side of the Yoga was dealt with separately with all its possibilities, and an indication as to how they meet so that one starting from knowledge could realise karma and bhakti also and so with each path. It was intended when the Self-Perfection¹² was finished, to suggest a way in which all could be combined, but this was never written. *The Mother* and the *Lights* were not intended to be a systematic treatment of the sadhana as a whole; they only touch on various elements in it.

18 May 1936

¹² “*The Yoga of Self-Perfection*”, Part IV of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. — Ed.

A Passage from “Rebirth and Karma”

In “Rebirth and Karma”,¹³ I find the following: “We have in fact an immutable Self, a real Person, lord of this ever-changing personality which, again, assumes ever-changing bodies, but the real Self knows itself always as above the mutation, watches and enjoys it, but is not involved in it. Through what does it enjoy the changes and feel them to be its own, even while knowing itself to be unaffected by them? . . . This more essential form is or seems to be in man the mental being or mental person which the Upanishads speak of as the mental leader of the life and body, *manomayaḥ prāṇa-śarīra-netā*.”¹⁴ Would not the mental being be part of the human personality — the mental, nervous and physical composite?

The mental being spoken of by the Upanishad is not part of the mental nervous physical composite — it is the *manomayaḥ puruṣaḥ prāṇa-śarīra-netā*, the mental being leader of the life and body. It could not be so described if it were part of the composite. Nor can the composite or part of it be the Puruṣa, — for the composite is composed of Prakṛiti. It is described as *manomaya* by the Upanishad because the psychic being is behind the veil and man being the mental being in the life and body lives in his mind and not in his psychic, so to him the *manomaya puruṣa* is the leader of the life and body, — of the psychic behind supporting the whole he is not aware or dimly aware in his best moments. The psychic is represented in man by the Prime Minister, the *manomaya*, itself being a mild constitutional king; it is the *manomaya* to whom Prakṛiti refers for assent to her actions. But still the statement of the Upanishad gives only the apparent truth of the matter, valid for man and

¹³ *The sixteen essays published since 1952 as The Problem of Rebirth originally appeared in the monthly review Arya between 1915 and 1921. The first twelve, which were published in 1915 and 1919, were sometimes referred to as “Rebirth and Karma”. This informal title was used later as the subtitle of Section I of The Problem of Rebirth. (In the United States, it also was used as the title of the entire book.) The Problem of Rebirth is reproduced in Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, volume 13 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 255–434. — Ed.*

¹⁴ *Sri Aurobindo, Essays in Philosophy and Yoga, p. 275.*

the human stage only — for in the animal it would be rather the *prāṇamaya puruṣa* that is the *netā*, leader of mind and body. It is one reason why I have not yet allowed the publication of “Rebirth and Karma” because this had to be corrected and the deeper truth put in its place. I had intended to do it later on, but had not time to finish the remaining articles. 24 December 1935

“The Lines of Karma”

Regarding “The Lines of Karma”,¹⁵ we beg to draw your attention to the matter and ask what should be done to publish it. If you kindly manage to write the first part of the book, then we can bring it out.

The book is unfinished — that is the main obstacle to its publication. However I will look at the copy Nolini has sent up and see. 5 September 1935

The Ideal of Human Unity

With regard to *The Ideal of Human Unity*, the book has to be revised before it is ready for reprinting. Sri Aurobindo will take up the work when he is able to make some time for it.¹⁶

19 April 1949

Translations of Vedic Hymns

Last year I got from X some translations of the Rig-Vedic hymns done by the Master after his retirement. I have just retyped them for myself and Y wanted my old copy.

These translations are provisional, not final — so I should not like them to be freely copied and seen by all; but I have no objection to your keeping a copy. 3 December 1936

¹⁵ A group of four essays that originally appeared in the *Arya* in 1920 and 1921. They now comprise Section II of *The Problem of Rebirth*. Here the reference may be to a proposed book including all of Sri Aurobindo’s essays on rebirth and karma, which eventually came out as *The Problem of Rebirth*. — Ed.

¹⁶ Written by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary, who replied to the enquirer. — Ed.

Glossary of Vedic Words

I see that this is a glossary of Vedic words with their current meanings. I have no objection to that. But I do not want any publication of Vedic interpretations or significances founded upon my translations, so long as my work on the Veda is incomplete and has not taken its final form. 5 March 1929

Essays on the Gita

My brother is thinking of starting a bookselling and publishing business and has asked for one or two books of Sri Aurobindo for publication. May I prepare for him an edition of the Gita with only the text and Sri Aurobindo's translation compiled from the *Essays on the Gita*?

The casual renderings in the *Essays* cannot be published as my translation, — they were not intended for the purpose.

20 January 1932

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Before coming here, I found some justification for my anger from your *Essays on the Gita* — though I must say that the tendency to violence was already there. Will there be any place for some sort of violence in the new creation?

The *Essays on the Gita* explain the ordinary karmayoga as developed in the Gita, in which the work done is the ordinary work of human life with only an inward change. There too the violence to be used is not a personal violence done from egoistic motives, but part of the ordered system of social life. Nothing can spiritually justify individual violence done in anger or passion or from any vital motive. In our yoga our object is to rise higher than the ordinary life of man and in it violence has to be left aside altogether. 12 August 1933

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I have compiled a translation of most of the slokas of the Gita, using your interpretation of them in the *Essays on the Gita*. I request you to give me permission to publish the book as it

will help the public to understand the Gita from your point of view.

The permission cannot be given — the translations in the *Essays* are more explanatory than textually precise or cast in a literary style — I do not want that to go out as my translation of the Gita.

1 August 1934

*

I read your *Essays on the Gita* twice or thrice before. But when I started reading it again, I found that there were many ideas in it which I had missed before. I think if I read it over and over again I would find newer and newer ideas each time.

That is a common experience — most books with any profundity of knowledge in them have that effect. Almost all spiritual problems have been briefly but deeply dealt with in the Gita and I have tried to bring out all that fully in the *Essays*.

1 November 1936

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The *Essays on the Gita* is the most important of the published books.¹⁷ If it is to be translated in Telugu it should be assured that it is an accurate translation in good style. A translation from a translation does not usually secure that object.

Passages from *Essays on the Gita*

“But the Gita insists that the nature of the action does matter. . . .”¹⁸ This perplexes me. Sri Aurobindo wrote to me in reply to my question about office work: “The nature of the work does not matter.”

That is quite a different question from the choice referred to in the passage of the *Essays*.

¹⁷ *At the time this letter was written, Essays on the Gita was the only full-length work by Sri Aurobindo that was available in the form of a book. — Ed.*

¹⁸ *Sri Aurobindo, Essays on the Gita, volume 19 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 131.*

What is written must be read and interpreted according to the context. In the Gita, the question is between two kinds of action — the quietistic life of the Sannyasin with the minimum of action and the dynamic life offered in all its actions whatever they be as a sacrifice to the Divine. It might be said that Arjuna might do either, it does not matter — but the Gita thinks it does matter: that Arjuna being called to a life of dynamic action must follow that and not the quietistic life. 3 December 1934

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In *Essays on the Gita* Sri Aurobindo renders the term “Kshara Purusha” as “the universal Soul” [p. 436]. How can the “Kshara” be the universal Soul, if the one is mutable and the other immutable?

This is not my interpretation, it is what the Gita itself plainly says. It explains Kshara as “all existences” and since Purusha is the being which observes and experiences all the movements of Nature, (which is what is meant here by soul) it cannot be anything else than the universal Soul identifying itself with all existences in Nature.

Kindly indicate the relation of the universal Soul to the Divine.

The word क्षर [kṣara] means really mobile as opposed to the immobile immutable Akshara. The Kshara Purusha is that which follows the movement of the universe and seems to move and change, because it identifies itself while the Akshara is not identified and stands apart. The Upanishad makes the same distinction of the two Souls and Prakriti.

I used to take *kṣetra* and *kṣara puruṣa* to mean the lower nature.

Nature is Prakriti — Purusha cannot be Prakriti. Neither can Purusha be *kṣetra*, the field, because Purusha by its very definition is that which is behind Prakriti and its field and observes it — it is the Being not the nature. 28 November 1934

The Future Poetry

I will write later about the University idea. But it is not possible, I think, to give *The Future Poetry* as a whole. If it is to be published, it should be in England and the time is not ready for that.

26 January 1932

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There is a review of the *Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse* in the *New Statesman*. It might be noted as worth getting when you have the money — unless you have already something of the kind. Have you Donne and Blake in the Library? — not that I want them just now, but I shall some day when I revise *The Future Poetry*.

January 1934

The Mother

I sent you a review of *The Mother* a few days ago. Have you seen it?

Yes. I think it will give the reader the impression that *The Mother* is a philosophical or practical exposition of Yoga — while its atmosphere is really not that at all.

1 March 1937

The Mother as a Mantra

Some mornings I recite *The Mother* silently with an aspiration to know what it contains. But sometimes it seems to me that this is intellectual and so not part of our discipline. Should I continue with this recitation?

Yes, if you find that it helps you.

I also recite the Gita with the view to understanding it but along the lines of *Essays on the Gita*. Is this a good idea?

Yes. It does not matter whether it is mental, if it helps you. These things often help the mind to get into the psychic attitude.

25 June 1933

A Note on the Terminology of *The Mother*

(1) *Falsehood and Ignorance*

Ignorance means Avidya, the separative consciousness and the egoistic mind and life that flows from it and all that is natural to the separative consciousness and the egoistic mind and life. This Ignorance is the result of a movement by which the cosmic Intelligence separated itself from the light of Supermind (the divine Gnosis) and lost the Truth,— truth of being, truth of divine consciousness, truth of force and action, truth of Ananda. As a result instead of a world of integral truth and divine harmony created in the light of the divine Gnosis, we have a world founded on the part truths of an inferior cosmic Intelligence in which all is half truth, half error. It is this that some of the ancient thinkers like Shankara, not perceiving the greater Truth-Force behind, stigmatised as Maya and thought to be the highest creative power of the Divine. All in the consciousness of this creation is either limited or else perverted by separation from the integral Light; even the Truth it perceives is only a half knowledge. Therefore it is called the Ignorance.

Falsehood, on the other hand, is not this Avidya, but an extreme result of it. It is created by an Asuric power which intervenes in this creation and is not only separated from the Truth and therefore limited in knowledge and open to error, but in revolt against the Truth or in the habit of seizing the Truth only to pervert it. This Power, the dark Asuric Shakti or Rakshasic Maya, puts forward its own perverted consciousness as true knowledge and its wilful distortions or reversals of the Truth as the verity of things. It is the powers and personalities of this perverted and perverting consciousness that we call hostile beings, hostile forces. Whenever these perversions created by them out of the stuff of the Ignorance are put forward as the truth of things, that is the Falsehood, in the Yogic sense, *mithyā*, *moha*.

(2) Powers and Appearances

These are the forces and beings that are interested in maintaining the falsehoods they have created in the world of the Ignorance and in putting them forward as the Truth which men must follow. In India they are termed Asuras, Rakshasas, Pisachas (beings respectively of the mentalised vital, middle vital and lower vital planes) who are in opposition to the Gods, the Powers of Light. These too are Powers, for they too have their cosmic field in which they exercise their function and authority and some of them were once divine Powers (the former gods, *pūrve devāḥ*, as they are called somewhere in the Mahabharata) who have fallen towards the Darkness by revolt against the divine Will behind the cosmos. The word “Appearances” refers to the forms they take in order to rule the world, forms often false and always incarnating falsehood, sometimes pseudo-divine.

(3) Powers and Personalities

The use of the word Power has already been explained — it can be applied to whatever or whoever exercises a conscious power in the cosmic field and has authority over the world movement or some part of it or some movement in it. But the Four of whom you speak are also Shaktis, manifestations of different powers of the supreme Consciousness and Force, the Divine Mother, by which she rules or acts in the universe. And they are at the same time divine Personalities; for each is a being who manifests different qualities and personal consciousness-forms of her Godhead. All the greater Gods are in this way personalities of the Divine — one Consciousness playing in many personalities, *ekam sat bahudhā*. Even in the human being there are many personalities and not only one, as used formerly to be imagined; for all consciousness can be at once one and multiple. “Powers and Personalities” simply describe different aspects of the same being; a Power is not necessarily impersonal and certainly it is not *avyaktam*, as you suggest, — on the contrary it is a manifestation acting in the worlds of the divine manifestation.

(4) Emanations

Emanations correspond to your description of the Matrikas of whom you speak in your letter. An emanation of the Mother is something of her consciousness and power put forth from her, which so long as it is in play is held in close connection with her and, when its play is no longer required, is withdrawn back into its source, but can always be put out and brought into play once more. But also the detaining thread of connection can be severed or loosened and that which came forth as an emanation can proceed on its way as an independent divine being with its own play in the world. All the Gods can put forth such emanations from their being, identical with them in essence of consciousness and power though not commensurate. In a certain sense the universe itself can be said to be an emanation from the Supreme. In the consciousness of the sadhaka an emanation of the Mother will ordinarily wear the appearance, form and characteristics with which he is familiar.

In a sense the four Powers of the Mother may be called, because of their origin, her Emanations, just as the Gods may be called Emanations of the Divine, but they have a more permanent and fixed character; they are at once independent beings allowed their play by the Adyā Shakti and yet portions of the Mother, the Mahashakti, and she can always either manifest through them as separate beings or draw them together as her own various Personalities and hold them in herself, sometimes drawn back, sometimes at play, according to her will. In the supramental plane they are always in her and do not act independently but as intimate portions of the original Mahashakti and in close union and harmony with each other.

(5) Gods

These four Powers are the Mother's cosmic godheads, permanent in the world-play; they stand among the greater cosmic Godheads to whom allusion is made when it is said the Mother as the Mahashakti of this triple world "stands there (in the

Overmind plane) above the Gods”.¹⁹ The Gods, as has been already said, are in origin and essence permanent Emanations of the Divine put forth from the Supreme by the Transcendent Mother, the Adyā Shakti; in their cosmic action they are Powers and Personalities of the Divine each with his independent cosmic standing, function and work in the universe. They are not impersonal entities but cosmic Personalities, although they can and do ordinarily veil themselves behind the movement of impersonal forces. But while in the Overmind and the triple world they appear as independent beings, they return in the Supermind into the One and stand there united in a single harmonious action as multiple personalities of the one Person, the divine Purushottama.

(6) *Presence*

It is intended by the word Presence to indicate the sense and perception of the Divine as a Being, felt as present in one’s existence and consciousness or in relation with it, without the necessity of any farther qualification or description. Thus of the “ineffable Presence”²⁰ it can only be said that it is there and nothing more can or need be said about it, although at the same time one knows that all is there, personality and impersonality, Power and Light and Ananda and everything else, and that all these flow from that indescribable Presence. The word may be used sometimes in a less absolute sense, but that is always the fundamental significance, — the essential perception of the essential presence supporting everything else.

(7) *The Transcendent Mother*

This is what is termed the Adyā Shakti; she is the supreme

¹⁹ “*Determining all that shall be in this universe and in the terrestrial evolution by what she sees and feels and pours from her, she stands there above the Gods and all her Powers and Personalities are put out in front of her for the action. . . .*” — Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1999)*, p. 34.

²⁰ “*Alone, she harbours the absolute Power and the ineffable Presence. . . .*” — Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p. 29.

Consciousness and Power above the universe and it is by her that all the Gods are manifested, and even the supramental Ishwara comes into manifestation through her — the supramental Purushottama of whom the Gods are Powers and Personalities.

Passages from *The Mother*

What I want to know is — when does God take full charge of our sadhana?

The sadhana described in the *Arya* in the beginning was based on the conviction that God was the sadhak. In subsequent years, individual effort was permitted in *Arya*, something like cooperation between the individual and God.

This is an error. There is no such variation in the beginning of the *Arya* and in subsequent years.

In the message of February,²¹ the operator is God and the individual becomes the operated. The individual effort consists in fasting etc. before and during the operation.

What is all this about operations and fasting? Certainly, I cannot have written anything of the kind.

What are the signs of the coming of the Divine Grace? Does the Divine Grace take full charge of the sadhana as soon as the sadhak gives the charge? If not, when will it take full charge?

If he gives full charge truly and really, with an absolute sincerity of total surrender and does not come in the way of the divine Grace. How many can do that? It cannot be done by a word or by taking up a mental posture.

Calling on God to do everything and save one all the trouble and struggle is a self-deception and does not lead to freedom and perfection.²²

30 May 1927

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²¹ Chapter One of *The Mother* was first issued as a “message” on 21 February 1927. — Ed.

²² Sri Aurobindo incorporated this sentence into Chapter Two of *The Mother*, which he wrote on the back of this letter. — Ed.

Does our spiritual destiny mean the fulfilment of “the aim of our endeavour”, which you mentioned at the beginning of *The Mother*?²³

Yes. It means to find your true self, the Divine, and become in the Nature a conscious and illumined part of the Divine in manifestation.

14 November 1933

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“ . . . it is only the very highest supramental Force descending from above and opening from below that can victoriously handle the physical Nature and annihilate its difficulties . . .”
[p. 2].

“Opening from below” means this — that the supramental force descending awakes a response from below in the earth consciousness so that it is possible for a supramental activity to be formed in the material itself. All is involved as potentiality in the earth consciousness — life, mind, supermind — but it is only when Life Force descended from the life plane into the material that active and conscious organised life was possible — so it was only when mind descended that the latent mind in Matter awoke and could be organised. The supramental descent must create the same kind of opening from below so that a supramental consciousness can be organised in the material.

20 April 1933

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“ . . . it is only the very highest supramental Force . . . that can victoriously handle the physical Nature . . .” [p. 2]. Is this idea to be found anywhere in the Upanishads or Vedas? What is there in this Force which can deal with Matter, and why cannot other forces do it — for example the occult vital forces that are used to produce *kāya siddhi* in Hathayoga?

The physical Nature does not mean the body alone but the phrase includes the transformation of the whole physical mind, vital, material nature — not by imposing siddhis on them, but by

²³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Mother*, p. 1.

creating a new physical nature which is to be the habitation of the supramental being in a new evolution. I am not aware that this has been done by any Hathayogic or other process. Mental or vital occult power can only bring siddhis of the higher plane into the individual life — like the Sannyasi who could take any poison without harm, but he died of a poison after all when he forgot to observe the conditions of the siddhi. The working of the supramental power envisaged is not an influence on the physical giving it abnormal faculties, but an entrance and permeation changing it wholly into a supramentalised physical. I did not learn the idea from Veda or Upanishad, and I do not know if there is anything of the kind there. What I received about the Supermind was a direct, not a derived knowledge given to me; it was only afterwards that I found certain confirmatory revelations in the Upanishad and Veda. 11 September 1936

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“Detect first what is false or obscure in you . . . then alone can you rightly call for the divine Power to transform you” [*pp.* 4–5]. Does “rightly” mean “it is the right way of calling” or does it mean “then only you have the ‘right’ to call”?

It means “in the right way”.

“If behind your devotion and surrender you make a cover for your desires, egoistic demands . . .” [*p.* 3]. Does this mean “you use devotion and surrender as a *means* of fulfilling your desires and demands”?

Yes, practically it means that. I put it in that way so as to avoid suggesting that the devotion is altogether insincere and meant *only* as a cover. 12 December 1934

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No sadhak can rely entirely on the Divine in the beginning. He goes by his own effort. Even as he makes his own effort, many subtle beings, the power of the Divine, etc. must be helping the sadhak. Is not this kind of tapasya and self-dependence a form of the Divine Power’s help?

It has been clearly stated in *The Mother* that personal effort is necessary so long as the transference to the Divine Power cannot be complete [p. 8]. It is the fact that all power is the Divine's and therefore self-effort is also a use of the Divine Power conceded by the Divine, but there is a great practical difference between the delegated use and the direct Divine Action.

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In the book *The Mother* Sri Aurobindo says, "The personal effort required is a triple labour of aspiration, rejection and surrender." And "rejection of the movements of the lower nature — rejection of the mind's ideas, opinions, preferences, habits, constructions, so that the true knowledge may find free room in a silent mind, — rejection of the vital nature's desires . . .", etc. [p. 9]. How can I apply this in my working life?

This has to be done in life itself — whether the life is in an Asram or outside, the rule and method is the same. It is an internal change for which one must become conscious of the lower nature as well as of the psychic and spiritual workings. Meditation is usually necessary for that but so also is life, for it is only life that tests the genuineness of the change. 7 April 1938

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" . . . surrender of oneself and all one is and has and every plane of the consciousness and every movement to the Divine and the Shakti" [p. 10]. Can I take this to mean surrender of the outward life to the Universal Nature through reason and will (i.e. a rational adaptation of the material life to the ways of Nature) and surrender of the inward life to the Divine through faith?

No. Universal Nature is a mass of forces, mental, vital and physical. The Divine is above with its supreme Shakti — and within behind Nature. 25 December 1934

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In *The Mother*, you have said: "Ask for nothing but the divine, spiritual and supramental Truth" [p. 13]. Should one have

such a high aspiration? The general impression in the Ashram is that it would be laughable to try.

There is nothing laughable in aspiring for the supramental Truth so long as one understands that it is not possible to have it at once and one must go through a long preparation and development. What is laughable is to think you have it when you are floundering about it in mental and vital half-truths or delusions — that is what some have done and it is probably these bad examples that have created the impression of which you speak.

2 June 1933

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In *The Mother* you write that the Mother is the consciousness and force of the Ishwara [p. 28]. But my experience here is that Ishwara is the consciousness and force of the Supreme Mother. Could you please make it clear to me?

The Mother is the consciousness and force of the Divine — or, it may be said, she is the Divine in its consciousness-force. The Ishwara as Lord of the Cosmos does come out of the Mother who takes her place beside him as the cosmic Shakti — the cosmic Ishwara is one aspect of the Divine. The experience therefore is correct so far as it goes.

16 November 1934

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In *The Mother* you write: “There are three ways of being of the Mother of which you can become aware when you enter into touch of oneness with the Conscious Force that upholds us and the universe” [p. 28]. Is it the Cosmic Spirit that is meant or the Overmind?

It is the Divine Shakti — who acts on all the planes and has all the aspects.

16 June 1933

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I am or was under the impression that Mother is the Cosmic and Supracosmic Mahashakti.

I don't quite understand the question. I have explained it in *The*

Mother [pp. 28–29] that there are three aspects, transcendent, universal and individual of the Mother. 31 May 1933

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“At the summit of this manifestation of which we are a part there are worlds of infinite existence, consciousness, force and bliss over which the Mother stands as the unveiled eternal Power” [p. 32]. Are we to understand that the Transcendent Mother stands above the Ananda plane? There would then be four steps of the Divine Shakti:

(1) The Transcendent Mahashakti who stands above the Ananda plane and who bears the supreme Divine in her eternal consciousness.

(2) The Mahashakti immanent in the worlds of Sat-Chit-Ananda, where all beings move in an ineffable completeness.

(3) The Supramental Mahashakti immanent in the worlds of Supermind.

(4) The Cosmic Mahashakti immanent in the lower hemisphere.

Yes; that is all right. One speaks often however of all above the lower hemisphere as part of the transcendence. This is because the Supermind and Ananda are not manifested in *our* universe at present, but are planes above it. For us the higher hemisphere is पर [para], the Supreme Transcendence is परात्पर [parātpara]. The Sanskrit terms are here clearer than the English.

27 January 1932

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In *The Mother* you write that the Mother as the Cosmic Mahashakti “stands there above the Gods and all her Powers and Personalities are put out in front of her for the action and she sends down emanations of them into these lower worlds to intervene, to govern, to battle and conquer, to lead and turn their cycles, to direct the total and the individual lines of their forces” [pp. 34–35]. Does this imply that the World War or the Bolshevik Revolution or the Satyagraha movement were in some manner arranged by the Mother?

They are incidents in the cosmic plan and so arranged by the

cosmic Mahashakti and worked out by men under the impulse of the forces of Nature.

1 June 1933

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You write in *The Mother* that there are Vibhutis of the powers and personalities of the Ishwara and Vibhutis of the Mother, but that in both cases it is the action of the Grace of the Mother that alone can effect a transformation of the Vibhuti [p. 35]. I would like to know the difference. Take for example, Christ, Chaitanya, Ramakrishna, Confucius, Zarathustra, Buddha, Shankara, Mohammed, Alexander, Napoleon — among these well-known figures which are Vibhutis of the Mother and which are Vibhutis of the Ishwara? And what about the Mother's action in Avatars like Rama and Krishna?

The Mother's Vibhutis would normally be feminine personalities most of whom would be dominated by one of the four personalities of the Mother. The others you mention would be personalities and powers of the Ishwara, but in them also, as in all, the Mother's force would act. I do not quite catch the question about the transformation of the Vibhutis. All creation and transformation is the work of the Mother.

29 October 1935

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Since all creation is her work, can it be taken that it is the personalities of the Mother who, behind the veil, prepare the conditions for the descent of the Avatar or Vibhutis?

If you mean the divine personalities of the Mother — the answer is yes. It may even be said that each Vibhuti draws his energies from the Four, from one of them predominantly in most cases, as Napoleon from Mahakali, Rama from Mahalakshmi, Augustus Caesar from Mahasaraswati.

31 October 1935

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“Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe and in her dealings with the terrestrial play” [p. 37].

What are you speaking of here?

Of the Mother in her universal workings.

13 July 1933

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“Wisdom, Strength, Harmony, Perfection are their several attributes and it is these powers that they bring with them into the world, manifest in a human disguise in their Vibhutis and shall found in the divine degree of their ascension in those who can open their earthly nature to the direct and living influence of the Mother” [pp. 38–39].

I am afraid it [*a translation of the above passage*] is still wrong. Let me try to explain otherwise. It means “they bring the powers into the world (in their ordinary and in man their human degree), manifest them (in a half-divine degree but) in a human disguise in their Vibhutis and shall (hereafter), in those who can open to the direct influence of the Mother, raise them (the powers) to their highest divine degree and establish them in that degree.” Please don’t translate my explanation, for that will make it very awkward; I only want the true sense of the sentence expressed in the translation as briefly and elegantly as possible. You might send me up what you propose to put for approval and only after approval put in the proof so that there may not be too many erasures.

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What is meant by “height” in the phrase “not wideness but height” [p. 42]?

It is very much as we speak of high ideas, high feelings, high aspirations. In that sense Mahakali’s movement is a high, swift action, very effective at the point touched, but not wide, patient, comprehensive like Maheshwari’s.

11 August 1933

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This morning, when I said that I thought that the Mother was putting pressure on me, you wrote that the word “pressure” was “entirely wrong”. If that is so, what is the sense

of the word “pressure” in this passage from *The Mother*: “[Maheshwari] puts on them the required pressure” [p. 41]? You wrote also, in regard to Mahakali, of “the vehemence of her pressure” [p. 44].

I was speaking of your case only — it was not my intention to say that the Mother never uses pressure. But pressure also can be of various kinds. There is the pressure of the Force when it is entering the mind or vital or body — a pressure to go faster, a pressure to build or form, a pressure to break and many more. In your case if there is any pressure it is that of help or support or removal of an attack, but it does not seem to me that that can properly be called pressure.

In the same book you say of Mahakali, “her hands are outstretched to strike and to succour” [p. 44]. What do you mean here by “strike”?

It expresses her general action in the world. She strikes at the Asuras, she strikes also at everything that has to be got rid of or destroyed, at the obstacles to the sadhana etc. I may say that the Mother never uses the Mahakali power in your case nor the Mahakali pressure.

5 June 1936

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About the Mother’s Mahakali aspect it is said in *The Mother*: “When she is allowed to intervene in her strength, then in one moment are broken like things without consistence the obstacles that immobilise or the enemies that assail the seeker” [p. 44]. How is this intervention of the Mahakali force felt?

It is felt as if something swift, sudden, decisive and imperative. When it intervenes, it has a kind of divine or supramental sanction behind it and is like a fiat against which there is no appeal. What is done cannot be reversed or undone. The adverse forces may try, may even touch or invade, but they retire baffled and it is seen as soon as they withdraw that the past ground has remained intact — it is felt even in the attack. Also the difficulties that were strong before touched by this fiat lose their power, their

verisimilitude destroyed or are weak shadows that come only to flicker and fade away. I say “allowed”, because this supreme action of Mahakali is comparatively rare, the action of the other Powers or a partial action of Mahakali is more common.

24 August 1933

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In the book *The Mother* what is the sense of “false adaptation” [p. 53] — is it something like a mason doing a coolie’s work?

Well, yes — it means misapplication of any kind and fitting things in where they do not really fit — whether with regard to ideas, activities, or anything else.

“Only when the Four have founded their harmony and freedom of movement in the transformed mind and life and body . . .” [p. 56]. Here does “transformed” mean the full transformation?

At any rate a sufficient *foundation* of the harmony in a sufficiently transformed Nature for still greater things to come in without perturbation of the Nature.

29 March 1933

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“There are among them Presences indispensable for the supramental realisation, — most of all one who is her Personality of that mysterious and powerful ecstasy and Ananda which flows from a supreme divine Love, the Ananda that alone can heal the gulf between the highest heights of the supramental spirit and the lowest abysses of Matter, the Ananda that holds the key of a wonderful divinest Life and even now supports from its secrecies the work of all the other Powers of the universe” [pp. 55–56]. Is not the Personality referred to in this passage the Radha-Power, which is spoken of as Premamayi Radha, Mahaprana Shakti and Hladini Shakti?

Yes — but the images of the Radha-Krishna *līlā* are taken from the vital world and therefore it is only a minor manifestation of the Radha Shakti that is there depicted. That is why she is called Mahaprana Shakti and Hladini Shakti. What is referred to is

not this minor form, but the full Power of Love and Ananda above. 7 February 1934

The Riddle of This World

In reference to what Prof. Sorley has written on *The Riddle of This World*, the book of course was not meant as a full or direct statement of my thought and, as it was written to sadhaks mostly, many things were taken for granted there. Most of the major ideas — e.g. Overmind — were left without elucidation. To make the ideas implied clear to the intellect, they must be put with precision in an intellectual form — so far as that is possible with supra-intellectual things. What is written in the book can be clear to those who have gone far enough in experience, but for most it can only be suggestive. 10 April 1934

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All that was bowed and rapt lifting clasped hands out of pain
and night,
How hast thou filled with murmuring ecstasy, made proud and
bright!
Thou hast chosen the grateful earth for thy own in her hour of
anguish and strife,
Surprised by thy rapid feet of joy, O Beloved of the Master of
Life.²⁴

Your answer is not only fine poetry but it is a true explanation of the descent of the soul into the Ignorance. It is the adventure into the Night (the introduction of the Light, Joy, Immortality) to see whether they cannot be established there — so that there may be a new experience of the Divine and joy of the Divine through separation and union (or reunion) on a new basis. It is what I have hinted at in *The Riddle of This World*.

²⁴ From "Lakshmi", a Bengali poem by Dilip Kumar Roy, as translated by Sri Aurobindo. See Translations, volume 5 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 561. — Ed.

Passages from *The Riddle of This World*

In the *Riddle* you speak of a conversion inwards and a series of conversions upwards.²⁵ Does the upward conversion begin only after the inward conversion, i.e. the psychicisation of the lower nature, is complete?

Not necessarily.

Or do both kinds of work go on simultaneously?

It differs with different people, but the upward conversions cannot go very far or cannot be secure if the lower nature is not psychicised — for there is then always the possibility of a big or even a decisive fall if there is something seriously unpsychic in the lower nature.

29 March 1935

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What precisely is meant by the “intermediate zone” [pp. 35–45]? Has everyone to pass through it to reach the truth?

The intermediate zone means simply a confused condition or passage in which one is getting out of the personal consciousness and opening into the cosmic (cosmic Mind, cosmic vital, cosmic physical, something perhaps of the cosmic higher Mind) without having yet transcended the human mind levels. One is not in possession of or direct contact with the divine Truth *on its own levels*, but one can receive something from them, even from the Overmind, indirectly. Only, as one is still immersed in the cosmic Ignorance, all that comes from above can be mixed, perverted, taken hold of for their purposes by lower, even by hostile Powers.

It is not necessary for everyone to struggle through the intermediate zone. If one has purified oneself, if there is no abnormal vanity, egoism, ambition or other strong misleading element, or if one is vigilant and on one’s guard, or if the psychic is in front, one can either pass rapidly and directly or with a minimum of

²⁵ *Sri Aurobindo*, *The Riddle of This World* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Asbram, 1973), p. 5.

trouble into the higher zones of consciousness where one is in direct contact with the Divine Truth.

On the other hand the passage through the higher zones — higher Mind, illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind, is obligatory — they are the true Intermediaries between the present consciousness and the Supermind. 28 December 1933

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About the intermediate zone, you wrote [*in the preceding letter*]: “One is not in possession of or direct contact with the divine Truth *on its own levels*.” Are the planes of Higher Mind or Intuition in direct contact with the truth?

Yes — because it is there that one opens to the cosmic Truth (as opposed to the cosmic Ignorance) — the cosmic Divine etc. It is not the full power of the Truth — that one reaches only in the Supermind where one is in direct communion with the Transcendent Reality; but it is still manifested Truth and not manifested Ignorance. This, of course, is when one can rise to those levels and stay there for a time at least or when the mind etc. are already so much changed that they can receive without perverting or distorting or misusing and diminishing too much. It is not so difficult once that is done to receive the Truth in consciousness — what is more difficult is to make it dynamic in its purity for life. 29 December 1933

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You write in *The Riddle of This World*: “Very readily they come to think that they are in the full cosmic consciousness when it is only some front or small part of it or some larger Mind, Life-Power or subtle physical ranges with which they have entered into dynamic connection” [*p. 37*]. What is meant here by “larger Mind”?

It means simply larger than the limited personal mind. It is a play of some combination of cosmic Mind-Forces but not the full cosmic Consciousness, not even the Cosmic Mind. It belongs usually to the Ignorance. 30 March 1934

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About polytheism, I certainly accept the truth of the many forms and personalities of the One which since the Vedic times has been the spiritual essence of Indian polytheism — a secondary aspect in the seeking for the one and only Divine. But the passage referred to by Professor Sorley (page 56 [*of the first edition*])²⁶ is concerned with something else — the little godlings and Titans spoken of there are supraphysical beings of other planes. It is not meant to be suggested that they are real Godheads and entitled to worship — on the contrary it is indicated that to accept their influence is to move towards error and confusion or a deviation from the true spiritual way. No doubt they have some power to create, they are makers of forms in their own way and in their limited domain, but so are men too creators of outward and inward things in their own domain and limits — and even man's creative powers can have a repercussion on the supraphysical levels.

10 April 1934

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I have always believed that there was an existence after death akin to our existence in this world minus the physical body.

The soul goes out in a subtle body.

On the strength of certain phenomena that did not appear to me to be capable of being summarily dismissed, I further believed that after a period of confusion immediately following death, the recollections of the life just preceding returned, and persisted till rebirth.

Only for a time, not till rebirth — otherwise the stamp could be so strong that remembrance of past births even after taking a new body would be the rule rather than the exception.

I was also disposed to believe that in cases of pure and unalloyed attachment the relationships of one birth persisted in successive births, the number depending on the strength of attachment.

²⁶ “. . . for these intermediate planes are full of little Gods or strong Daityas. . . .” *The Riddle of This World* (1973), p. 38.

This is possible, but not a law — as a rule the same relationship would not be constantly repeated — the same people often meet again and again on earth in different lives, but the relations are different. The purpose of rebirth would not be served if the same personality with the same relations and experiences were incessantly repeated.

All these beliefs were shattered to pieces when someone drew my attention to certain statements of yours in the book *The Riddle of This World* [pp. 53–54, 58–60], in which I understood you to say that in the case of forms of life lower than man there is a complete annihilation of the ego on death.

That is not the case.

I further understood you to say that in the case of man, the ego persisted in a static condition of complete rest and carried with it (except in a very few exceptional cases) only the essence of the experiences and the inclinations gathered and acquired in the life just preceding.

This is said not of the ego, but of the psychic being after it has shed its vital and other sheaths and is resting in the psychic world. Before that it passes through vital and other worlds on its way to the psychic plane.

I would like to know whether it is possible to come into direct touch with those who have departed from this world.

Yes, so long as they are near enough to the earth (it is usually supposed by those who have occult experience that it is for three years only) or if they are earth-bound or if they are of those who do not proceed to the psychic plane but linger near the earth and are soon reborn.

Universal statements cannot be easily made about these things — there is a general line, but individual cases vary to an almost indefinite extent.

[*Note by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary:*] You will tell him that

I do not carry on correspondence usually with people outside, but as his questions were from the book, I have asked you to give him my answers to his questions. 28 February 1938

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“It is not to be denied, no spiritual experience will deny that this is an unideal and unsatisfactory world, strongly marked with the stamp of inadequacy, suffering, evil” [p. 61].

That is when you look at what the world ought to be and lay stress on what it should be. The idealist’s question is why should there be pain at all, even if it is outweighed by the fundamental pleasure of existence. The real crux is why should inadequacy, limit and suffering come across this natural pleasure of life. It does not mean that life is essentially miserable in its very nature.

23 July 1935

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Weber writes of Spinoza’s conception of God: “God is not the cause of the world in the proper and usual sense of the term, a cause acting from without and creating it once for all, but the permanent substratum of things, the innermost substance of the universe.”²⁷ Does this not find a parallel in the following lines from *The Riddle of This World*: “For it is not . . . a supracosmic, arbitrary, personal Deity himself altogether uninvolved in the fall who has imposed evil and suffering on creatures made capriciously by his fiat” [pp. 65–66]. I wonder why Spinoza did not arrive at a convincing explanation of the problem of evil and misery.

The European type of monism is usually pantheistic and weaves the universe and the Divine so intimately together that they can hardly be separated. But what explanation of the evil and misery can there be there? The Indian view is that the Divine is the inmost substance of the Universe, but he is also outside it, transcendent; good and evil, happiness and misery are only phenomena of cosmic experience due to a division and diminution

²⁷ Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy* (London: Longmans, Green, 1904), pp. 328–29.

of consciousness in the manifestation, but are not part of the essence or of the undivided whole-consciousness either of the Divine or of our own spiritual being. 6 October 1935

Passages from *Lights on Yoga*

You write in a letter: “One must not enter on this path, far vaster and more arduous than most ways of Yoga, unless one is sure of the psychic call and of one’s readiness to go through to the end.”²⁸

It is simply an indication to those who wish to enter on to this Path that they must have a call (not take it up as they would take any way for spiritual experience) and must be prepared for great difficulties to surmount.

Can it be said that you have seen in all those who are permanent members of the Asram this readiness to go through to the end?

The readiness to go through to the end is a thing dependent on the will of the sadhak. That will may be there in the beginning and flag afterwards. All who are here did not come as permanent members and some were never told that they were made permanent but they have stuck on and Mother has not sent them away.

What is the exact significance of “to the end”?

Until the siddhi — but it means essentially here to go through in spite of the difficulties. 20 October 1934

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“The difference or contrast between the Personal and Impersonal is a truth of the Overmind — there is no separate truth

²⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Lights on Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1981), pp. 2–3. *Lights on Yoga* is made up of letters by Sri Aurobindo, who revised the letters for publication in the book, which was brought out in 1935. The writer of this question of October 1934 cited the original version of the letter, which Sri Aurobindo wrote on 6 April 1928 (see page 540 of the present volume). — Ed.

of them in the Supermind, they are inseparably one” [p. 5]. If this refers to the Personal and Impersonal Divine, the question of the difference can hardly arise, because the Personal Divine (i.e. the Avatar) is not always there. It is only very rarely that the Divine becomes the Avatar to come on earth.

I do not understand. The Personal Divine does not mean the Avatar. What I said was that the scission between the two aspects of the Divine is a creation of the Overmind which takes various aspects of the Divine and separates them into separate entities. Thus it divides Sat, Chit and Ananda, so that they become three separate aspects different from each other. In fact in the Reality there is no separateness, the three aspects are so fused into each other, so inseparably one that they are a single undivided reality. It is the same with the Personal and Impersonal, the Saguna and Nirguna, the Silent and the Active Brahman. In the Reality they are not contrasted and incompatible aspects; what we call Personality and what we call Impersonality are inseparably fused together in a single Truth. In fact “fused together” even is a wrong phrase, because there they were never separated so that they have to be fused. All the quarrels about either the Impersonal being the only true truth or the Personal being the only highest truth are mind-created quarrels derivative from this dividing aspect of the Overmind. The Overmind does not deny any of the aspects as the Mind does, it admits them all as aspects of the One Truth, but by separating them it originates the quarrel in the more ignorant and more limited and divided Mind, because the Mind cannot see how two opposite things can exist together in one Truth, how the Divine can be *nirguṇo guṇī*; — having no experience of what is behind the two words it takes each in an absolute sense. The Impersonal is Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, not a Person, but a state. The Person is the Existent, the Conscious, the Blissful; consciousness, existence, bliss taken as separate things are only states of his being. But in fact the two (personal being and eternal state) are inseparable and are one reality.

13 October 1935

You write in *Lights on Yoga*: “It is a mistake to dwell on the lower nature and its obstacles, which is the negative side of the Sadhana. . . . The positive side of experience of the descent is the more important thing” [*cf. p. 5*]. But there may be obstacles that themselves prevent the experience of descent. If that is the case, I suppose one would have to deal with them in order to clear the road.

The statement is a general one and like all general statements subject to qualification according to circumstances. What I meant was to discourage what some do which is to be always dwelling on their difficulties and shortcomings only, for that makes them turn for ever like squirrels in a cage always in the same circle of difficulties without the least breaking of light through the clouds. The sentence would be more accurate or generally applicable if it were written “dwell too much” or “dwell solely”.²⁹ Naturally, without rejection nothing can be done. And in hard periods or moments concentration on the difficulties is inevitable. Also in the early stages one has often to do a great amount of clearance work so that the road can be followed at all.

29 April 1935

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“The taking away of the Force of destruction implies a creation that will not be destroyed but last and develop always” [*pp. 7–8*]. Does this mean that in the Truth-Creation the force of destruction will be taken away and only the forces of creation and preservation remain? Does it mean that nobody will die — not even plants and animals?

That might be true if the whole world were to be supramentalised and that supramentalisation meant inability to change or put off a form, but it is not so.

16 October 1935

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You write in *Lights on Yoga* that the subconscious “receives obscurely the impressions of all things and stores them up in

²⁹ Sri Aurobindo in fact wrote “dwell too much” in the passage in *Lights on Yoga*. The correspondent omitted “too much” when he transcribed the passage. — Ed.

itself” [p. 11]. Where then are stored all the words, images and thoughts that we say come out of memory? What is the difference between storing in memory and this subconscious storing?

The clear memory of words, images and thoughts is an action of the conscious mind, not the unconscious. Of course the memory goes behind, so to speak, in the back part of the mind, but it can be brought out. Also the memory can be lost or defaced, so that one remembers wrongly or forgets altogether, but that is still an imperfect action of the conscious mind, not an action of the subconscious. What the subconscious keeps is a mass of impressions, not of clear or exact images and these can come up as in dreams in an incoherent jumble distorted altogether or else in the waking state as a mechanical recurrence or repetition of the same suggestions, impulses (subconscious vital) or sensations. There is a recognisable difference between the two functionings. 26 October 1935

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“The true vital being . . . is wide, vast, calm, strong, without limitations, firm and immovable, capable of all power, all knowledge, all Ananda” [p. 13]. Does this imply that the true vital belongs to the cosmic or supracosmic consciousness? If not, how can it have such qualities?

The true being mental, vital or subtle physical has always the greater qualities of its plane — it is the Purusha and like the psychic, though in another way, the projection of the Divine, therefore in connection with the Higher Consciousness and reflects something of it, though it is not altogether that — it is also in tune with the cosmic Truth.

In the change of the vital nature, is the external surface vital to be entirely effaced and replaced by the true vital or is it to be kept and changed into the nature of the true vital? In either case, what is the need of an external vital at all if the true vital is already there?

The true vital is in the inner consciousness, the external is that

which is instrumental for the present play of Prakriti in the surface personality. When the change comes, the true vital rejects what is out of tune with its own truth from the external and makes it a true instrument for its expression, a means of expression of its inner will, not a thing of responses to the suggestions of the lower Nature. The strong distinction between the two practically disappears.

19 October 1935

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If the true vital is “capable of all power, all knowledge, all Ananda” [p. 13], it would seem to be the equal of the supramental vital itself or the vital of the Ishwara. How is it possible for an individual to have such a vital?

It is capable of receiving the movements of the higher consciousness, and afterwards it can be capable of receiving the still greater supramental power and Ananda. If it is not, then the descent of the higher consciousness would be impossible and supramentalisation would be impossible. It is not meant that it possesses these things itself in its own right and that as soon as one is aware of the true vital, one gets all these things as inherent in the true vital.

20 October 1935

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“This central being has two forms — above, it is Jivatman, . . . below, it is the psychic being . . .” [p. 15]. Is it meant that the Jivatman and the psychic being are different *forms* of the central being? If they are *forms* of the central being, how can they be *beings*?

“Forms” is not used in a physical sense here. The central being is the being in its original self, the psychic being is the same in the becoming.

Again, when one rises from the psychic being below to the Jivatman above, does the psychic being cease to be? And when one rises above the Jivatman does the central being become formless?

The evolution or becoming continues, so the psychic also continues, just as the rest of the nature continues, only spiritualised and felt as one being in all planes. It is not a question of formed or formless. As I have said “forms” is not used here in its outward but its inward or metaphysical sense. 11 October 1935

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“The Jivatman . . . knows itself as one centre of the multiple Divine, not as the Parameshwara. It is important to remember the distinction; for, otherwise, if there is the least vital egoism, one may begin to think of oneself as an Avatar or lose balance like Hridaya with Ramakrishna” [*pp.* 15–16]. Can the Jivatman status be realised before vital egoism is abolished?

One can get the knowledge or perception in the higher mind “I am That” while the vital is still untransformed, — then the vital ego can take it up and give it a wrong application.

How can one go so far as to think of oneself as an Avatar? Is it because, if there is union with the Divine, the sense of all-powerfulness that it brings is reflected on the vital ego as something grandiose?

Yes. It is when one feels that one is the Divine, *So aham* but not in the impersonal way to which all is the one Brahman, the One Self, but in the personal way “I am God, the Parameshwara”. It is as in the Puranic story in which the knowledge was given both to Indra and Virochana and the God understood but the Asura concluded that he the ego was the Divine and therefore went about trying to impose his ego on the universe. 26 November 1935

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“The ego . . . does not cease with the body” [*pp.* 16–17]. Does this mean that it is carried by the psychic as a separate principle after death, just as the psychic sometimes carries with it a highly developed mental or vital being, or does it mean that it is taken up in the psychic as a seed-*samskāra* or that it exists side by side with the psychic in the after-death state?

It is only meant that the separative ego is not a creation of birth in the physical body; the mental and the vital have it also. So long as the mental and vital are subject to ignorance, the ego will last also. When the psychic being goes into rest it naturally takes it with the essence of its past experience and in coming back it takes up a mental, vital and physical existence which has the mark of the ego and the ignorance. 29 October 1935

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“Moreover, the multiple Divine is an eternal reality antecedent to the creation here” [p. 17]. Does this mean that souls existed eternally separate from the Brahman? In other words are Jiva and Brahman eternally separate?

The Brahman is not a mathematical One with the Many as an illusion — he is an infinite One with an infinite multiplicity implied in the Oneness. This is not Dwaitavada — for in Dwaitavada the many are quite different from the One. In the Sankhya Prakriti is one but the Purushas are many, so it is not Sankhya, nor I suppose Jainism, unless Jainism is quite different from what it is usually represented to be.

Does “antecedent to the creation” mean creation as it took place from Supermind downward or does it simply mean the material creation?

The material creation or the creation of the universe generally.

If the multiple Divine is to be taken as an eternal reality, does this not come down to something like Jainism and Sankhya, in which several Purushas exist eternally? This would be a pure Dwaitavada.

It is on the contrary a complete Adwaitavada, more complete than Shankara’s who splits Brahman into two incompatible principles — the Brahman and a universe of Maya which is not Brahman and yet somehow exists. In this view which is that of the Gita and some other Vedantic schools the Para Shakti and the Many are also Brahman. Unity and Multiplicity are aspects of

the Brahman, just as are Personality and Impersonality, Nirguna and Saguna.

18 March 1936

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“ . . . if the mental is strongly developed, then the mental being can remain [when the body is dissolved]; so also can the vital, provided they are organised by and centred around the true psychic being; they share the immortality of the psychic” [p. 18]. Does this mean that the vital of strong persons like Napoleon is carried forward in the future lives? But how can it be said that their vital was centred around the psychic being? It is only about the Bhaktas and the Jnanis that we can say that their vital was centred around the psychic.

If one has had a strong spiritual development, that makes it easier to retain the developed mental or vital after death. But it is not absolutely necessary that the person should have been a Bhakta or a Jnani. One like Shelley or like Plato for instance could be said to have a developed mental being centred round the psychic — of the vital the same can hardly be said. Napoleon had a strong vital but not one organised round the psychic being.

12 October 1935

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“It is really for the vital part of the being that Shraddha and rites are done — to help the being to get rid of the vital vibrations which still attach it to the earth or to the vital worlds, so that it may pass quickly to its rest in the psychic peace” [p. 18]. Does this mean that the Shraddha ceremony performed at present by the Brahmins is correct? Does feeding the caste and the Brahmins fulfil the purpose?

I only said what was originally *meant* by the ceremonies — the rites. I was not referring to the feeding of the caste or the Brahmins which is not a rite or ceremony. Whether the Shraddha as performed is actually effective is another matter — for those who perform it have not either the knowledge or the occult power.

11 April 1935

Bases of Yoga

I have been reading your *Bases of Yoga* — a most staggering book: the Himalayan conditions for success you impose — well, shall the likes of us ever fulfil a hundredth part of such countless conditions?

Conditions for success? But these are not conditions for doing the sadhana, but the basic conditions for the integral siddhi — they are, as it might be said, basic siddhis, realised foundations on which the total and permanent siddhi can be created — or one may say they are the constituents of the Yogic as opposed to the ordinary consciousness. When one has arrived fully at this Yogic consciousness, one can be called a Yogi, till then one is a sadhak. So much as all that is not demanded immediately from a sadhak. From the sadhak all that is asked is “a sincerity in the aspiration and a patient will to arrive . . . in spite of all obstacles, then the opening in one form or another is sure to come.”³⁰ “All sincere aspiration has its effect; if you are sincere you will grow into the divine life” [*p.* 26]. Again “One cannot become altogether this at once, but if one aspires at all times and calls in the aid of the Divine Shakti with a true heart and a straightforward will, one grows more and more into the true consciousness” [*cf. p.* 27]. It is of course said that the success will come sooner or later, — it is for that reason that patience is indispensable. But these are not Himalayan conditions — it is not putting an impossible price on what is asked for. As for the difficulty, as it has also been said in the book, when one once enters into the true (Yogic) consciousness, “then you see that everything can be done, even if at present only a slight beginning has been made; but a beginning is enough, once the Force, the Power are there” [*pp.* 33–34]. It is not really on the capacity of the outer nature that success depends, (for the outer nature all self-exceeding seems impossibly difficult), but on the inner being and to the inner being all is possible. One has only to get into contact with the inner being and change the outer

³⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bases of Yoga* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1981), p. 24.

view and consciousness from the inner — that is the work of the sadhana and it is sure to come with sincerity, aspiration, and patience. All that is not excessively stern or exacting.

As a description of the constituents of the Yogic consciousness, the bases of realisation, I don't think the book can be called staggering or its suggestions Himalayan — for in fact they have already been stated by the Gita and other books on Yoga and, after all, thousands of people have realised them in part at least or in the inner being — though not so well in the outer. But to realise the inner being is quite enough for a foundation — for many it is quite enough even as a last state, for those who do not seek the transformation of the outer nature. Here too, even if one puts the whole ideal, it is not alleged that it must be all done at once or as a first condition for the greater endeavour.

26 June 1936

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You feel depressed on reading the *Bases of Yoga*, because your mind becomes active at the wrong end; from the point of view of your obsession about inability, hopelessness, past failure enforcing future failure. The right way to read these things is not to be mentally active, but receive with a quiet mind leaving the knowledge given to go in and bear its fruit hereafter at the proper time, not ask how one can practise it now or try to apply it to immediate circumstances in which it may not fit. I have told you already that these things are the basic siddhis which constitute the Yogic consciousness — they are things towards which one has to move but cannot be established now and offhand. What has to be done now is for each the thing necessary for him at present. I have indicated what is necessary at present for you, the growth of the psychic being which had begun and the power of contact and communication which it will bring with the inner consciousness and through it with the Divine Power or Presence. But for that to grow the mind must keep more quiet, not insisting, not desponding at every moment, but steadily aspiring and letting the things of which these were indications grow from within.

28 June 1936

Passages from *Bases of Yoga*

I do not remember the context of the sentence quoted,³¹ without which it is not possible to say what was meant by its not being the first aim of the Yoga. That may mean it is not the one to be pursued at the beginning, for first there should be the union in the heart of the personal being with the Divine. Or it may mean that it does not take priority or importance over all others. For both personality and impersonality have their claims and join together in the final realisation of what transcends and unites them both in one.

What has to disappear is the personal separative ego — the dualities of course also. The quickest though not the final way to extinguish ego is to make it disappear in impersonality. When all is one, universal or infinite then there is no place for the sense of ego — the dualities also begin to disappear. But the difficulty is that usually this realisation is confined to the mind or the above-mind while in the vital the stamp of ego remains and is felt in the life and its actions and reactions. Even if full impersonality comes in the vital and physical also, there remains the impossibility, all being impersonal, of having any relation with the Divine. What has therefore to be done is to lose the small personality in impersonality, but also by that loss to discover the true personality which is a portion of the Divine. This person is not separative and limited but is a universal individual, has the sense of uniting with all, but also the power of love and worship for the Divine. That is why I say that to merge the personal consciousness is not the first (or the whole) aim of the Yoga.

November 1935

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In *Bases of Yoga* one reads, “It is with the Mother who is always with you and in you that you converse” [p. 56]. Could you kindly explain to me how one converses with the Mother?

³¹ “Also to merge the personal consciousness is not the first aim of the Yoga. . . .” *Bases of Yoga*, p. 1.

One hears the voice or the thought speaking inwardly and one answers inwardly. Only it is not always safe for the sadhak if there is any insincerity of ego, desire, vanity, ambition in him — for then he may construct a voice or thought in his mind and ascribe it to the Mother and it will say to him pleasing and flattering things which mislead him. Or he may mistake some other Voice for the Mother's.

2 July 1936

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You write in *Bases of Yoga*, “All the ordinary vital movements . . . are waves from the general Nature, Prakriti,” and “The desires come from outside . . .” [*p.* 61]. If desires are only waves from outside (Prakriti), what then is the vital itself? Is not desire its main constituent?

There can be a vital without desire. When desire disappears from the being, the vital does not disappear with it.

Is not the vital itself part of the same Prakriti?

By Prakriti is meant universal Prakriti. Universal Prakriti entering into the vital being creates desires which appear by its habitual response as an individual nature; but if the habitual desires she throws in are rejected and exiled, the being remains but the old individual prakriti of vital desire is no longer there — a new nature is formed responding to the Truth above and not to the lower Nature.

What determines the *first* response to these waves? One may suppose that the habit of response is carried over from life to life. But what determined the response when we were animals in some distant past?

Universal Prakriti determined it and the soul or Purusha accepted it. In the acceptance lies the responsibility. The Purusha is that which sanctions or refuses. The vital being responds to the ordinary life waves in the animal; man responds to them but has the power of mental control. He has also, as the mental Purusha is awake in him, the power to choose whether he shall have desire

or train his being to surmount it. Finally, there is the possibility of bringing down a higher nature which will not be subject to desire but act on another vital principle. December 1936

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You write in *Bases of Yoga*, “The whole principle of this Yoga is to give oneself entirely to the Divine alone . . . and to bring down into ourselves . . . all the transcendent light . . . and Ananda of the supramental Divine. . . .” And then, “It is only after becoming one with the supramental Divine . . .” and also, “It is only the bringing down of the supramental Light, Power and Bliss . . .” [pp. 70–72]. These passages indicate that it is possible for the Jiva to rise up into and bring down the supramental consciousness. But in the *Arya* you define the supermind as the truth-will of Sachchidananda. How could any human being except one who has come for the divine manifestation reach or bring down the supermind? This is something for the Divine alone.

It is the very principle of this Yoga that only by the supramentalisation of the consciousness which means rising above mind to supermind and the descent of the supermind into the nature can the final transformation be made. So if nobody can rise above mind to supermind or obtain the descent of the supermind, then logically this Yoga becomes impossible. Every being is in essence one with the Divine and in his individual being a portion of the Divine, so there is no insuperable bar to his becoming supramental. It is no doubt impossible for the human nature being mental in its basis to overcome the Ignorance and rise to or obtain the descent of the Supermind by its own unaided effort, but by surrender to the Divine it can be done. One brings it down into the earth Nature through his own consciousness and so opens the way for the others, but the change has to be repeated in each consciousness to become individually effective. 29 July 1936

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“In this Yoga . . . there can be no place for vital relations or interchanges with others. . . . Still worse would it be if this interchange took the form of a sexual relation . . .” [p. 70].

The first of these sentences seems to refer to relations between men and men or women and women. But didn't you once say that ordinary interchanges between people are almost unavoidable? Moreover, almost everyone here [*in the Ashram*] has friends. Do friendships fall in the category of "vital relations"?

I suppose I must have been referring to the interchanges which are the result of vital relations. The involuntary vital or other involuntary interchange which takes place by the mere fact of meeting, talking or being together are those which are practically unavoidable. That is to say, they are avoidable only when one has become entirely conscious and is able to put a wall of Force around oneself which nothing can penetrate except the things which one wills to accept. But the reference in the passage cannot be to these, but to the interchange due to vital attachments, passions, vital love or hate etc.

Friendships can be vital relations if there is strong attachment or desire but the friendship which is the nature of comradeship or mental affinity or of a psychic character need not be a vital relation.

4 January 1937

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In *Bases of Yoga*, it is said about the sex-movements that they "throw into the atmosphere forces that would block the supramental descent, bringing instead the descent of adverse vital powers" [p. 71]. Is it meant that any kind of sex-movement in the Ashram atmosphere would block the supramental descent? If it were so, the descent would hardly be possible because new sadhaks or temporary visitors may indulge in sex-movements and throw these forces in the atmosphere.

That is not what is said in that passage. What is spoken of is the taking of sex indulgence as a part of the aim and method of the sadhana. It is said that if that were done, the sadhana would bring down vital Forces of a type adverse to the supramental change which would serve to block (stand in the way of) the supramental descent.

1 August 1936

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You write in *Bases of Yoga*, in regard to “the waves that recur from the general Nature”, that “they return on him [the individual], often with an increased force . . . when they find their influence rejected. But they cannot last long once the environmental consciousness is cleared — unless the ‘Hostiles’ take a hand” [p. 90]. Two questions arise: (1) Whether the Hostiles are something quite different from the waves of Nature? (2) Whether, during the process you describe (the “return” of the forces and so forth), it was not the Hostiles attacking all the time.

There are some who are never touched by the hostile forces.

The normal resistance of the lower Nature in human beings and the action of the Hostiles are two quite different things. The former is natural and occurs in everybody; the latter is an intervention from the non-human world. But this intervention can come in two forms. (1) They use and press on the lower Nature forces making them resist where they would otherwise be quiescent, making the resistance strong or violent where it would be otherwise slight or moderate, exaggerating its violence when it is violent. There is besides a malignant cleverness, a conscious plan and combination when the Hostiles act on these forces which is not evident in the normal resistance of the forces. (2) They sometimes invade with their own forces. When this happens there is often a temporary possession or at least an irresistible influence which makes the thoughts, feelings, actions of the person abnormal — a black clouding of the brain, a whirl in the vital, all acts as if the person could not help himself and were driven by an overmastering force. On the other hand instead of a possession there may be only a strong Influence; there the symptoms are less marked, but it is easy for anyone acquainted with the ways of these forces to see what has happened. Finally it may be only an attack, not possession or influence; the person then is separate, is not overcome, resists.

24 August 1936

The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth

Before coming to the main point I may as well clear out one

matter not unconnected with it, my articles or messages, as they have been called, in the *Bulletin*;³² for their appearance there and their contents seem to have caused some trouble, perplexity or misunderstanding in your mind and especially my speculations about the divine body. I wrote the first of these articles to explain about how or why sport came to be included in the programme of the Ashram activities and I think I made it clear, as I went on, that sport was not sadhana, that it belonged to what I called the lower end of things, but that it might be used not merely for amusement or recreation or the maintenance of health, but for a greater efficiency of the body and for the development of certain qualities and capacities, not of the body only but of morale and discipline and the stimulation of mental energies: but I pointed out also that these could be and were developed by other means and that there were limitations to this utility. In fact, it is only by sadhana that one could go beyond the limits natural to the lower-end means. I think there was little room for misunderstanding here but the Mother had asked me to write on other subjects not connected in any way with sport and had suggested some subjects such as the possibilities of the evolution of a divine body; so I wrote on that subject and went on to speak of the Supermind and Truth-Consciousness which had obviously not even the remotest connection with sport. The object was to bring in something higher and more interesting than a mere record of gymnasium events but which might appeal to some of the readers or even to wider circles. In speaking of the divine body I entered into some far-off speculations about what might become possible in the future evolution of it by means of a spiritual force, but obviously the possibilities could not be anything near or immediate and I said clearly enough that we shall have to begin at the beginning and not attempt anything out of the way. Perhaps I should have insisted more on present limitations but that I should now make clear. For the immediate object of my endeavours is to establish spiritual life on earth and

³² *The eight essays making up The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth were first published in the Bulletin of Physical Education in 1949 and 1950. — Ed.*

for that the first necessity must always be to realise the Divine; only then can life be spiritualised or what I have called the Life Divine be made possible. The creation of something that could be called a divine body could be only an ulterior aim undertaken as part of this transformation; as obviously the development of such a divine body as was envisioned in these speculations could only come into view as the result of a distant evolution and need not alarm or distract anyone. It might even be regarded as a phantasy of some remotely possible future which might one day happen to come true.

7 December 1949

Publication Plans, 1949

There can be no objection to the immediate or early publication [*in the United States*] of (1) *The Life Divine* (2) the *Essays on the Gita* (3) *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Yoga of Works) (4) *Superman* (and other essays) (5) *The Hero and the Nymph* (with essay on Kalidasa). As regards the *Collected Poems* numerous corrections have to be made in *Perseus* and the essay on classical metres, but as these are mainly misprints there is no objection to their being made on the proofs when these are sent to us.

As to *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Psychology of Social Development* they have to be altered by the introduction of new chapters and rewriting of passages and in the *Ideal* changes have to be made all through the book in order to bring it up to date, so it is quite impossible to make these alterations on the proofs. I propose however to revise these two books as soon as possible; they will receive my first attention.

The Defence of Indian Culture is an unfinished book and also I had intended to alter much of it and to omit all but brief references to William Archer's criticisms. That was why its publication has been so long delayed. Even if it is reprinted as it is, considerable alterations will have to be made and there must be some completion and an end to the book which does not at present exist.

The Future Poetry also cannot be published as it is, for there must be a considerable rearrangement of its matter since

publication from month to month left its plan straggling and ill-arranged and also one or two chapters will have to be omitted or replaced by other new ones. I do not wish it to be published in its present imperfect form.

The publication of *The Secret of the Veda* as it is does not enter into my intention. It was published in a great hurry and at a time when I had not studied the Rig Veda as a whole as well as I have since done. Whole chapters will have to be rewritten or written otherwise and a considerable labour gone through; moreover, it was never finished and considerable additions in order to make it complete are indispensable.

30 June 1949

The Terminology of His Writings

Spiritual and Supramental

Krishnaprem has always complained (and quite naturally) that it was difficult to get the right meaning of the “technical terms” used by you. . . . Of course a full expounding of the difference between Spiritualisation and Supramentalisation would fatten into a volume, but is it not possible just to indicate why the one is called partial transformation and the other complete transformation? Also in what way the supramental consciousness-force is not identical with the spiritual.

If spiritual and supramental were the same thing, then all the sages and devotees and Yogis and sadhaks throughout the ages would have been supramental beings and all I have written about the supermind would be so much superfluous rubbish. Anybody who had spiritual experiences would then be a supramental being; the Asram would be chock-full of supramental beings and every other Asram in India also. As for writing about these things, I do not see the utility. I have already two philosophical essays to write and I do not find them writing themselves. If I start explaining the supramental, it would mean a book of 200 pages at least and even then you would be no wiser than before — as everything I wrote would probably be misinterpreted in the terms of mental cognition. The supramental has to be realised, not explained; I therefore prefer to leave it to explain or not explain itself when it is there and not waste my time in explaining mentally the supramental. As to technical terms, I have explained many times over in a way sufficient for those who practise this Yoga. If I have to explain philosophically to others, I must write a few more volumes of the *Arya*. I have no time just now.

I may say that spiritual experiences can fix themselves in the inner consciousness and alter it, transform it, if you like, one can realise the Divine everywhere, the Self, the universal Shakti

doing all things, one can feel merged in the Cosmic Self or full of ecstatic bhakti or Ananda, but that need not transform the instrumental being. One can go on thinking with the intellect, willing with the mental will, feeling joy and sorrow on the vital surface, undergoing physical afflictions etc. just as before. The change only will be that the inner self will watch all that without getting disturbed or bewildered, taking it as a part of nature. That is not the transformation I envisage. 12 October 1935

*

People seem to misunderstand certain words used by Dr. Sircar in his lectures: “supermind” or “supramental”, “psychic”, “ascent and descent” etc. I think such terms should be defined precisely when used.

The words supermind and supramental were first used by me, but since then people have taken up and are using the word supramental for anything above mind. Psychic is ordinarily used in the sense of anything relating to the inner movements of the consciousness or anything phenomenal in the psychology; in this case I have made a special use of it, relating it to the Greek word psyche meaning soul; but ordinarily people make no distinction between the soul and the mental-vital consciousness; for them it is all the same. The ascent of the Kundalini — not its descent, so far as I know — is a recognised phenomenon, there is one that corresponds in our Yoga, the feeling of the consciousness ascending from the vital or physical to meet the higher consciousness. This is not necessarily through the chakras but is often felt in the whole body. Similarly the descent of the higher consciousness is not felt necessarily or usually through the chakras but as occupying the whole head, neck, chest, abdomen, body. 18 June 1937

Supermind

Others besides X have assumed that they had the Supermind because something opened in them which was “super” to the ordinary human mind. It is a common mistake. Even the word supermind (which I invented) has been taken up by several

people (writers in the *Prabuddha Bharata* and elsewhere) and applied generally to the spiritual consciousness. I see no reason to doubt that X saw things in vision (hundreds of people do) or had experiences. 7 July 1936

Supermind and Overmind

Is it true that when you write “must”, it is from the Supermind, and when you write “maybe” or “if”, it is from the Overmind?

No—I can’t say that. The Overmind has its certitudes also, though of a less absolute kind than the supramental.

19 March 1933

*

What is the connection between Overmind and Supermind?

That would need some chapters to explain. It is not important to know it before you have got some experience of the planes above mind. 23 June 1933

*

What you call supramental overmind¹ is still overmind—not a part of the true Supermind. One cannot get into the true Supermind (except in some kind of trance or Samadhi) unless one has first objectivised the overmind Truth in life, speech, action, external knowledge and not only experienced it in meditation and inner experience. 25 February 1934

*

I sent up an article on your Yoga some time ago. You returned it without comment. I do not know whether you have gone through it and approve of its publication or not.

There are some errors about the Supermind and Overmind,—the two getting rather mixed up as they always do (I had much

¹ This expression is a misnomer since overmind cannot be supramental: it can at most receive some light and truth from the higher source.

difficulty in separating them myself); I have tried to clear that up but it is difficult to put in language that the mind can grasp. I hope you will manage to unravel the writing which has become microscopically illegible owing to lack of space for the corrections.

Supermind by the way is synthetic only in the lowest spaces of itself where it has to prepare the principles of Overmind — synthesis is necessary only where analysis has taken place; one has dissected everything, put in pieces (analysis) so one has to piece together. But Supermind is unitarian, has never divided up, so it does not need to add and piece together the parts and fragments. It has always held the conscious Many together as the conscious One. 26 October 1938

Overmind

*In the whole of *The Synthesis of Yoga* [as originally published in the Arya] there is nowhere any mention of Overmind. If there is anything in that book similar to what you now call Overmind, it would be in the last seven chapters.*

At the time when these chapters were written, the name “overmind” had not been found, so there is no mention of it. What is described in these chapters is the action of the supermind when it descends into the overmind plane and takes up the overmind workings and transforms them.² It was intended in later chapters to show how difficult even this was and how many levels there were between human mind and supermind and how even supermind, descending, could get mixed with the lower action and turned into something that was less than the true Truth. But these later chapters were not written.

The lack of a clear distinction between overmind and supermind is causing me some confusion, as you have said that some of my experiences belonged to the overmind.

² The highest Supermind or Divine Gnosis existent in itself is something that lies beyond still and quite above.

Not exactly that. They result from the overmind pressure on the intervening mental and lower planes, trying to pour into them the overmind movements. The process is very intricate, has many stages, is not of a simple, single, definite character.

13 April 1932

*

Is Overmind the same as what you call “supramental reason” in the *Arya*?

No, — although there is a supramentalised overmind which is not very different from it, but overmind has always something relative in its knowledge.

18 March 1933

*

In the *Arya* there is no mention of the Overmind. You have mentioned the supramental or Divine Reason in the gradations of the Supermind, but from its description it is quite different from the Overmind. Why was the Overmind not mentioned and clearly distinguished from the Supermind in the *Arya*?

The distinction has not been made in the *Arya* because at that time what I now call the Overmind was supposed to be an inferior plane of the Supermind. But that was because I was seeing them from the Mind. The true defect of Overmind, the limitation in it which gave rise to a world of Ignorance is seen fully only when one looks at it from the physical consciousness, from the result (Ignorance in Matter) to the cause (Overmind division of the Truth). In its own plane Overmind seems to be only a divided, many-sided play of the Truth, so can easily be taken by the Mind as a supramental province. Mind also when flooded by the Overmind lights feels itself living in a surprising revelation of divine Truth. The difficulty comes when we deal with the vital and still more with the physical. Then it becomes imperative to face the difficulty and to make a sharp distinction between Overmind and Supermind — for it then becomes evident that the Overmind Power (in spite of its lights and splendours) is not sufficient to overcome the Ignorance because it is itself under

the law of Division out of which came the Ignorance. One has to pass beyond and supramentalise Overmind so that mind and all the rest may undergo the final change. 20 November 1933

*

Judging from your description of Overmind [*in the preceding letter*], it would seem that what the Vedantins (especially of the Mayavada School) call *kāraṇa* is Overmind, *īśvara* is the cosmic spirit in Overmind, and *prājñā* is individualised being in the Overmind. Supermind would be in *turīya* and *mahākāraṇa*, about which they had only a few glimpses. In *kāraṇa* and *īśvara*, they must have found something wanting of the Highest Truth.

That is evidently what they meant. But they had no clear perception of these things because they lived at the highest in the spiritualised higher mind, and for the rest could only receive things from even the Overmind — they could not enter it except by deep samadhi (सुषुप्ति). Prajna and Ishwara were for them Lord of the *susupti*. 20 November 1933

*

Is it possible for another being to take birth in a human being's কারণ দেহ [*kāraṇa deha*] and see everything from that standpoint?

The কারণ দেহ may be simply a form answering to the higher consciousness (overmental, intuitive etc.) and I suppose a being could be there working in that consciousness and body. It is not likely to be the supramental being and supramental body — for in that case the whole consciousness, thought, action subjective and objective would begin to be faultlessly true and irresistibly effective. Nobody has reached that stage yet, even the overmind is, for all but the Mother and myself, either unrealised or only an influence mostly subjective. 24 March 1934

*

In my translation I have been obliged to find or make a word for “Overmind”. I want to know if Hiranyagarbha can be used

with a change from its old connotation? It is not *prajñā* as far as I can make out. Have you any other word more suitable to convey the idea of the Overmind?

Hiranyagarbha is not the Overmind, but the subtle subjective Consciousness which includes much more than the Overmind. *Prajñā* certainly won't do — *prajñā* belongs to the Mind; you are probably thinking of the *prājñā* प्राज्ञ (*cidghana*) *caitanya*, but that is a different thing from *prajñā* प्रज्ञा. Perhaps Overmind can be described as आद्य हिरण्यगर्भ चैतन्य (as opposed to the rest of the सूक्ष्म from the intuitive mind to the bottom), but that is a very long phrase. It is really, however, a different classification and other words ought to be found for it. परा मनीषा, आद्या मनीषा, दैवी मनीषा, any of these might do, if no single word can be found or invented.

Overmind and Intuition

Is Overmind to the Cosmic Spirit as Intuition is to the individual Self?

The Cosmic Spirit uses all powers, but Overmind power is the highest it normally uses in the present scheme of things here. In that sense as intuition is normally the highest power used by the individual being in the body, what you say may be considered as correct.

2 June 1933

Intuition

In a recent letter to me you wrote: “But the Intuition sees in flashes and combines through a constant play of light — through revelations, inspirations, intuitions, swift discriminations.” Since all these terms connect up with “Intuition”, perhaps “intuitions” is unnecessary.

“Intuition” is the word for the general power proper to that plane, but it works through a fourfold process expressed in the four words connected together here. If you like you can substitute “intuitive intimations” for the third.

17 October 1936

Your intuition says everything to you? Have you nothing to think whether right or wrong? Alas! How then can the shishya follow the Guru?

Good heavens! after a life of sadhana you expect me still to “think” and what is worse think what is right or wrong. I don’t think, even; I see or I don’t see. The difference between intuition and thought is very much like that between seeing a thing and badgering one’s brains to find out what the thing can possibly be like. Intuition is truth-sight. The thing seen may not be the truth? Well, in that case it will at least be one of its hundred tails or at least a hair from one of the tails. The very first step in the supramental change is to transform all operations of consciousness from the ordinary mental to the intuitive, only then is there any hope of proceeding farther, — not to, but towards the supramental. I must surely have done this long ago, otherwise how could I be catching the tail of the supramental whale? 7 May 1938

Jivatman, Spark-Soul and Psychic Being

The Jivatman, spark-soul and psychic being are three different forms of the same reality and they must not be mixed up together as that confuses the clearness of the inner experience.

The Jivatman or spirit, as it is usually called in English, is self-existent above the manifested or instrumental being — it is superior to birth and death, always the same, the individual Self or *ātman*. It is the eternal true being of the individual.

The soul is a spark of the Divine which is not seated above the manifested being, but comes down into the manifestation to support its evolution in the material world. It is at first an undifferentiated power of the divine consciousness, containing all possibilities, but at first unevolved possibilities, which have not yet taken form, but to which it is the function of evolution to give form. This spark is there in all living beings, from the lowest to the highest.

The psychic being is formed by the soul in its evolution. It supports the mind, vital, body, grows by their experiences, carries the nature from life to life. It is the psychic or *caitya*

puruṣa. At first it is veiled by mind, vital and body, but, as it grows, it becomes capable of coming forward and dominating the mind, life and body; in the ordinary man it depends on them for expression and is not able to take them up and freely use them. The life of the being is animal or human and not divine. When the psychic being can by sadhana become dominant and freely use its instruments, then the impulse towards the Divine becomes complete and the transformation of mind, vital and body, not merely their liberation becomes possible.

The Self or Atman being free and superior to birth and death, the experience of the Jivatman and its unity with the supreme or universal Self brings the sense of liberation; but for the transformation of the life and nature the awakening of the psychic being is indispensable.

The psychic being realises its oneness with the true being, the Jivatman, but it does not change into it.

The *bindu* seen [*in vision by the correspondent*] above may be a symbolic way of seeing the Jivatman, the portion of the Divine; the aspiration there would naturally be for the opening of the higher consciousness so that the being may dwell there and not in the ignorance. The Jivatman is already one with the Divine in reality, but it may want the rest of the consciousness to realise it.

The aspiration of the psychic being is for the opening of the whole lower nature, mind, vital, body to the Divine, for the love and union with the Divine, for its presence and power within the heart, for the transformation of the mind, life and body by the descent of the higher consciousness into this instrumental being and nature.

Both aspirations are necessary for the fullness of this Yoga. When the psychic imposes its aspiration on the mind, vital and body, then they too aspire and this is what was felt as the aspiration from the level of the lower being. The aspiration felt above is that of the Jivatman for the higher consciousness with its realisation of the One to manifest. Therefore both aspirations help each other. The seeking of the lower being is necessarily at first intermittent and oppressed by the ordinary consciousness. It has by sadhana to become clear, constant, strong and enduring.

The sense of peace, purity and calm is brought about by the union of the lower with the higher consciousness. It cannot be permanent at first, but it can become so by increased frequency and endurance of the calm and peace and finally by the full descent of the eternal peace and calm and silence of the higher consciousness into the lower nature. 5 May 1935

*

I read a [*copy of the preceding*] letter on Jivatman, spark-soul and psychic being. I would like to ask some questions. Is Jivatman of (or in) one person different from that of another?

It is one, yet different. The Gita puts it that the Jiva is an अंशः सनातनः [*aṁśaḥ sanātanaḥ*] of the One. It can also be spoken of as one among many centres of the Universal Being and Consciousness.

If different, is it a qualitative or a quantitative difference?

Essentially one Jiva has the same nature as all — but in manifestation each puts forth its own line of Swabhava.

Is not what you term “Jivatman” the same as what they call *kūṭastha*?

No. Kutastha is the अक्षर पुरुष [*akṣara puruṣa*] — it is not the Jivatman.

What is the plane on which the Jivatman stands?

It is on the spiritual plane always that is above the mind, but there it is not fixed to any level.

Is there anything like union of one’s psychic being with another’s?

No. Affinity, harmony, sympathy, but not union. Union is with the Divine. 3 October 1936

Psychic and Spiritual

Ordinarily, all the more inward and all the abnormal psychological experiences are called psychic. I use the word psychic for the soul as distinguished from the mind and vital. All movements and experiences of the soul would in that sense be called psychic, those which rise from or directly touch the psychic being; where mind and vital predominate, the experience would be called psychological (surface or occult). “Spiritual” has nothing to do with the Absolute, except that the experience of the Absolute is spiritual. All contacts with self, the higher consciousness, the Divine above are spiritual. There are others that could not be so sharply classified and set off against each other.

The spiritual realisation is of primary importance and indispensable. I would consider it best to have the spiritual and psychic development first and have it with the same fullness before entering the occult regions. Those who enter the latter first may find their spiritual realisation much delayed — others fall into the mazy traps of the occult and do not come out in this life. Some no doubt can carry on both together, the occult and the spiritual, and make them help each other; but the process I suggest is the safer.

The governing factors for us must be the spirit and the psychic being united with the Divine — the occult laws and phenomena have to be known but only as an instrumentation, not as the governing principles. The occult is a vast field and complicated and not without its dangers. It need not be abandoned but it should not be given the first place.

Psychic Being

I have translated the words “psychic being” as *jīva* but I was doubtful whether *jīva* conveys the idea of the psychic being.

How can *jīva* = psychic being? Ask X for the proper word — if there is any.

15 June 1931

Can *antarātmā* or *hṛt-puruṣa* do for “psychic being”? Or your own term *caitya puruṣa*?

Antarātmā is the inner being — it is a larger term than the psychic being. *Hṛt-puruṣa* or *caitya puruṣa* would do. June 1931

*

As directed, “psychic being” has been translated as *caitya puruṣa*. Does this mean the *puruṣa* in the *citta*? Is *jīva* the combined and the fundamental being of all the beings — the vital, the psychic and others?

चैत्य पुरुष [*caitya puruṣa*] means rather the पुरुष [*puruṣa*] in the चित् [*cit*], the fundamental (inner) consciousness.

जीव [*jīva*] is the fundamental, or as we call it, the central being. But the fundamental being is not *combined* of the mental, vital, psychic etc., these are only expressions of the Jivatman; the Jivatman itself is self-existent in the Divine; *essential* in its being, it cannot be regarded as a combination of things. 1 July 1931

The Psychic

How is it that in the *Arya* you never laid any special stress on the psychic centre and considered the centre above the head the most important in your Yoga? Is it because you wrote under different conditions and circumstances? But what exactly made you shift your emphasis?

You might just as well ask me why in my pre-*Arya* writings I laid stress on other things than the centre above the head or in the post-*Arya* on the distinction between overmind and supermind. The stress on the psychic increased because it was found that without it no true transformation is possible. 5 July 1937

Transformation

If you find time to answer my letter, do at least remember my chief questions: (1) whether in Vaishnavism and Ramakrishnaism there wasn't partial transformation at least, and (2) does

not any light of realisation, if it is to be lasting, presuppose some transformation of the *ādhāra* in order that the descent may not be fugitive?

Under your pressure (not supramental) I have splashed about a little on the surface of the subject — the result is imperfect and illegible. (I am sending it down to Nolini to wrestle with it.) Your fault! How on earth do you expect me to go deep on the point or do anything else but scribble when I have no time at all, at all, at all.

I am not sure what you mean by the Vaishnava transformation or Ramakrishna's, so I can't say anything about that. I can only say that by transformation I do not mean some change of the nature — I do not mean for instance sainthood or ethical perfection or Yogic siddhis (like the Tantrik's). I use transformation in a special sense, a change of consciousness radical and complete and of a certain specific kind which is so conceived as to bring about a strong and assured step forward in the spiritual evolution of the consciousness such as and greater than what took place when a mentalised being first appeared in a vital and material animal world. If anything short of that takes place or at least if a real beginning is not made on that basis, a fundamental progress towards it, then my object is not accomplished. A partial realisation does not meet the demand I make on life and Yoga.

Light of realisation is not the same thing as Descent. I do not think realisation by itself, necessarily transforms anything; it may bring only an opening or heightening or widening of the consciousness so as to realise something in the Purusha part without any radical change in the parts of Prakriti. One may have some light of realisation at the spiritual summit of the consciousness but the parts below remain what they were. I have seen any number of instances of that. There must be a descent of the light not merely into the mind or part of it but into all the being down to the physical and below before a real transformation can take place. A light in the mind may spiritualise or otherwise change the mind or part of it in one way or another, but it need

not change the vital nature, a light in the vital may purify and enlarge the vital movements or else silence and immobilise the vital being, but leave the body and the physical consciousness as it was, or even leave it inert or shake its balance. And the descent of Light is not enough, it must be the descent of the whole higher consciousness, its Peace, Power, Knowledge, Love, Ananda. Moreover, the descent may be enough to liberate, but not to perfect, or enough to make a great change in the inner being, while the outer remains an imperfect instrument, clumsy, sick or unexpressive. Finally, the transformation effected by the sadhana cannot be complete unless it is a supramentalisation of the being. Psychicisation is not enough, it is only a beginning; spiritualisation and the descent of the higher consciousness is not enough, it is only a middle term; the ultimate achievement needs the action of the supramental consciousness and Force. Something less than that may very well be considered enough by the individual, but it is not enough for the earth consciousness to take the definitive stride forward it must take at one time or another.

I have never said that my Yoga was something brand new in all its elements. I have called it the integral Yoga and that means that it takes up the essence and many procedures of the old Yogas — its newness is in its aim, standpoint and the totality of its method. In the earlier stages which is all I deal with in books like the *Riddle* or the *Lights* or in the new book to be published [*Bases of Yoga*] there is nothing in it that distinguishes it from the old Yogas except the aim underlying its comprehensiveness, the spirit in its movements and the ultimate significance it keeps before it — also the scheme of its psychology and its working: but as that was not and could not be developed systematically or schematically in these letters, it has not been grasped by those who are not already acquainted with it by mental familiarity or some amount of practice. The later stages of the Yoga which go into little known untrodden regions, I have not made public and I do not at present intend to do so.

I know very well also that there have been seemingly allied ideals and anticipations — the perfectibility of the race, certain Tantric sadhanas, the effort after a complete physical Siddhi by certain schools of Yoga, etc. etc. I have alluded to these things

myself and have put forth the view that the spiritual past of the race has been a preparation of Nature not merely for attaining to the Divine beyond the world, but also for the very step forward which the evolution of the earth-consciousness has now to make. I do not therefore care in the least, — even though these things were far from identical with mine, — whether this Yoga and its aim and method are accepted as new or not, that is in itself a trifling matter. That it should be recognised as true in itself and make itself true by achievement is the one thing important; it does not matter if it is called new or a repetition or revival of the old which was forgotten. I laid emphasis on it as new in a letter to certain sadhaks so as to explain to them that a repetition of the old Yogas was not enough in my eyes, that I was putting forward a thing to be achieved that has not yet been achieved, not yet clearly visualised, even though it is the natural but still secret destined outcome of all the past spiritual endeavour.

It is new as compared with the old Yogas

(1) Because it aims not at a departure out of world and life into a Heaven or a Nirvana, but at a change of life and existence, not as something subordinate or incidental, but as a distinct and central object. If there is a descent in other Yogas, yet it is only an incident on the way or resulting from the ascent — the ascent is the real thing. Here the ascent is the first step, but it is a means for the descent. It is the descent of the new consciousness attained by the ascent that is the stamp and seal of the sadhana. Even Tantra and Vaishnavism end in the release from life; here the object is the fulfilment of life.

(2) Because the object sought after is not an individual achievement of divine realisation for the sake of the individual, but something to be gained for the earth consciousness here, a cosmic not a supra-cosmic achievement. The thing to be gained also is the bringing in of a Power of consciousness (the supramental) not yet active directly in earth-nature, even in the spiritual life, but yet to be organised and made directly active.

(3) Because a method has been preconised for achieving this purpose which is as total and integral as the aim set before it, viz., the total and integral change of the consciousness and nature, taking up old methods but only as a part action and present aid

to others that are distinctive. I have not found this method as a whole or anything like it proposed or realised in the old Yogas. If I had I should not have wasted my time in hewing out paths and in thirty years of search and inner creation when I could have hastened home safely to my goal in an easy canter over paths already blazed out, laid down, perfectly mapped, macadamised, made secure and public.

5 October 1935

Brahma — Brahman — Brahmin

Please favour me with the correct transliteration of the words ब्रह्म and ब्राह्मण in the English language. In the *Essays on the Gita*, they are spelt alike, viz. Brahman. What is the necessity of an “n” when transliterating ब्रह्म?

In English, Brahma = the Creator, one of the Trinity.

Brahman is the Eternal and Infinite. In English very often the stem is taken as the form of the name in transliterating and not the nominative form e.g. Pururavas, not Pururavā. So Vivekananda writes “Sannyasin bold” instead of Sannyasi.

1 February 1933

*

You have given me the spellings of ब्रह्म (the Eternal) and ब्रह्मा (the Creator). Kindly write to me the correct spelling of ब्राह्मण (a caste) also.

I spoke of Brahma the Creator in order to explain why the *n* was necessary in transliterating ब्रह्म the Eternal.

As for the other word the correct English is Brahmin, but it is often transliterated Brahmana or Brahman in order to be nearer the Sanskrit. Usually, I write Brahmin but in the Press it gets altered into Brahman.

2 February 1933

Dynamis

Dynamis is a Greek word, not current, so far as I know, in English; but the verb *dunamai*, I can, am able, from which it derives, has given a number of words to the English language

including dynamise, dynamics, dynamic, dynamical, dyne (a unit of force), so that the word can be at once understood by all English readers. It means power, especially energetic power for energetic action. It is equivalent to the Sanskrit word, Shakti. Philosophically it can stand as the opposite word to status, Divine Status, Divine Dynamis.

Ineffugable

“Infinity imposes itself upon the appearances of the finite by its ineffugable self-existence.”³

[*Note by a correspondent:*] “*Ineffugable* is a new word, like *dynamis*, introduced into the English language by Sri Aurobindo. It means inescapable, inevitable, not to be avoided. A similar word was used by Blount in 1656 with slight change of form — ineffugible. Etymologically it is an adaptation of the Latin *ineffugibilis*, from *effugere*, to flee from, avoid. (*Vide, Oxford English Dictionary.*)”

Ineffugible is the correct formation, but it has not force or power of suggestive sound in it. The *a* in ineffugable has been brought in by illegitimate analogy from words like “fugacious”, Latin *fugare*, because it sounds better and is forcible.

1 October 1943

Sublate

“It claims to stand behind and supersede, to sublatare and to eliminate every other knowledge. . . .”⁴

“Sublate” means originally to remove: it implies denial and removal (throwing off) of something posited. What appeared to be true, can be sublated by a greater truth contradicting it. The experience of the world can be sublated by the experience of Self, it is denied and removed; so the experience of the Self can be sublated by the experience of Sunya; it is denied and removed.

³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, volume 21 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 81.

⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 487.

[*Note by a correspondent:*] “Hegelian philos. (rendering G. *aufheben*, used by Hegel as having the opposite meanings of ‘destroy’ and ‘preserve’). See quotation: ‘Nothing passes over into Being, but Being equally sublates itself, is a passing over into Nothing, Ceasing-to-be. They sublata not themselves mutually, not the one the other externally; but each sublata itself in itself, and is in its own self the contrary of itself.’ (*Vide, Oxford English Dictionary.*)”

Hegel could not have used the word “sublate” as he wrote in German.⁵ I do not know what word he used which is here translated by sublate, but certainly it does not mean both destroy and preserve, nor in fact does it mean either. Being passes over into Non-being, so it sublata itself, changes and eliminates itself as it were from the view, becomes Non-being instead of being; but so also does Non-being, what was Non-being passes over into being; where there was nothing, there is being; nothing has eliminated itself from the view. This, says Hegel, is not a mutual destruction by two contraries each of which was outside the other. Being inside itself becomes nothing or Non-Being; Non-Being or Nothing equally inside itself passes into being. They do not really sublata or drive out each other, but each sublata itself into the other. In other words it is the same Reality that presents itself now as one and now as the other.

31 July 1944

Global

“To contact” is a phrase that has established itself and it is futile to try to keep America at arm’s length any longer; “global” also has established itself and it is too useful and indeed indispensable to reject; there is no other word that can express exactly the same shade of meaning. I heard it first from Arjava who described the language of *Arya* as expressing a global thinking and I at once caught it up as the right and only word for certain things, for instance, the thinking in masses which is a frequent characteristic of the Overmind.

2 April 1947

⁵ *Aufheben*, if that is the German word, must mean the same as the Latin word *subtollere* p.p. *sublatus*, to heave up and off, or throw, from which “sublate” is taken.

Section Four

Remarks on Contemporaries and on Contemporary Problems

Remarks on Spiritual Figures in India

Ramakrishna Paramhansa

I would have been surprised to hear that I regard (in agreement with an advanced sadhak) Ramakrishna as a spiritual pigmy, if I had not become past astonishment in these matters. I have said, it seems, so many things that were never in my mind and done too not a few that I have never dreamed of doing! I shall not be surprised or perturbed if one day I am reported to have declared, on the authority of advanced or even unadvanced sadhaks, that Buddha was a *poseur* or Shakespeare an overrated poetaster or Newton a third-rate college Don without any genius. In this world all is possible. Is it necessary for me to say that I have never thought and cannot have said anything of the kind, since I have at least some faint sense of spiritual values? The passage you have quoted is my considered estimate of Ramakrishna.¹

3 February 1932

*

I have heard that if one learns logic or philosophy it can be a great help in the yoga, because it makes the mind wider to spiritual experiences so that once the mind gets beyond the intellect and reaches the intuitive, it is able to bring down or express knowledge which an unintellectual mind could not do.

An unintellectual mind cannot bring down the Knowledge? What then about Ramakrishna? Do you mean to say that the

¹ “*And in a recent unique example, in the life of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, we see a colossal spiritual capacity first driving straight to the divine realisation, taking, as it were, the kingdom of heaven by violence, and then seizing upon one Yogic method after another and extracting the substance out of it with an incredible rapidity, always to return to the heart of the whole matter, the realisation and possession of God by the power of love, by the extension of inborn spirituality into various experience and by the spontaneous play of an intuitive knowledge.*” — Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga, volume 23 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO*, p. 41.

majority of the sadhaks here who have not learned logic and are ignorant of philosophy will never get Knowledge?

4 November 1936

*

“An unintellectual mind cannot bring down the Knowledge?”
Certainly it can. But don’t you think there is a world of difference between the expression of an intellectual mind and an unintellectual one?

Expression is another matter, but Ramakrishna was an uneducated, nonintellectual man, yet his expression of knowledge was so perfect that the biggest intellects bowed down before it.

5 November 1936

*

What a difference there is between Ramakrishna’s expressions of knowledge and those of a perfectly developed intellect like yourself!

His expressions are unsurpassable in their quality. Don’t talk nonsense. Moreover I never developed my intellect and I made zero marks in Logic.

Who preached Ramakrishna’s gospel to the world? Vivekananda, a highly developed mind.

And who taught Vivekananda the Truth? Not a logician or highly developed intellect certainly?

13 November 1936

*

I have heard different things about Ramakrishna from different people. Some say he was an Avatar and some that he was not. Do you think he was an Avatar as he said in his autobiography?

He never wrote an autobiography. What he said was in conversation with his disciples and others. He was certainly quite as much an Avatar as Christ or Chaitanya.

13 November 1936

*

Ramakrishna himself never thought of transformation or tried for it. All he wanted was bhakti for the Mother and along with that he received whatever knowledge she gave him and did whatever she made him do. He was intuitive and psychic from the beginning and only became more and more so as he went on. There was no need in him for the transformation which we seek; for although he spoke of the divine man (Ishwarakoti) coming down the stairs as well as ascending, he had not the idea of a new consciousness and a new race and the divine manifestation in the earth-nature.

Swami Vivekananda

I do not remember what I said about Vivekananda.² If I said he was a great Vedantist, it is quite true. It does not follow that all he said or did must be accepted as the highest truth or the best. His ideal of *sevā* was a need of his nature and must have helped him — it does not follow that it must be accepted as a universal spiritual necessity or ideal. Whether in declaring it he was the mouthpiece of Ramakrishna or not, I cannot pronounce. It seems certain that Ramakrishna expected him to be a great power for changing the world-mind in a spiritual direction and it may be assumed that the mission came to the disciple from the Master. The details of his action are another matter. As for proceeding like a blind man, that is a feeling that easily comes when a Power greater than one's own mind is pushing one to a large action; for the mind does not realise intellectually all that it is being pushed to do and may have its moments of doubt or wonderment about it and yet it is obliged to go on. Vedantic (Adwaita) realisation is the realisation of the silent static or absolute Brahman — one may have that and yet not have the same indubitable clearness as to the significance of one's action — for over action for the Adwaitin lies the shadow of Maya.

24 December 1934

*

² Sri Aurobindo is referring here to the passage from *The Synthesis of Yoga* that is reproduced on page 94 of the present volume. — Ed.

I am thinking of reading Vivekananda. What he has said in his lectures — is it all truth, something directly inspired?

I cannot say that it is all truth — he had his own opinions about certain things (like everybody else) which can be questioned. But most of what he said was of great value.

I wish to read some good books on yoga or philosophy. Will you please give me some names?

I am not sure what books would interest you and I am myself so far away from books that it is difficult to remember names. If you have not read V's things you can read them or any books that would give you an idea of Vedanta schools and Sankhya. There is Mahendra Sircar's *Eastern Lights*. It is Indian philosophy you want, I suppose? 25 September 1935

*

I hear that there is a file of unpublished letters by Vivekananda, in one of which he says: "The time has now come to follow Aurobindo Ghose." Because of this it seems the Ramakrishna Mission keeps always an interested eye on what is going on in Pondy. Do you know anything of that reference by Vivekananda and in what connection it was made?

Where on earth is this extraordinary file? How could Vivekananda know anything about me? Trikaldrishti? 5 July 1937

*

God knows where that extraordinary file of Vivekananda's letters is. I got news of it from X who heard about it from a man of the Ramakrishna Mission who came here.

What I want to know is when did Vivekananda write that or what led him to take notice of me. I no longer remember when he left his body, but my impression is that it was when I was a blissfully obscure Professor of Baroda College and neither in politics nor Yoga had put on the tedious burden of fame. Why then should Vivekananda say anything about me at all, much

less a thing like that — unless it was as the trikaldarshi Yogi that he spoke?

7 July 1937

Swami Ramatirtha

From the standpoint of sadhana Vivekananda has never attracted me — he was more of a missionary. As far as I have studied Ramatirtha, he seems to have been on a higher level.

That can be judged from the personal experience only — not from the books which are too highly mentalised to give any indication of the full achievement in the lower part of the nature.

2 December 1933

*

Ramatirtha used to say that all beings were himself in different forms and to address others as “myself in the form of . . .”. This sounds a little fantastic!

It is fantastic.

Can this not be called an example of the transformed mind and vital, for he seems to have been engrossed in the Self in the waking life as well as in meditation.

I think Ramatirtha’s realisations were more mental than anything else. He had opening of the higher mind and a realisation there of the cosmic Self, but I find no evidence of a transformed mind and vital; that transformation is not a result of or object of the Yoga of Knowledge. The realisation of the Yoga of Knowledge is when one feels that one lives in the wideness of something silent, featureless and universal (called the Self) and all else is seen as only forms and names; the Self is real, nothing else. The realisation of “my self in other forms” is a part of this or a step towards it, but in the full realisation the “my” should drop so that there is only *the* one Self or rather only the Brahman. For the Self is merely a subjective aspect of the Brahman, just as the Ishwara is its objective aspect. That is the Vedantic “Knowledge”. Its result is peace, silence, liberation. As for the active Prakriti,

(mind, vital, body), the Yoga of Knowledge does not make it its aim to transform them — that would be no use as the idea is that if the liberation has come, it will all drop off at death. The only change wanted is to get rid of the idea of ego and realise as true only the supreme Self, the Brahman. 25 June 1934

Ramana Maharshi

I did not ask X to prevent you from going to Ramana Maharshi and I never had the least thought or intention of requesting him to intervene at all. He tells me that it is true he told you Sri Aurobindo had approved of his speaking to you about the right attitude etc. and he had inferred that from a phrase in my answer to a letter of his. But that inference was a mistake — the phrase did not carry that meaning, nor was there in the context any reference to Ramana Maharshi. He adds, “But I did *not* say I was authorised by Sri Aurobindo to try to detain him here.”

There was absolutely no reason why I should want to prevent you from going to the Maharshi. I have always encouraged people to go even in long past years when the Maharshi was unknown except to a few and I even sent several there who wanted to come here. Even if anyone wished to leave me and go to him, I would be the last person to interfere. Everyone has the right to choose his own Guru or, if he is dissatisfied or has lost his faith, to go elsewhere.

The Mother in her letter to you made it very clear that she approved of your visit and she even said it was the first thing to do. There can be no doubt therefore of her approval. Mine is contained in hers. 2 September 1935

*

Ramana Maharshi seems to agree to some extent with your views. He seems to believe in Grace and takes the position that the Real Self is in the heart, something akin to the psychic being. That means he is less of a Shankara Adwaitin.

According to Brunton’s description of the sadhana he (Brunton) practised under the Maharshi’s instructions, it is the Overself

one has to seek within, but he describes the Overself in a way that is at once the Psychic Being, the Atman and the Ishwara. So it is a little difficult to know what is the exact reading.

25 January 1936

*

I quote the following remarks of Ramana Maharshi as recorded by Paul Brunton: "All human beings are ever wanting happiness, untainted with sorrow. They want to grasp a happiness which will not come to an end. The instinct is a true one."³

All? It is far too sweeping a generalisation. If he had said that is one very strong strain in human nature it could be accepted. But mark that it is in human physical consciousness only. The human vital tends rather to reject a happiness untainted by sorrow and to find it a monotonous, boring condition. Even if it accepts it, after a time it kicks over the traces and goes to some new painful or risky adventure.

"Man's real nature *is* happiness. Happiness is inborn in the true self. His search for happiness is an unconscious search for his true self. The true self is imperishable; therefore, when a man finds it, he finds a happiness which does not come to an end" [pp. 157–58].

The true Self is quite a different proposition. But what it has is not happiness but something more.

"Even they [the wicked and the criminal] sin because they are trying to find the self's happiness in every sin which they commit. This striving is instinctive in man, but they do not know that they are really seeking their true selves, and so they try these wicked ways first as a means to happiness" [p. 158].

Who is this "they"? I fear it is a very summary and misleading criminal psychology. To say that a Paris crook or apache steals,

³ Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India* (London: Rider & Company, [1934] 1943), p. 157.

swindles, murders for the happiness of stealing, swindling, murdering is a little startling. He does it for quite other reasons. He does it as his *métier* just as you do your doctor's work. Do you really do your doctor's work because of the happiness you find in it?

People will not seek a sorrowless, untainted, everlasting happiness, even if shown the way — because they will consider it beyond their power to attain, or so it seems to me.

It is also with many because they prefer the joy mixed with sorrow, মানুষের হাসিকান্না, and consider your everlasting happiness an everlasting bore.

About the criminals, I don't obviously include those types who are born with a criminal instinct: idiots and imbeciles.

Why not? If your generalisation is good for all, it must be good for them also.

Ramana Maharshi also says that if you “meditate for an hour or two every day, you can then carry on with your duties. If you meditate in the right manner . . .”

A very important qualification.

“then the current of mind induced will continue to flow even in the midst of your work. It is as though there were two ways of expressing the same idea; the same line which you take in meditation will be expressed in your activities.” The result will be a gradual change of attitude towards people, events and objects. “Your actions will tend to follow your meditations of their own accord” [*p.* 156].

If the meditation brings poise, peace, a concentrated condition or even a pressure or influence, that *can* go on in the work, provided one does not throw it away by a relaxed or dispersed state of consciousness. That was why the Mother wanted people not only to be concentrated at pranam or meditation but to

remain silent and absorb or assimilate afterwards and also to avoid things that relax or disperse or dissipate too much — precisely for this reason that so the effects of what she put on them might continue and the change of attitude the Maharshi speaks of will take place. But I am afraid most of the sadhaks have never understood or practised anything of the kind — they could not appreciate or understand her directions.

Of course, he adds that setting apart time for meditation is for spiritual novices. You too wrote to me to meditate at least half an hour a day, if only to bring a greater concentration in the work.

It does bring the effects of meditation into work if one gives it a chance.

You know that meditations are not always successful.

You forget that with numbers of people they are successful.

Even if they were, how does this affect the whole day's work?

It doesn't, if one does not take care that it should do so — if one takes care, it can.

Is it something like charging a battery which goes on inducing an automatic current?

It is not exactly automatic. It can be easily spoilt or left to sink into the subconscious or otherwise wasted. But with simple and steady practice and persistence it has the effect the Maharshi speaks of — he assumes, I suppose, such a practice. I am afraid your meditation is hardly simple or steady — too much *kasrat* and fighting with yourself.

Ramana Maharshi seems a real Maharshi.

He is more of a Yogi than a Rishi, it seems to me. The happiness theory does not impress me, — it is as old as the mountains but

not so solid. But he knows a lot about Yoga. 9 February 1936

*

Ramana Maharshi has seen the truth. Can he not be called a Rishi?

He has experienced certain eternal truths by process of Yoga — I don't think it is by Rishilike intuition or illumination, nor has he the mantra. 10 February 1936

*

I recently have read of some of Ramana Maharshi's disciples, who have the power of vision to a greater degree than X. But it seems that the beings they see do not come and help them in their difficulties. Usually these beings show them certain things which strengthen their faith; but their difficulties remain. It is they or their guru who have to solve them.

It is quite usual at a certain stage of the sadhana for people who have the faculty to see or hear the Devata of their worship and to receive constant directions from him or her with regard either to action or to sadhana. Defects and difficulties may remain, but that does not prevent the direct guidance from being a fact. The necessity of a Guru in such cases is to see that it is the right experience, the right voice or vision — for it is possible for a false guidance to come as it did with Y and Z.

Moreover, Maharshi dissuaded his disciples from cultivating this power of vision, since it had nothing to do with the realisation of the self.

Maharshi is very much of a Vedantist. He does not believe in what we believe or in the descent etc. At the same time he himself has had experiences in which the Mother interfered in a visible, even material form and prevented him from doing what he intended to do. 7 July 1936

*

It is evident that my ideas about visions and views on occult things were poor and ignorant from the very beginning. They

became all the more ignorant when I read that the Maharshi, whom you have called a great man and one who “lives always in the light” and therefore in the truth consciousness, discouraged his disciples from using their occult gifts.

Because he is a great man does it follow that everything he thinks or says is right? or because he lives in the light, does it follow that his light is absolute and complete? The “Truth-Consciousness” is a phrase I use for the supermind. Maharshi is not in the supermind. He may be and is in a true Consciousness, but that is a different matter.

They were not misusing their gifts, rather they were making spiritual progress through them.

He discouraged his disciples because his aim was the realisation of the inner Self and intuition — in other words the fullness of the spiritual Mind — visions and voices belong to the inner occult sense, therefore he did not want them to lay stress on it. I also discourage some from having any dealing with visions and voices because I see that they are being misled or in danger of being misled by false visions and false voices. That does not mean that visions and voices have no value. 9 July 1936

*

If the true being behind the usual emotional heart is the psychic, how is it that Ramana Maharshi says, and all the Upanishads too say, that in the core of the heart is the Self, the Atman? Maharshi says the place of the Self is not in the centre of the chest but two fingers to the right — whereas the psychic is located in the middle.

The Upanishads do not say that about the Atman — what they say about the Atman is that it is in all and all is in it, it is everywhere and all this universe is the Atman. What they speak of as situated in the deeper inner heart is the Purusha in the heart or Antaratman.⁴ This is in fact what we call the psychic being, *caitya puruṣa*.

⁴ *aṅguṣṭhamātraḥ puruṣo antarātmā*.

The heart spoken of by the Upanishads corresponds with the physical cardiac centre; it is the *hrtpadma* of the Tantriks. As a subtle centre, *cakra*, it is supposed to have its apex on the spine and to broaden out in front. Exactly where in this area one or another feels it does not matter much; to feel it there and be guided by it is the main thing. I cannot say what the Maharshi has realised — but what Brunton describes in his book as the Self is certainly this Purusha Antaratma but concerned more with *mukti* and a liberated action than with transformation of the nature. What the psychic realisation does bring is a psychic change of the nature purifying it and turning it altogether towards the Divine. After that or along with it comes the realisation of the cosmic Self. It is these two things that the old Yogas encompassed and through them they passed to Moksha, Nirvana or the departure into some kind of celestial transcendence. The Yoga practised here includes both liberation and transcendence, but it takes liberation or even a certain Nirvana, if that comes, as a first step and not as the last step of its siddhi. Whatever exit to or towards the Transcendent it achieves is an ascent accompanied by a descent of the power, light, consciousness that has been achieved and it is by such descents that is to be achieved the spiritual and supramental transformation here. This possibility does not seem to be admitted in the Maharshi's thought, — he considers the Descent as superfluous and logically impossible. "The Divine is here, from where will He descend?" is his argument. But the Divine is everywhere, he is above as well as within, he has many habitats, many strings to his bow of Power, there are many levels of his dynamic Consciousness and each has its own light and force. He is not confined to his position in the heart or to the single cord of the psycho-spiritual realisation. He has also his supramental station above the heart-centre and mind-centres and can descend from there if He wants to do so. 3 March 1937

*

I am giving below the best brief account by Paul Brunton of the Maharshi's technique of discovering what Brunton calls the Overself. It occurs in the book named *A Message from*

Arunachala:

“When the mind is deeply engaged in a train of thought, it tends to become unconscious of external surroundings as concentration deepens. When this condition is carried to a profound extent, then the mind becomes one-pointed. If, at this degree, the subject of the meditation could be somehow dropped, the ensuing vacuum would swiftly cause the hidden world of man’s soul to arise and fill it. In that apparent emptiness he would become aware of a new visitant, his Overself. Such is the essential principle behind this process of self-knowing. . . .

“It [*the Maharshi’s method*] consists in taking as the subject of meditation the inquiry, ‘*Who Am I?*’ The mind must centre itself upon this single question, pressing deeply inward in the effort to discover the elusive inhabitant of the body. If the concentration is complete and the persistence undiminished; if the inquiry is conducted in the correct manner; if the person is really sincere; then an extraordinary thing will happen. The mental current of self-questioning, the attempt to ferret out what one really is, the watching of one’s thoughts in the earlier part of the process, ultimately pins all thinking down to the single thought of personal existence. ‘I’ is the first thought sprayed up by the spring of life’s being, but it is also the last. As this final thought is held in the focus of attention and questioned in a particular way, it suddenly disappears and the Overself takes its place, overwhelming both questioner and question in its divine stillness.”⁵

What do you think, from this, the Overself of the Maharshi is? Is it the Antaratman leading to or widening into the Cosmic Self or is it the silent Self of the Jnanis, the traditional Atman, realised directly?

[*Sri Aurobindo did not immediately answer this question, posed on 4 March 1937. The correspondent sent two reminders, to which Sri Aurobindo answered as follows on 6 and 7 March:*]

I had started answering your questions but it took on too long a development and I could not finish it — I don’t suppose I shall find time.

⁵ Paul Brunton, *A Message from Arunachala* (London: Rider & Co., n.d. [1936]), pp. 205–7.

In the first place I do not want to go farther into the question of the Maharshi's realisation which does not really concern us. As I have said comparisons are of no use; each path has its own aim and direction and method and the truth of one does not invalidate the truth of the other. The Divine (or if you like, the Self) has many aspects and can be realised in many ways — to dwell upon those differences is irrelevant and without use.

Transformation is a word that I have brought in myself (like supermind) to express certain spiritual concepts and spiritual facts of the integral Yoga. People are now taking them up and using them in senses which have nothing to do with the significance which I put into them. Purification of the nature by the "influence" of the Spirit is not what I mean by transformation; purification is only part of a psychic change or a psycho-spiritual change — the word besides has many senses and is very often given a moral or ethical meaning which is foreign to my purpose. What I mean by the spiritual transformation is something dynamic (not merely liberation of the self, or realisation of the One which can very well be attained without any descent). It is a putting on of the spiritual consciousness dynamic as well as static in every part of the being down to the subconscious. That cannot be done by the influence of the Self leaving the consciousness fundamentally as it is with only purification, enlightenment of the mind and heart and quiescence of the vital. It means a bringing down of a Divine Consciousness static and dynamic into all these parts and the entire replacement of the present consciousness by that. This we find unveiled and unmixed above mind, life and body and not in mind, life and body. It is a matter of the undeniable experience of many that this can descend and it is my experience that nothing short of its *full* descent can thoroughly remove the veil and mixture and effect the full spiritual transformation. No metaphysical or logical reasoning in the void as to what the Atman "must" do or can do or needs or needs not to do is relevant here or of any value. I may add that transformation is not the central object of other paths as it is of this Yoga — only so much purification and change is demanded by them as will lead to liberation and the

beyond-life. The influence of the Atman can no doubt do that — a full descent of a new Consciousness into the whole nature from top to bottom to transform life here is not needed at all for the spiritual escape from life. 6 March 1937

*

Sundays are no better than other days. A number of people always choose it for long letters demanding replies. But apart from that to write what you demand of me would mean a volume, not a letter — especially as these are matters of which people know a great deal less than nothing and would either understand nothing or misunderstand everything. Some day I suppose I shall write something, but the supramental won't bear talking of now. Something about the spiritual transformation might be possible and I may finish the letter on that point⁶ — if I find leisure, but that is doubtful. 7 March 1937

*

The methods described in the account are the well-established methods of Jnanayoga⁷ — (1) one-pointed concentration followed by thought-suspension, (2) the method of distinguishing or finding out the true self by separating it from mind, life, body (this I have seen described by him more at length in another book) and coming to the pure I behind; this also can disappear into the Impersonal Self. The usual result is a merging in the Atman or Brahman — which is what one would suppose is meant by the Overself, for it is that which is the real Overself. This Brahman or Atman is everywhere, all is in it, it is in all, but it is in all not as an individual being in each but is the same in all — as the Ether is in all. When the merging into the Overself is complete, there is no ego, or distinguishable I, or any formed separative person or personality. All is *ekākāra* — an indivisible

⁶ The "letter" referred to here is presumably the one on pages 173–75, which Sri Aurobindo wrote below the date 6 March 1937. He apparently had not finished writing it when he wrote this note dated (Sunday) 7 March 1937. — Ed.

⁷ This is Sri Aurobindo's reply to the correspondent's question of 4 March 1937 (see pp. 172–73), containing Paul Brunton's account of Ramana Maharshi's methods. — Ed.

and indistinguishable Oneness either free from all formation or carrying all formations in it without being affected — for one can realise it in either way. There is a realisation in which all beings are moving in the one Self and this Self is there stable in all beings; there is another more complete and thoroughgoing in which not only is it so but all are vividly realised as the Self, the Brahman, the Divine. In the former, it is possible to dismiss all beings as creations of Maya, leaving the one Self alone as true — in the other it is easier to regard them as real manifestations of the Self, not as illusions. But one can also regard all beings as souls, independent realities in an eternal Nature dependent upon the One Divine. These are the characteristic realisations of the Overself familiar to the Vedanta. But on the other hand you say that this Overself is realised by the Maharshi as lodged in the heart-centre, and it is described by Brunton as something concealed which when it manifests appears as the real Thinker, source of all action, but now guiding thought and action in the Truth. Now the first description applies to the Purusha in the heart, described by the Gita as the Ishwara situated in the heart and by the Upanishads as the Purusha Antaratma; the second could apply also to the mental Purusha, *manomayaḥ prāṇasarīra netā* of the Upanishads, the mental Being or Purusha who leads the life and the body. So your question is one which on the data I cannot easily answer. His Overself may be a combination of all these experiences, without any clear distinction being made or thought necessary between the various aspects. There are a thousand ways of approaching and realising the Divine and each way has its own experiences which have their own truth and stand really on a basis, one in essence but complex in aspects, common to all, but not expressed in the same way by all. There is not much use in discussing these variations; the important thing is to follow one's own way well and thoroughly. In this Yoga, one can realise the Psychic Being as a portion of the Divine seated in the heart with the Divine supporting it there — this psychic being takes charge of the sadhana and turns the whole being to the Truth and the Divine, with results in the mind, the vital, the physical consciousness which I need not go into

here, — that is a first transformation. We realise it next as the one Self, Brahman, Divine, first *above* the body, life, mind and not only within the heart supporting them — above and free and unattached as the static Self but also extended in wideness through the world as the silent Self in all and dynamic too as the active cosmic Divine Being and Power, Ishwara-Shakti, containing the world and pervading it as well as transcending it, manifesting all cosmic aspects. But, what is most important for us, is that it manifests as a transcending Light, Knowledge, Power, Purity, Peace, Ananda of which we become aware above and which descends into the being and progressively replaces the ordinary consciousness by its own movements — that is the second transformation. We realise also the consciousness itself as moving upward, ascending through many planes physical, vital, mental, overmental to the supramental and Ananda planes. This is nothing new; it is stated in the Taittiriya Upanishad that there are five Purushas, the physical, the vital, the mental, the Truth Purusha (supramental) and the Bliss Purusha; it says that one has to draw the physical self up into the vital, the vital into the mental, the mental into the Truth Self, the Truth Self into the Bliss Self and so attain perfection. But in this Yoga we become aware not only of this taking up but of a pouring down of the powers of the higher Self, so that there comes in the possibility of a descent of the Supramental Self and nature to dominate and change our present nature and turn it from nature of Ignorance into nature of Truth-Knowledge (and through the supramental into nature of Ananda) — this is the third or supramental transformation. It does not always go in this order, for with many the spiritual descent begins first in an imperfect way before the psychic is in front and in charge, but the psychic development has to be attained before a perfect and unhampered spiritual descent can take place, and the last or supramental change is impossible so long as the two first have not become full and complete. That's the whole matter, put as briefly as possible. March 1934

I wish I had learned logic. One needs to know it before entering into a discussion with you. In a recent letter you say, as if logically: “If I think that the human plane is like the plane or planes of infinite Light, Power, Ananda, infallible Will Force, then I must be either a stark lunatic or a gibbering imbecile or a fool. . . .” Surely no one ever thought of you in these terms!

No need of logic to see that — a little common sense is sufficient. If anyone, no matter who he be, thinks that this world of ignorance, limitation and suffering is a plane of eternal and infinite Light, Power and Ananda, infallible Will and Power, what can he be but a self-deceiving fool or lunatic? And where then would be the need of bringing down the said Light, Power etc. from the higher planes, if it was already gambolling about all over this blessed earth and its absurd troop of human-animal beings? But perhaps you are of the opinion of Ramana Maharshi, “The Divine is here, how can he descend from anywhere?” The Divine may be here, but if he has covered here his Light with darkness of Ignorance and his Ananda with suffering, that, I should think, makes a big difference to the plane and, even if one enters into that sealed Light etc., it makes a difference to the Consciousness but very little to the Energy at work in this plane which remains of a dark or mixed character.

3 May 1937

Swami Ramdas

In the April number of *The Vision*, Ramdas concludes his editorial letter with the words, “When all are kind to us, we realise God’s own kindness, because God dwells in all — God is verily all.”⁸ But what cogent objection is there to continuing: “When all are cruel or indifferent to us, we realise God’s own cruelty or indifference, because etc.”? The stock answer is to acknowledge human incapacity to fathom an inscrutable Providence; but then why profess to do so in the case of kindness or similar circumstances of happiness (beauty, health, powers and capacities of different kinds)? It seems to

⁸ *The Vision*, vol. 1 (April 1934), p. 146.

be loading the dice — to be placing in the mouth of Providence some such words as “Heads I win, tails you lose”.

Earlier in the letter there is this sentence: “God is the one power who provides for and guides all the works of the Ashram [*i.e. Anandashram*] as He does also all the affairs of the world.” This put me in mind of a missionary who, trying hard to be liberal and fair-minded about Taoism in China, acknowledged defeat when confronted with the spectacle of Taoist priests conducting a religious ceremony in a brothel for the success of the business. Would it be possible for you to indicate which of your writings would clear up my perplexity?

I have not read Ramdas’s writings nor am I at all acquainted with his personality or what may be the level of his experience. The words you quote from him could be expressions either of a simple faith or of a pantheistic experience; evidently if they are used or intended to establish the thesis that the Divine is everywhere and is all and therefore all is good, being Divine, they are very insufficient for that purpose. But as an experience, it is a very common thing to have this feeling or realisation in the Vedantic sadhana — in fact without it there would be no Vedantic sadhana. I have had it myself on various levels of consciousness and in numerous forms and I have met scores of people who have had it very genuinely — not as an intellectual theory or perception, but as a spiritual reality which was too concrete for them to deny whatever paradoxes it may entail for the ordinary intelligence.

Of course it does not mean that all here is good or that in the estimation of values a brothel is as good as an Asram, but it does mean that all are part of one manifestation and that in the inner heart of the harlot as in the inner heart of the sage or saint there is the Divine. Again his experience is that there is one Force working in the world both in its good and in its evil — one Cosmic Force; it works both in the success (or failure) of the Asram and in the success (or failure) of the brothel. Things are done in this world by the use of the force, although the use made is according to the nature of the user, one uses it for the works of light, another for the works of

Darkness, yet another for a mixture. I don't think any Vedantin (except perhaps some modernised ones) would maintain that all is good here — the orthodox Vedantic idea is that all is here an inextricable mixture of good and evil, a play of the Ignorance and therefore a play of the dualities. The Christian missionaries, I suppose, hold that all that God does is morally good, so they are shocked by the Taoist priests aiding the work of the brothel by their rites. But do not the Christian priests invoke the aid of God for the destruction of men in battle and did not some of them sing *Te Deums* over a victory won by the massacre of men and the starvation of women and children? The Taoist who believes only in the Impersonal Tao is more consistent and the Vedantin who believes that the Supreme is beyond good and evil, but that the Cosmic Force the Supreme has put out here works through the dualities, therefore through both good and evil, joy and suffering, has a thesis which at least accounts for the double fact of the experience of the Supreme which is All Light, All Bliss and All Beauty and a world of mixed light and darkness, joy and suffering, what is fair and what is ugly. He says that the dualities come by a separative Ignorance and so long as you accept this separative Ignorance, you cannot get rid of that, but it is possible to draw back from it in experience and to have the realisation of the Divine in all and the Divine everywhere and then you begin to realise the Light, Bliss and Beauty behind all and this is the one thing to do. Also you begin to realise the one Force and you can use it or let it use you for the growth of the Light in you and others — no longer for the satisfaction of the ego and for the works of the ignorance and darkness.

As to the dilemma about the cruelty of things, I do not know what answer Ramdas would give. One answer might be that the Divine within is felt through the psychic being and the nature of the psychic being is that of the divine light, harmony, love, but it is covered by the mental and separative vital ego from which strife, hate, cruelty naturally come. It is therefore natural to feel in the kindness the touch of the Divine, while the cruelty is felt as a disguise or perversion in Nature, although that would not prevent the man who has the realisation from

feeling and meeting the Divine behind the disguise. I have known even instances in which the perception of the Divine in all accompanied by an intense experience of universal love or a wide experience of an inner harmony had an extraordinary effect in making all around kind and helpful, even the most coarse and hard and cruel. Perhaps it is some such experience which is at the base of Ramdas's statement about the kindness. As for the Divine working, the experience of the Vedantic realisation is that behind the confused mixture of good and evil something is working that he realises as the Divine and in his own life he can look back and see what each step, happy or unhappy, meant for his progress and how it led towards the growth of his spirit. Naturally this comes fully as the realisation progresses; before that he had to walk by faith and may have often felt his faith fail and yielded to grief, doubt and despair for a time.

As for my writings, I don't know if there is any that would clear up the difficulty. You would find mostly the statement of the Vedantic experience, for it is that through which I passed and, though now I have passed to something beyond, it seems to me the most thorough-going and radical preparation for whatever is Beyond, though I do not say that it is indispensable to pass through it. But whatever the solution, it seems to me that the Vedantin is right in insisting that one must, to arrive at it, admit the two facts, the prevalence of evil and suffering here and the experience of that which is free from these things — and it is only by the progressive experience that one can get a solution — whether through reconciliation, a conquering descent or an escape. If we start from the basis taken as an axiom that the prevalence of suffering and evil in the present and in the hard, outward fact of things, disproves of itself all that has been experienced by sages and mystics of the other side, the realisable Divine, then no solution seems possible. 15 April 1934

J. Krishnamurti

At one time I tried to come into imaginative contact with J. Krishnamurti. I imagined as follows: He has acquired a quiet

mind and a semi-quiet vital and has glimpses through them of the Self. He receives some things intuitively in his mind. But he goes no further than that. He has neither the knowledge nor the power nor bliss of the higher planes.

What he speaks is all purely mental — if he has any glimpses of realisation, they are in the mind only. 4 September 1933

*

I don't think there is much either in this man himself or in his teachings. It does not seem to me that he is a yogi in the true sense of the word but rather a man with some intellectual ability who is posing as a spiritual teacher. His photograph gives an impression of much pretension and vanity and an impression also of much falsity in the character. As for what he teaches, it does not hang together. If all books are worthless, why did he write a book and one of this kind telling people what they should do, what they should not do and if all teachers are unhelpful, why does he take the posture of a teacher since according to his own statement that cannot be helpful to anybody? Krishnamurti was, before he broke away on his own, certainly the disciple of two Gurus, Leadbeater and Annie Besant: if he has denounced Mrs. Besant, Krishnaprem is quite entitled to denounce him as a *gurudrohī*. 9 December 1949

Remarks on European Writers on Occultism

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

On reading *La Vie de Mme Blavatsky*, I had the impression that there is nothing but vital occultism in her. Her life and work are concerned mostly with the supraphysical worlds and spirits and miraculous powers and Mahatmas.

You are quite right. She was an occultist, not a spiritual personality. What spiritual teachings she gave, seemed to be based on *intellectual* knowledge, not on realisation. Her attitude was Tibetan Buddhistic. She did not believe in God, but in Nirvana, miraculous powers and the Mahatmas. 31 March 1936

Alexandra David-Neel

Recently someone gave me a book called *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet* by Madame Alexandra David-Neel. I am sending you a photograph of her. I was impressed by the hardships she endured and by her study of Tibetan mystics. But I don't know whether what she writes is authentic.

This is a photograph of Madame David-Neel taken long ago when she was much younger. Her story about her travels is perfectly authentic. She came here once to Pondicherry and saw me on her way to the North — that was before the Mother came here. Mother knew her very well in Paris. Even before she went to Tibet she was a Buddhist and deeply versed in Buddhism. As to the authenticity of all in this book (magic, mysticism) Mother cannot say as she has not read it. But she is not a woman with any imagination or invention and has a rather hard positive mind, — if there are any “travellers’ tales” she is more likely to have heard them than invented them.

Remarks on Public Figures in India

Sayajirao Gaekwar

I find it strange that they have made the Gaekwar the President of the World Conference of Faiths. Is he a Hindu?

When I knew him the Gaekwar was a free-thinker without any religion; I don't know if he has altered his views since. Formally, he is of course a Hindu. 7 July 1936

*

I read the Gaekwar's speech at the World Conference of Faiths. It is full of commonplace ideas about brotherhood, fellowship and goodwill. These ideas seem to have become mere catchwords and it is doubtful if they can be of any help in solving the problems of modern life.

One can't expect anything more than catchwords and the most common ones from the Gaekwar on such subjects and occasions — in fact the whole affair of this Conference is likely to be little else. There are people who have a faith in words and think that with them they can sweep back the realities of life and embody effectively the realities of spirit. 9 July 1936

Mahatma Gandhi

As for Gandhi, why should you suppose that I am so tender for the faith of the Mahatma? I do not call it faith at all, but a rigid mental belief, and what he terms soul-force is only a strong vital will which has taken a religious turn. That, of course, can be a tremendous force for action, but unfortunately Gandhi spoils it by his ambition to be a man of reason, while in fact he has no reason in him at all, never was reasonable at any moment in his life and, I suppose, never will be. What he has in its place is a remarkable type of unintentionally sophistic logic. Well, what this

reason, this amazingly, precisely unreliable logic brings about is that nobody is ever sure and, I don't think, he is himself really sure what he will do next. He has not only two minds, but three or four minds, and all depends on which will turn up topmost at a particular moment and how it will combine with the others. There would be no harm in that, on the contrary there might be an advantage if there were a central Light somewhere choosing for him and shaping the decision to the need of the action. He thinks there is and calls it God — but it has always seemed to me that it is his own mind that decides and most of the time decides wrongly. Anyhow I cannot imagine Lenin or Mustapha Kemal not knowing their own minds or acting in this way — even their strategic retreats were steps towards an end clearly conceived and executed. But whatever it be, it is all mind-action and vital-force in Gandhi. So why should he be taken as an example of the defeat of the Divine or of a spiritual Power? I quite allow that there has been something behind Gandhi greater than himself and you can call it the Divine or a Cosmic Force which has used him, but then there is that behind everybody who is used as an instrument for world ends, — behind Kemal and Lenin also, — so that is not germane to the matter.

29 July 1932

*

This second fast of Mahatma Gandhi of three weeks has disquieted me a little. There seems to be no way out, for Gandhi asserts that he can break his irrevocable fast only if he is persuaded that the inner voice which enjoins the fast on him is the voice not of God but of the Devil. I wonder whose voice it is though? Can it be anything but disastrous augury?

I don't think it was the voice of God that raged and thundered till Gandhi decided to starve himself on to the danger line — it looks as if it were the other fellow. One can only hope that he will scrape through somehow and that the doctors are wrong as they most often are when they opine in the plural; but the last experiment was not encouraging. And as this time there seems to be no reason whatever for this inspired procedure and no

practical or practicable object set before it, there is no tangible means either of bringing it to a timely close. What an extraordinary ignorance of spiritual things to take any “inner” shout for the command of the Supreme!

5 May 1933

*

Yesterday I thought how nice it would be if Gandhiji came here for the truth which he is seeking. At times he hears some “voice” he says.

I don’t think he would accept the Truth that is here. His mind is too rigid for it.

22 July 1933

*

The letter to Govindbhai from Gandhiji has created a stir in the atmosphere and people are busy speculating.¹ Some think it would be an event useful to the world if he could see you. I wonder if even half an hour’s interview would help our inner work or its outward manifestation. Perhaps people are excited about the possibility that the Truth that is here and is accepted by us will be accepted by a person who is called the world’s greatest man.

Gandhi has his own work, his own ideal and dharma — how can he open himself to receive anything from here?

28 December 1933

*

I heard that Gandhi has written a letter expressing his desire to have an interview with Sri Aurobindo.

I don’t see how I can see him — the time has not come when I

¹ In December 1933, Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Govindbhai Patel, a disciple of Sri Aurobindo then living in the Ashram, asking whether it would be possible for him to meet Sri Aurobindo. Govindbhai communicated Gandhi’s request to Sri Aurobindo. On 2 January 1934, Gandhi wrote directly to Sri Aurobindo asking for a face-to-face meeting. Extracts from Govindbhai’s and Gandhi’s letters, and Sri Aurobindo’s complete replies, are published in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 442–44. — Ed.*

can depart from my rule.²

29 December 1933

*

I was glad when X informed me that Gandhi is not coming here. I had an impression that his coming just before our occasion [*the darshan of 21 February*] would create a disturbance in the atmosphere.

It would have meant a very serious and quite unprofitable and unnecessary disturbance.

4 February 1934

*

It seems some people from the town went to see Gandhi and asked him why he had cancelled his visit to the Asram. Gandhi is supposed to have said that it was because Sri Aurobindo was not willing to see him, after which he showed a copy of the notice which was put on our notice board—the one prohibiting members of the Asram from attending Gandhi's arrival procession, etc.³ I don't believe Gandhi actually had a copy of the notice but some people in town must have known of it.

That is all nonsense. Gandhi's decision not to come here was made before the notice was put on the board. My decision to issue the notice and his decision not to come may have coincided—but how could he know it except by telepathy?

In one of his letters to Govindbhai, Gandhi said that he would be much disappointed if he did not see Sri Aurobindo. If that was the case, I wonder why he couldn't wait till the 21st to have Darshan.

I suppose the disappointment was nothing more than a phrase—meaning, I would so much have liked to see what kind of a person you are. If I have read his last letter to Govindbhai aright, his request was dictated by curiosity rather than anything else.

² After November 1926, Sri Aurobindo made it a rule not to meet with anyone, not even his disciples.—Ed.

³ See Notice of 3 February 1934, in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, p. 536.—Ed.

If anybody expected him to come here seeking for Truth, it was absurd — he has his own fixed way of seeing things and is not likely to change it. 9 February 1934

*

Yesterday Gandhi asked permission to see the Mother. I heard that Mother asked Govindbhai to meet him and explain her inability to see him.

Gandhi wrote to Govindbhai and from his letter it seemed as if he were still expecting to see the Mother and the Asram or at least expecting an answer. In view of this persistence we sent Govindbhai to explain to him that it was impossible for the Mother to receive his visit. 23 February 1934

*

It is curious that mosquitoes do not bite me. Perhaps they do not like my blood or they do not bite me because I don't kill them. Here is an example of the efficacy of the truth of Ahimsa. But if this is true, why with all the Ahimsa Gandhi practises has the government not given up their enmity towards him? Of course, the meaning of Ahimsa can be extended to All-love, and, as it says in one Upanishad, everything that is not compatible with the Higher Self is Himsa.

Mosquitoes do have strong preferences (and dislikes) in the matter of blood. One person is sleeping in a room, no mosquitoes — another enters, immediately there is a cloud of mosquitoes. Also as between two persons in a room, they will swarm round one and leave the other.

I don't think the Ahimsa principle works like that with Governments — after all Gandhi is trying to do to them or their interests immense harm and you can't expect his mere non-violence to make them love him for that or leave him alone. On the other hand Ahimsa does work (though not invariably) with animals — if you don't kill them, they don't as a rule go out of their way to kill you — unless they are frightened or mad or otherwise abnormal or unless it is their rule to kill. I don't know what effect it can have on mosquitoes.

All-love is a different matter — it has sometimes a powerful effect, very powerful, in conciliating automatically men, animals, Nature itself. The only beings who do not respond are the Asuras and Rakshasas.

11 March 1934

*

Someone was speaking to me about Gandhi's seven-day fast. I said: "Is it to create an earthquake for the sake of the Harijans? At least his own earth (body) will quake."

It seems to be very foolish, these fasts — as if they could alter anything at all. A fast can at most affect one's own condition, but how can it "atone" for the doings of others or change their nature?

12 July 1934

*

In a recent statement, Gandhi criticises the attitude taken by Dr. Ambedkar and his followers at the Bombay Presidency Depressed Classes Conference. They passed a resolution recommending the "complete severance of the Depressed Classes from the Hindu fold and their embracing any other religion which guaranteed them equal status and treatment". About this Gandhi says: "But religion is not like a house or a cloak, which can be changed at will. It is more an integral part of one's self than of one's body. Religion is the tie that binds one to one's Creator and whilst the body perishes, as it has to, religion persists even after death."⁴ Is there any truth in what Gandhi says? Why should a particular religion persist after death? Why should one be bound to one form of religion if one feels the necessity of a different approach to Truth?

If it is meant by the statement that the form of religion is something permanent and unchangeable, then that cannot be accepted. But if religion here means one's way of communion with the Divine, then it is true that that is something belonging to the inner being and cannot be changed like a house or a cloak

⁴ M. K. Gandhi, "Statement to the Press" (15 October 1935), in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 62 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, 1975), p. 37.

for the sake of some personal, social or worldly convenience. If a change is to be made, it can only be for an inner spiritual reason, because of some development from within. No one can be bound to any form of religion or any particular creed or system, but if he changes the one he has accepted for another, for external reasons, that means he has inwardly no religion at all and both his old and his new religion are only an empty formula. At bottom that is, I suppose, what the statement drives at. Preference for a different approach to the Truth or the desire of inner spiritual self-expression are not the motives of the recommendation of change to which objection is made by the Mahatma here; the object proposed is an enhancement of social status and consideration which is no more a spiritual motive than conversion for the sake of money or marriage. If a man has no religion in himself, he can change his credal profession for any motive; if he has, he cannot; he can only change it in response to an inner spiritual need. If a man has a bhakti for the Divine in the form of Krishna, he can't very well say "I will swap Krishna for Christ so that I may become socially respectable."

19 October 1935

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Gandhi says the following in a recent article: "I hold that complete realization is impossible in this embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human beings."⁵
Your opinion on the matter?

I do not know what Mahatma Gandhi means by complete realisation. If he means a realisation with nothing more to realise, no farther development possible, then I agree—I have myself spoken of farther divine progression, an infinite development. But the question is not that; the question is whether the Ignorance can be transcended, whether a complete essential realisation turning the consciousness from darkness to light, from

⁵ M. K. Gandhi, "Where Is the Living God?" (13 June 1936), in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 63 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, 1976), p. 58.

an instrument of the Ignorance seeking for Knowledge into an instrument or rather a manifestation of Knowledge proceeding to greater Knowledge, Light enlarging, heightening into greater Light, is or is not possible. My view is that this conversion is not only possible, but inevitable in the spiritual evolution of the being here. The embodiment of life has nothing to do with it. This embodiment is not of life, but of consciousness and its energy, of which life is only one phase or force. As life has developed mind, and the embodiment has modified itself to suit this development (mind is precisely the main instrument of ignorance seeking for knowledge), so mind can develop supermind which is in its nature knowledge not seeking for itself, but manifesting itself by its own automatic power, and the embodiment can again modify itself or be modified from above so as to suit this development. Faith is a necessary means for arriving at realisation because we are ignorant and do not yet know that which we are seeking to realise; faith is indeed knowledge giving the ignorance an intimation of itself previous to its own manifestation, it is the gleam sent before by the yet unrisen Sun. When the Sun shall rise there will be no longer any need of the gleam. The supramental knowledge supports itself, it does not need to be supported by faith; it lives by its own certitude. You may say that farther progression, farther development will need faith. No, for the farther development will proceed on a basis of knowledge, not of Ignorance. We shall walk in the light of knowledge towards its own wider vistas of self-fulfilment.

7 July 1936

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I would prefer to avoid all public controversy especially if it touches in the least on politics. Gandhi's theories are like other mental theories built on a basis of one-sided reasoning and claiming for a limited truth (that of non-violence and of passive resistance) a universality which it cannot have. Such theories will always exist so long as the mind is the main instrument of human truth seeking. To spend energy trying to destroy such theories is of little use; if destroyed they are replaced by others equally limited and partial.

As for imperialism, that is no new thing — it is as old as the human vital; there was never a time in known human history when it was not in existence. To get rid of it means to change human nature or at least to curb it by a superior power. Our work is not to fight these things but to bring down a higher nature and a Truth-creation which will make spiritual Light and Power the chief force in terrestrial existence. 10 October 1936

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Mahatma Gandhi is reported to have said: “To be born as a ‘Bhangi’ was the result of great *punya* in previous birth. He [*Gandhi*] did not know what qualifications determined the birth of one man as Bhangi and another as Brahmin, but from the point of view of benefit to society the one was no whit lower than the other.”⁶ This seems like nonsense to me. How can he say that through *punya* (righteous acts) in previous births people go to a life in the lowest order of human society?

The view taken by the Mahatma in these matters is Christian rather than Hindu — for the Christian self-abasement, humility, the acceptance of a low status to serve humanity or the Divine are things which are highly spiritual and the noblest privilege of the soul. This view does not admit any hierarchy of castes; the Mahatma accepts castes but on the basis that all are equal before the Divine, a bhangi doing his dharma is as good as the Brahmin doing his, there is division of function but no hierarchy of functions. That is one view of things and the hierarchic view is another, both having a standpoint and logic of their own which the mind takes as wholly valid but which only corresponds to a part of the reality. All kinds of work are equal before the Divine and all men have the same Brahman within them, is one truth, but that development is not equal in all is another. The idea that it needs special *punya* to be born as a bhangi is of course one of those forceful exaggerations of an idea which are common

⁶ M. K. Gandhi, “Address to Congress Volunteers” (21 December 1936). Reported in the *Hindu* and other newspapers, and reproduced in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 64 (New Delhi: The Publications Division, 1976), pp. 162–63.

with the Mahatma and impress greatly the mind of his hearers. The idea behind is that his function is an indispensable service to the society, quite as much as the Brahmin's, but that being disagreeable it would need a special moral heroism to choose it voluntarily and he thinks as if the soul freely chose it as such a heroic service and as a reward of righteous acts — that is hardly likely. The service of the scavenger is indispensable under certain conditions of society, it is one of those primary necessities without which society can hardly exist and the cultural development of which the Brahmin life is part could not have taken place. But obviously the cultural development is more valuable than the service of the physical needs for the progress of humanity as opposed to its first static condition and that development can even lead to the minimising and perhaps the eventual disappearance by scientific inventions of the need for the functions of the scavenger. But that I suppose the Mahatma would not approve of as it is machinery and a departure from the simple life. In any case it is not true that the bhangi life is superior to the Brahmin life and the reward of especial righteousness. On the other hand the traditional conception that a man is superior to others because he is born a Brahmin is not rational or justifiable. A spiritual or cultured man of Pariah birth is superior in the divine values to an unspiritual and worldly-minded or a crude and uncultured Brahmin. Birth counts, but the basic value is in the man himself, the soul behind and the degree to which it manifests itself in his nature.

23 December 1936

Jawaharlal Nehru

I have just finished Jawaharlal's autobiography. I send you some citations which moved me deeply. I caught myself today praying for him that he may have peace. How I wish he could do yoga for a year at least, if only to realise the divine harmony within him — even in this age when times are so grievously "out of joint".

I have not read Jawaharlal's book and know nothing of his life except what is public; now of course I have no time for reading.

But he bears on himself the stamp of a very fine character, a nature of the highest sattwic kind, full of rectitude and a high sense of honour: a man of the finest Brahmin type with what is best in European education added — that is the impression he gives. I must say that Mother was struck by his photograph when she first saw it in the papers, singling it out from the mass of ordinary *eminent* people.

But peace? Peace is never easy to get in the life of the world and never constant, unless one lives deep within and bears the external activities as only a surface front of our being. And the work he has to do is the least peaceful of all. If Buddha had to lead the Indian National Congress, well! For the spiritual life there is perhaps no immediate possibility: his mind stands in between, for it has seized strongly the Socialist dream of social perfection by *outward* change as the thing to be striven for and has made that into a sort of religion. The best possible on earth has been made by his mind its credo: the something beyond he does not believe in, the something more here would seem to him a dream without basis, I suppose. But pray for him, of course. He is a man with a strong psychic element and in this life or another that must go beyond the mind to find its source.

13 September 1936

Subhas Chandra Bose

I have read your correspondence with Subhas Bose.⁷ Your main point is of course quite the right thing to answer; all this insistence upon action is absurd if one has not the light by which to act. Yoga must include life and not exclude it does not mean that we are bound to accept life as it is with all its stumbling ignorance and misery and the obscure confusion of human will and reason and impulse and instinct which it expresses. The advocates of action think that by human intellect and energy making an always new rush everything can be put right; the

⁷ All the letters in this group except the one dated 2 July 1938 were written to Dilip Kumar Roy, who was a close friend of Subhas Chandra Bose. — Ed.

present state of the world after a development of the intellect and a stupendous output of energy for which there is no historical parallel is a signal proof of the illusion under which they labour. Yoga takes the stand that it is only by a change of consciousness that the true basis of life can be discovered; from within outward is indeed the rule. But within does not mean some quarter inch behind the surface. One must go deep and find the soul, the self, the Divine Reality within us and only then can life become a true expression of what we can be instead of a blind and always repeated confused blur of the inadequate and imperfect thing we were. The choice is between remaining in the old jumble and groping about in the hope of stumbling on some discovery or standing back and seeking the Light within till we discover and can build the godhead within and without us. 16 June 1932

*

I want to send Chapter 1 of “The Yoga of Divine Works” to Subhas. It will, I am sure, be just the aliment for his soul and may work a sort of miracle as it did in me. So unless you have a particular reason, could you see your way to allowing me to send him this chapter by tomorrow’s post?

I am not sure that Subhas is prepared to receive any effect from it — it is only because your inner preparation had proceeded to a point at which you could feel something of what was behind the words that it had an effect upon you. All the same — you can send it, if you like. 26 December 1932

*

I received this post-card from Subhas in the last mail. He had written it before starting for Calcutta by aeroplane. Now he is practically a prisoner — a home-internee really — at his residence. I wonder what work he will be doing now. . . . He used once to meditate and see light and had a real bhakti — had even turned a sannyasi once. And now he says that seeking the Divine is useless inactive work!

I had never a very great confidence in Subhas’s yoga-turn getting the better of his activism — he has two strong ties that prevent

it, ambition and need to act and lead in the vital and in the mind a mental idealism — these two things are the great fosterers of illusion. The spiritual path needs a certain amount of realism — one has to see the real value of the things that are — which is very little, except as steps in evolution. Then one can either follow the spiritual static path of rest and release or the spiritual dynamic path of a greater truth to be brought down into life. But otherwise —

12 December 1934

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I wrote a letter to Subhas this morning in reply to his exhorting me to come away, assuring me that all my friends want me back and that nobody is cross with me etc. etc. I wrote that I must be faithful to the call of my soul and to my Guru whom I do believe to be the Divine incarnate. Perhaps he will smile the well-known “the old old story” smile of our up-to-date rationalism.

Well, his also is the old old story repeated without any satisfactory result or liberating end.

20 August 1935

*

Here is Subhas the despairer: “It is no use trying to argue with you. You are quite blind. Reason is but the slave of your faith. When I think how a person of your calibre can surrender his reasoning in this way, I feel like despairing of my country. Everywhere we find the same thing. You regard Sri Aurobindo as God Incarnate. So many regard Mahatma Gandhi in the same light. My own mother — whose sincerity I cannot doubt — has a guru whom she regards as God incarnate.” — *Extract from a letter of Subhas Chandra Bose to Dilip Kumar Roy, dated Vienna, 23 December 1935.*

As for the desperate Subhas, why the deuce does he want everybody to agree with him and follow his line of conduct or belief? That is the never realised dream of the politician; we, incarnate Gods, Gurus, spiritual men, are more modest in our hopes and are satisfied with a handful or, if you like, an Asramful of disciples, and even we don't ask for that, — they come, they come.

So are we not nearer to reason and wisdom than the political leaders? Unless of course we make the mistake of founding a universal religion, but that is not our case. Moreover, Subhas upbraids you for losing your reason in blind faith, but what is his view of things except a reasoned faith; you believe according to your faith, which is quite natural, he believes according to his opinion, which is natural also but no better so far as the likelihood of getting at the true truth of things is in question. His opinion is according to his reason? So is the opinion of his political opponents according to their reason, yet they affirm the very opposite idea to his. How is reason going to show which is right? The opposite parties can argue till they are blue in the face, they won't be anywhere nearer a decision. In the end he prevails whom the greater force or whom the trend of things favours. But who can look at the world and say that the trend of things is always (or ever) according to right reason — whatever this thing called right reason may be? As a matter of fact there is no universal infallible reason which can decide and be the umpire between conflicting opinions, there is only my reason, your reason, x's, y's, z's reason multiplied up to the discordant innumerable. Each reasons according to his view of things, his opinion, that is, his mental constitution and mental preference. So what's the use of running down faith which after all gives something to hold on to amidst the contradictions of an enigmatic universe? If one can get at a knowledge that knows, it is another matter; but so long as we have only an ignorance that argues, well, there is a place still left for faith — even, faith may be a glint from the knowledge that knows, however far off, and meanwhile there is not the slightest doubt that it helps to get things done. There's a bit of reasoning for you! just like all other reasoning too, convincing to the convinced, but not to the unconvincible, i.e., who don't agree with the ground upon which the reasoning dances. Logic after all is only a measured dance of the mind, nothing else.

The day before yesterday I was telling someone how Bertrand Russell, in his *In Praise of Idleness*, predicted with almost irrefutable logic the coming collapse of war-mad Europe seized with lunacy born of horror on the one hand and greed on the other. Just listen: “We are all more aware of our fellow-citizens than we used to be, more anxious, if we are virtuous, to do them good,” — like Dr. Stanley Jones, what? — “and in any case to make them do us good. We do not like to think of anyone lazily enjoying life, however refined may be the quality of his enjoyment. We feel that everybody ought to be doing something to help on the great cause (whatever it may be), the more so as so many bad men are working against it and ought to be stopped. We have not leisure of mind, therefore, to acquire any knowledge except such as will help us in the fight for whatever it may happen to be that we think important.”⁸ What would the rational Subhas, himself a worshipper of Russell’s keen logic, say to this cynicism?

Poor Subhas! But he is a politician and the rationality of politicians has perforce to move within limits; if they were to allow themselves to be as clear-minded as that, their occupation would be gone. It is not everybody who can be as cynical as Birkenhead or as philosophical as C. R. Das and go on with political reason or political humbug in spite of knowing what it all came to — from *arrivisme* in the one and from patriotism in the other case.

In another essay, Russell writes: “When the indemnities were imposed, the Allies regarded themselves as consumers: they considered that it would be pleasant to have the Germans work for them as temporary slaves, and to be able themselves to consume, without labour, what the Germans had produced. Then, after the Treaty of Versailles had been concluded, they suddenly remembered that they were also producers, and that the influx of German goods which they had been demanding would ruin their industries. . . . The plain fact is that the governing classes of the world are too ignorant and stupid to be able to think through such a problem, and too conceited

⁸ Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1935), pp. 35–36.

to ask advice of those who might help them” [pp. 66–67]. Well, what would Subhas as a ruling patriot say to this? How support his reason? All these meeting-makers are reasonable people, aren’t they?

Yes, but human reason is a very convenient and accommodating instrument and works only in the circle set for it by interest, partiality and prejudice. The politicians reason wrongly or insincerely and have power to enforce the results of their reasoning, so make a mess of the world’s affairs, — the intellectuals reason and see what their minds show them, which is far from being always the truth, for it is generally decided by intellectual preference and the mind’s inborn or education-inculcated angle of vision, — but even when they see it, they have no power to enforce it. So between blind power and seeing impotence the world moves, achieving destiny through a mental muddle.

To conclude, Russell writes in the same essay: “When a nation, instead of an individual, is seized with lunacy, it is thought to be displaying remarkable industrial wisdom” [p. 67]. *Qu’en dites-vous?*

Seized with lunacy? But that implies the nation is ordinarily led by reason? Is it so? Or even by common sense? Masses of men act upon their vital push, not according to reason — individuals too mostly, though they frequently call in their reason as a lawyer to plead the vital’s case. 30 January 1936

*

Sarojini Naidu’s daughter Padmaja told me today that when Subhas issued his manifesto from Europe to the effect that he and Jawaharlal were great friends and at one on every point, he actually had been scheming from Europe to bring J. down in the public eye. I could not believe this, I told her point blank. She averred it was absolutely true. I am very pained to hear it. For though I feel there is not a little exaggeration in this business, I fear there may be substance of truth somewhere in this dirty story.

I would certainly not hang anybody on the testimony of Padmaja: she has too much of a delight in scandal-mongering of the worst kind; but I suppose she would not cite Jawaharlal as a witness if there were nothing in it. The question is: how much exaggeration? I am afraid it is not at all impossible that Subhas should say one thing to Jawaharlal and quite another to somebody else. Politics is like that, a dirty and corrupting business full of “policy”, “strategy”, “tactics”, “diplomacy”: in other words, lying, tricking, manoeuvring of all kinds. A few escape the corruption but most don’t. It has after all always been a trade or art of Kautilya from the beginning, and to touch it and not be corrupted is far from easy. For it is a field in which people fix their eyes on the thing to be achieved and soon become careless about the character of the means, while ambition, ego and self-interest come pouring in to aid the process. Human nature is prone enough to crookedness as it is, but here the ordinary restraints put upon it fail to be at all effective. That however is general: in a particular case one can’t pronounce without knowing the circumstances more at first hand or before having seen the documents cited.

20 October 1936

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For Subhas Bose, country is the one thing that matters and nothing else.

Excuse me — country is not the only thing for Subhas Bose — there is also Subhas Bose and he looms very large. You have illusions about these political heroes — I have seen them close and have none.

2 July 1938

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I am not responsible for anything that may have been said by any sadhak in the Asram. I have not said that Subhas was my enemy and that anybody sympathising with him ought to leave the Asram. If this statement was made, it certainly did not have my authority. There is absolutely no reason why you should say anything contrary to your feelings or to what you believe to be

the truth, or feel that in not doing so you were going contrary to what was expected of you and think of leaving the Asram. The question you put me as to what you should do, does not really arise, for I would never make any such demand on anybody. I hope that will clear your mind and restore your peace.

30 March 1942

*

In all this imbroglio about the book on Subhas⁹ one thing is positive that I never gave any such order and it ought to have been evident to everybody that I could not have done it since I permitted the publication of your book and the prohibition of it would have been too outrageous a self-contradiction to be even thinkable. . . .

Behind all that is an old story which may account for everything. You will remember that both the Mother and I were very angry against Subhas for having brought the Japanese into India and reproached him with it as a treason and crime against the Motherland. For if they had got in, it would have been almost impossible to get them out. The Mother knows the Japanese nation well and was positive about that. Okawa, the leader of the Black Dragon (the one who shammed mad and got off at the Tokyo trial) told her that if India revolted against the British, Japan would send her Navy to help, but he said that he would not like the Japanese to land because if they once got hold of Indian soil they would never leave it, and it was true enough. If the Japanese had overrun India, and they would have done it if a powerful Divine intervention had not prevented it and turned the tables on them, they would have joined the Germans in Mesopotamia and the Caucasus and nothing could have saved Europe and Asia from being overrun. This would have meant the destruction of our work and a horrible fate for this country and for the world. You can understand therefore the bitterness of our feelings at that time against Subhas and his association with the Axis and the disaster to his country for which he would have

⁹ The Subhash I Knew, by Dilip Kumar Roy (Bombay, Nalanda Publications, 1946).

been responsible. Incidentally, instead of being liberated in 1948, India would have had to spend a century or several centuries in a renewed servitude. When therefore the Mother heard that you were writing a book eulogising Subhas, she disapproved strongly of any such thing issuing out of the Ashram and she wanted that you should be asked not to publish it. . . .

. . . Subsequently she met one of the chief lieutenants of Subhas, a man from Hyderabad who had been his secretary and companion in the submarine by which he came from Germany to Japan, and he recounted his daily talks in the submarine and strongly defended his action. From what he said it was evident although we still regarded Subhas's action as a reckless and dangerous folly, that the aspect of a crime against the country disappeared from it. Since then Mother modified her attitude towards Subhas; moreover, the war was receding into the past and there was no longer any room for the poignancy of the feeling it had raised and it was better that all that should be forgotten. But although almost a year had passed, the impressions made at that time have remained in the minds of many and account for the attitude of X and Y to your book and must also be the psychological source of X's misunderstanding about the supposed order.

We regret that a blow should have fallen on you and the pain accompanying it when no blow was really given or intended. Anyhow, the matter has been rectified; the library has been informed that there has been a misunderstanding, no prohibition was actually made and the book must be issued to sadhaks.

5 April 1947

Remarks on Public Figures in Europe

Kaiser Wilhelm II

The Kaiser gave up at the last moment when he could have assumed a dictatorship. Napoleon did the same after Waterloo.

In Napoleon's case they say it was the result of his disease, he was no longer quite his old self. The Kaiser was a man without any real strong stuff in him to face adversity. In the German case they simply lost hope after the American intervention and the failure of the submarine campaign — there was no way out any longer and they felt exhausted by a hopeless struggle. But the end was inevitable. After the turning back at Compiègne all the balance of forces had passed to the other side. 26 October 1934

The Kaiser, Hitler and His Lieutenants

Hitler and his chief lieutenants Goering and Goebbels are certainly vital beings or possessed by vital beings, so you can't expect common sense from them. The Kaiser, though ill-balanced, was a much more human person; these people are hardly human at all. The nineteenth century in Europe was a preeminently human era — now the vital world seems to be descending there.

18 September 1936

Stalin, Lenin and Trotsky

From what I read about Stalin's life, it seems that it was he who saved Bolshevism (even when Lenin was there) and turned several catastrophes into successes either by military operations or tactics. If Lenin was the mind of the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin was its vital — a very solid, steadfast and intuitive vital.

But where did you read that? It must be someone who since Stalin became powerful has exaggerated his share in the work. When Lenin lived he alone was all-powerful and dictated the whole policy changing it whenever that was needed. As for military operations, the man who saved Bolshevism in history was Trotsky who organised the Red Army, created it out of nothing and directed its operations. Stalin was not so much the vital as the physical mind working out details; after Lenin's death he took charge and arranged everything by this faculty.

25 January 1937

Edward Windsor

Edward VIII is becoming a plain-clothes sentinel now (once more) of his realm instead of being quondam august keeper! Most are lost in a ferment.

But I don't understand. Why should there be a ferment about this affair among the "most"? What is Edward Windsor to them or they to Edward Windsor? He has very sensibly kicked over the traces and chucked the unpleasant work of being a King who can do nothing except nod his head like a marionette to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet and preferred to have his own life as a man and not a pseudo-king. Quite natural. What is said is that he was too democratic and socialistic for the British Parliamentarians, wanted to create a free and united Ireland, give full Dominion autonomy without reserve to India, do something for the workers etc. and generally made himself a vigorous nuisance to Baldwin and Co. Hence they took the first opportunity to put him in the dilemma "Be a puppet or go." It is very probable. Anyhow it seems that the new George will suit them very well. So all is for the best in the best possible of all possible Baldwinian worlds and there is nothing to be in a ferment over.

12 December 1936

Remarks on Indian Affairs 1930–1946

The Civil Disobedience Movement

I have received a letter from my father. He says he read Pandit Sunderlal's speech published in a newspaper, in which he has reportedly stated that you have asked your disciples to join the Civil Disobedience Movement.

You can write to your father that Sri Aurobindo has given no such orders to his disciples. The statement of Sunderlal has no foundation.

4 May 1930

Indian Independence and the Muslims

The Hindu mentality in politics is such that they would a thousand times prefer British rule to any Mahomedan influence, even if it be only a little.

That was never the view of the Nationalists, even those who were ardent Hindus who would prefer Moslem to British rule.

Even if Swaraj itself were postponed for a long time, it would be less of a shock to anybody in the Ashram than if Mahomedans got a little right.

The Asram is not concerned with politics; but I cannot believe without proof that this is the state of their mentality.

17 November 1932

Dominion Status

The Mother has said that only a minor portion of the government will remain in British hands.

That seems to be a description of "Dominion Status". In the Dominions the British Government have only a nominal power, not any real sovereignty.

It is not the time to speak of these things — for we have kept politics out of our scope. What we have to do is not to trouble ourselves about it but to get the spiritual realisation. The rest will work itself out according to the Divine Decree.

26 January 1935

India and the Expected World War

If England is involved in the war, she will naturally call on India for men and money. And to obtain it, she will have to hold out the bait of freedom. But India won't commit the same foolish mistake she was led to commit during the last war.

What India? The Legislative Assembly? You think it has force enough to exact freedom as a price of some military help? Must have changed much if they can do that. 5 October 1935

Prospects for India after Independence

In the *Times*, there are some predictions by Mme Laila saying that India's civilisation, philosophy, culture etc. will spread in the world very slowly but at last it will be recognised as the best culture. She has however also predicted that India will always remain under Britain. Perhaps it is not advisable for India to get freedom soon, because even before getting it there is so much competition for power.

The spread of India's spirit is obviously the essential. As for freedom it is necessary and certainly no empire is everlasting — but I expect the first days of freedom will be rather trying. Perhaps a Mussolini will have to rise to get rid of the corruption and mutual quarrelling and disorder. 18 April 1935

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You know it is the confounded Raj that has fomented this communal incident [*in Bengal, as described in a newspaper report that the correspondent summarised for Sri Aurobindo*].

It looks as if it were going to be like that everywhere. In Europe also.

In your scheme of things do you definitely see a free India? You have stated that for the spreading of spirituality in the world India must be free. I suppose you must be working for it! You are the only one who can do something really effective by the use of your spiritual Force.

That is all settled. It is a question of working out only. The question is what is India going to do with her independence? The above kind of affair? Bolshevism? Goonda-raj? Things look ominous.

16 September 1935

*

Please don't go on thinking like others about what India is going to do with her independence. Give her that first and let her decide her fate however she likes.

You are a most irrational creature. I have been trying to logicise and intellectualise you but it seems in vain. Have I not told you that the independence is all arranged for and will evolve itself all right? Then what's the use of my bothering about that any longer? It's what she will do with her independence that is not arranged for — and so it is that about which I have to bother.

18 September 1935

*

Can't you say something a little more definite about independence than that it "will evolve itself"? Such a phrase can stretch itself out to the end of the cosmos. When the yogi Baroda Babu was asked about this, he replied "Independence? Not within 50 years!" We live in time and space and would like to hear something in terms of time.

I am not a prophet like Baroda Babu. All I can say is that the coming of independence is now sure (as anyone with any political sense at all can see). As you do not accept my "play of forces", I can say no more than that — for that is all that can be said by the "human time-sense".

20 September 1935

The Communal Problem

As regards Bengal, things are certainly very bad; the conditions of the Hindus there are terrible and they may even get worse in spite of the interim *mariage de convenance* at Delhi. But we must not let our reaction to it become excessive or suggest despair. There must be at least 20 million Hindus in Bengal and they are not going to be exterminated, — even Hitler with his scientific methods of massacre could not exterminate the Jews who are still showing themselves very much alive and, as for Hindu culture, it is not such a weak and fluffy thing as to be easily stamped out; it has lasted through something like 5 millenniums at least and is going to carry on much longer and has accumulated quite enough power to survive. What is happening did not come to me as a surprise. I foresaw it when I was in Bengal and warned people that it was probable and almost inevitable and that they should be prepared for it. At that time no one attached any value to what I said although some afterwards remembered and admitted, when the trouble first began, that I have been right; only C. R. Das had grave apprehensions and he even told me when he came to Pondicherry that he would not like the British to go out until this dangerous problem had been settled. But I have not been discouraged by what is happening, because I know and have experienced hundreds of times that beyond the blackest darkness there lies for one who is a divine instrument the light of God's victory. I have never had a strong and persistent will for anything to happen in the world — I am not speaking of personal things — which did not eventually happen even after delay, defeat or even disaster. There was a time when Hitler was victorious everywhere and it seemed certain that a black yoke of the Asura would be imposed on the whole world; but where is Hitler now and where is his rule? Berlin and Nuremberg have marked the end of that dreadful chapter in human history. Other blacknesses threaten to overshadow or even engulf mankind, but they too will end as that nightmare has ended. I cannot write fully in this letter of all things which justify my confidence — some day perhaps I shall be able to do it. 19 October 1946

Remarks on the World Situation 1933–1949

Intellectual Idealists, World Events and the New Creation

I cannot persuade myself that all the things that are happening — including the triumph of the British policy and deterioration of Gandhi’s intellect — are meant for the best. . . . Bengal is now benighted and there is no sign of light anywhere. Tagore too has just written an article of despair in which he forebodes gloomily an end of the world, *pralaya-kalpānta*, as perhaps the quickest and most satisfactory solution to the mess we are in. Add to this my own lack of devotion and faith. . . . I do sometimes even feel that in the end you will give up this wicked world and wish with Tagore for the *pralaya* and retire into extracosmic samadhi.

I have no intention of doing so — even if all smashed; I would look beyond the smash to the new creation. As for what is happening in the world, it does not upset me because I knew all along that things would happen in that fashion. I never had any illusions about Gandhi’s satyagraha — it has only fulfilled my prediction that it would end in a great confusion or a great fiasco and my only mistake was that I put an “or” where there should have been an “and” — and as for the hopes of the intellectual idealists I have not shared them, so I am not disappointed.

10 August 1933

Gandhi, Tagore and the New Creation

A friend writes: “Tagore and the Tagorians have by now all but given up Sri Aurobindo for lost — as one irreclaimable. . . . They no longer have the faith they once had that Sri Aurobindo was going to inaugurate a new era of creation in the world of fact.” I feel that Tagore has come to this conclusion after reading your *Riddle of This World*, which must have appeared to him more of a riddle than an explanation. For formerly he

wrote enthusiastically to me about you as a *creator*. I suspect also that Romain Rolland's retraction has something to do with Tagore's retraction. But I expect sooner or later he will write somewhere about your becoming a thorough introvert. There of course the whole Bengal intelligentsia (such as it is) will agree with him. Are you staggered at such a lugubrious prospect?

I cannot find any symptom of a stagger in me, not even of a shake or a quake or a quiver — all seems quite calm and erect, as far as I can make out. And I don't find the prospect lugubrious at all — the less people expect of you and bother you with their false ideas and demands, the more chance one has to get something real done. It is queer these intellectuals go on talking of creation while all they stand for is collapsing into the *Néant* without their being able to raise a finger to save it. What the devil are they going to create and from what material? and of what use if a Hitler with his cudgel or a Mussolini with his castor oil can come and wash it out or beat it into dust in a moment? 23 March 1934

The World Situation before World War II

I was discussing the Ethiopian problem with some friends. One suggested it would result in a world war. He thought such a war would clear the way for the supramental and supposes that Mussolini would help precipitate the war. Perhaps after the war everybody will be so tired out that they will begin to read the *Arya* or else go to the Wardha Ashram to get peace.

I don't think! They will only gasp and talk peace for a bit and then get ready for another war. I don't see why the supramental should need a general carnage for its appearance — if it were so it should surely have appeared in 1919. But perhaps that was sufficient only for the overmind to look in and it needed Mussolini and a general extermination by all sorts of poison gases to persuade the supramental to follow suit? For the poison gases by aeroplane were not ready to make their "descent" in the last war. 8 September 1935

The adage “Honesty is the best policy” was invented in a semi-barbarous age when mankind had not made so much progress as now, an age which no longer exists — except perhaps in the wilds of Abyssinia, and now Mussolini is out to finish with it and bring in the blessings of civilisation even there. Nowadays the saying is notoriously out of date; it only means that with honesty you have less chances of going to jail — provided you are lucky and also provided you have not met Mahatma Gandhi. But Rockefellers and the rest of the commercial aristocracy were not born for jail but for palaces with marble water closets and the immortality of Rockefeller institutes and honour in the land of the gangsters and the free. All this is not meant to tempt you out of the paths of virtue.

7 November 1935

*

You write as if what is going on in Europe were a war between the powers of Light and the powers of Darkness — but this is no more so than during the Great War. It is a fight between two kinds of Ignorance.¹ Our aim is to bring down a higher Truth, but that Truth must be able to live by its own strength and not depend upon the victory of one or other of the forces of the Ignorance. That is the reason why we are not to mix in political or social controversies and struggles; it would simply keep down our endeavour to a lower level and prevent the Truth from descending which is none of these things but has a quite different law and basis. You speak of Brahmatej being overpowered by Kshatratej, but where is that happening? None of the warring parties incarnates either.

17 February 1937

On World War II

You have said that you have begun to doubt whether it was the Mother’s war and ask me to make you feel again that it is. I affirm again to you most strongly that this is the Mother’s war. You should not think of it as a fight for certain nations against

¹ *The reference is to the Nationalist and Republican forces, and their Fascist and Communist backers, during the Spanish Civil War. — Ed.*

others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity, for a Truth that has yet to realise itself fully and against a darkness and falsehood that are trying to overwhelm the earth and mankind in the immediate future. It is the forces behind the battle that have to be seen and not this or that superficial circumstance. It is no use concentrating on the defects or mistakes of nations; all have defects and commit serious mistakes; but what matters is on what side they have ranged themselves in the struggle. It is a struggle for the liberty of mankind to develop, for conditions in which men have freedom and room to think and act according to the light in them and grow in the Truth, grow in the Spirit. There cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins, there will be an end of all such freedom and hope of light and truth and the work that has to be done will be subjected to conditions which would make it humanly impossible; there would be a reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people in this country do not dream of and cannot yet at all realise. If the other side that has declared itself for the free future of humanity triumphs, this terrible danger will have been averted and conditions will have been created in which there will be a chance for the Ideal to grow, for the Divine Work to be done, for the spiritual Truth for which we stand to establish itself on the earth. Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the Asura.²

29 July 1942

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I just received a long letter from Krishnaprem. He evidently wants to qualify his statement about violence. For myself I have no doubt as *you* who *know* have said so. Only one point gave rise to doubts in me, in regard to what Nolini wrote in his

² *This letter and the one that follows were later revised and issued as messages, first to the members of the Ashram, then to the general public. They are published, as revised, in Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 463–68. In the present volume they are published as originally written. — Ed.*

masterly analysis of the values at stake, comparing this war to Kurukshetra.³ This is exactly what troubles Krishnaprem. How can the Allied Powers be compared to the Pandavas? I never doubted the wisdom of all efforts being directed against Hitler, but is it not unwise to compare him to Duryodhana and the Allied Powers to the Pandavas? I have received of late from correspondents and friends objections to that effect — that the Allies can hardly be dubbed “modern Pandavas”. The Pandavas were protagonists of virtue and unselfishness, which can hardly be said of the Allies who are all selfish (more or less) and exploiters of weaker races and imperialistic.⁴

What I have said is not that the Allies have never done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces. I have not said that at random, but on what to me are clear grounds of fact. What you speak of is the dark side. All nations and governments have shown that side in their dealings with each other, — at least all who had the strength or got the chance. I hope you are not expecting me to believe that there are or have been virtuous Governments and unselfish and sinless peoples? It is only individuals and not too many of them who can be described in that style. But there is the other side also. Your correspondents are condemning the Allies on grounds that people in the past would have stared at, on the basis of modern ideals of international conduct; but looked at like that, all big nations and many small ones have black records. But who created these ideals or did most to create them (liberty, democracy, equality, international justice and the rest)? Well, America, France, England — the present Allied nations. They have all been imperialistic and still bear the burden of their

³ *The reference is to the essay “Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre” written in Bengali by Nolini Kanta Gupta and published along with other material in a pamphlet entitled Sri Aurobindo o Bartaman Yuddha (“Sri Aurobindo and the Present War”) in Bengali year 1349 (1942–43). The title “Dharmakshetre Kurukshetre” is taken from the Bhagavad Gita and evokes the Kurukshetra war. At the end of the essay, the writer mentions Duryodhana and his ninety-nine brothers, who were on one side in that war, and the five Pandava brothers and Sri Krishna, who were on the other side. — Ed.*

⁴ *Here Sri Aurobindo wrote between two lines of the correspondent’s letter: “Good Heavens, but so were the Pandavas, even if less than more! They were human beings, not ascetics or angels.” — Ed.*

past, but they have also deliberately spread these ideals and introduced self-governing bodies and parliamentary institutions where they did not exist; and whatever the relative worth of these things, they have been a stage, even if a still imperfect stage, in a forward evolution. (What of the others? What about the Axis' new order? Hitler swears it is a crime to educate the coloured peoples, they must be kept as serfs and labourers.) England has helped certain nations to be free without seeking any personal gain; she has conceded independence to Egypt and Eire after a struggle, to Iraq without a struggle. On the whole she has been for some time moving away steadily from Imperialism towards a principle of free association and cooperation; the British Commonwealth of England and the Dominions is something unique and unprecedented, a beginning of new things in that direction. She is turning in spirit in the direction of a world-union of some kind after the war; her new generation no longer believes in an "imperial mission"; she has offered India Dominion Independence (even, if she prefers it, she can choose or pass on to isolated independence) after the war, on the base of an agreed free constitution to be chosen by Indians themselves; though this, it has been feared, leaves a loophole for reactionary delay, it is in itself extremely reasonable and it is the Indians themselves with their inveterate habit of disunion who will be responsible if they are imbecile enough to reject the opportunity. All that is what I call evolution in the right direction — however slow and imperfect and hesitating. As for America she has forsworn her past imperialistic policies in regard to Central and South America, in Cuba, the Philippines, — everywhere apart from some islands in the Pacific which would go plop into other hands, if she withdrew from them. It is perhaps possible, some suggest, that she may be tempted towards a sort of financial imperialism, the rule of the Almighty American Dollar, by her new sense of international power, or led into other mistakes, but if so we may fairly assume from her other strong tendencies that she will soon withdraw from it. The greater danger is that she may retire again into a selfish isolationism after the war and so destroy or delay the chance of

a possible beginning that may lead eventually to some beginning of a free world-union. But still there again is the evolutionary force. Is there a similar trend on the part of the Axis? The answer is plain enough both from their own declarations and their behaviour. Avowedly and openly, Nazi Germany today stands for the reversal of this evolutionary tendency, for the destruction of the new international outlook, the new Dharma, for a reversion not only to the past, but to a far-back primitive and barbaric ideal. She fully intended to reimpose it on the whole earth, but would have done so if she had had, as for a time she seemed to have, the strength to conquer. There can be no doubt or hesitation here; if we are for the evolutionary future of mankind, we must recognise that it is only the victory of the Allies that can save it. At the very least, they are at the moment the instruments of the evolutionary Forces to save mankind's future, and these declarations of their own show that they are conscious of it. Other elements and motives there are, but the main issue is here. One has to look at things on all sides, to see them steadily and whole. Once more, it is the forces working behind that I have to look at, I don't want to go blind among surface details. The future has first to be safeguarded; only then can present problems and contradictions have a chance to be solved and eliminated.

Krishnaprem too has become doubtful about the Allies being compared to the Pandavas. Would you kindly throw some light on the question?

For us the question put by you does not arise. The Mother made it plain in a letter which has been made public that we did not consider the war as a fight between nations or governments (still less between good people and bad people) but between two forces, the Divine and the Asuric. What we have to see is on which side men and nations put themselves; if they put themselves on the right side, they at once make themselves instruments of the Divine purpose in spite of all defects, errors, wrong movements and actions (past or present or possible

backslidings in the future) which are common to human nature and to all human collectivities. The victory of one side (the Allies) would keep the path open for the evolutionary forces; the victory of the other side would drag back humanity, degrade it horribly and might lead even, at the worst, to its failure as a race, as others in the past evolution failed and perished. That is the whole question and all other considerations are either irrelevant or of a minor importance. The Allies at least stand for human values, though they may often have acted against their own best ideals (human beings always do that); Hitler stands for diabolical values or for human values exaggerated in the wrong way until they become diabolical (e.g. the “virtues” of the *Herrenvolk*, the master race). That does not make the English or Americans nations of spotless angels nor the Germans a wicked and sinful race, but as an indicator it has a decisive importance.

Nolini, I should suppose, gave the Kurukshetra example not as an exact parallel but as a traditional instance of a War between two world-forces in which the side favoured by the Divine triumphed, because its leaders made themselves his instruments. I don't suppose he envisaged it as a battle between virtue and wickedness or between good and evil men or intended to equate the British with the Pandavas, nations with individuals or even individuals with individuals, — shall we say, Stafford Cripps with Yudhisthir, Churchill with Bhima and General Montgomery with Arjuna! After all, were even the Pandavas virtuous without defect, calm and holy and quite unselfish and without passions? There are many incidents in the Mahabharat which seem to show to the contrary that they had their defects and failings. And in the Pandava army and its leaders there must have been many who were not angels or paragons of virtue, while there were plenty of good men and true on Duryodhana's side. Unselfishness? But were not the Pandavas fighting to establish their own claims and interests — just and right, no doubt, but still personal claims and self-interest? Theirs was a righteous battle, *dharmya yuddha*, but it was for right and justice in their own case. The Allies have as good or even a better case and reason to call theirs a righteous quarrel, for they are fighting

not only for themselves, for their freedom and very existence, but for the existence, freedom, maintenance of natural rights of other nations, Poles, Czechs, Norwegians, Belgians, Dutch, French, Greece, Yugoslavia and a vast number of others not yet directly threatened; they too claim to be fighting for a Dharma, for civilised values, for the preservation of great ideals and in view of what Hitler represents and openly professes and what he wishes to destroy, their claim has strong foundations. And if imperialism is under all circumstances a wickedness, then the Pandavas are tainted with that brush, for they used their victory to establish their empire continued after them by Parikshit and Janamejaya. Could not modern humanism and pacifism make it a reproach against the Pandavas that these virtuous men (including Krishna) brought about a huge slaughter (alas for Ahimsa!) that they might establish their sole imperial rule over all the numerous free and independent peoples of India? Such a criticism would be grotesquely out of place, but it would be a natural result of weighing ancient happenings in the scales of modern ideals. As a matter of fact, such an empire was a step in the right direction then, just as a world-union of free peoples would be a step in the right direction now, — and in both cases the right consequences of a terrific slaughter.

Who are the people who have such a tenderness for Hitler and object to his being compared to Duryodhana? I hope they are not among those — spiritual people among them, I am told, — who believe — or perhaps once believed? — Hitler to be the new Avatar and his religion (God help us!) to be the true religion which we must all help to establish throughout the wide world or among those who regard Hitler as a great and good man, a saint, an ascetic and all that is noble and godlike. I don't see why Hitler should not be compared to Duryodhana, except that Duryodhana, if alive, might complain indignantly that the comparison was a monstrous and scandalous injustice to him and that he never did anything like what Hitler has done. By the way, what about Krishna's *jītvā śātrūn bhūṅkṣva rājyaṃ samṛddham*? An unholy and unethical bribe? Or what on earth did he mean by it? But battle and conquest and imperial rule

were then a *dharma* and consecrated by a special form of sacrifice. We should remember that conquest and rule over subject peoples were not regarded as wrong either in ancient or medieval times and even quite recently but as something great and glorious; men did not see any special wickedness in conquerors or conquering nations. Just government of subject peoples was envisaged, but nothing more — exploitation was not excluded. No doubt, many nations in the past were jealous of their own independence and some like the Greeks and later the English had the ideal of freedom, more especially of individual liberty. But the passion for individual liberty went along in ancient times with the institution of slavery which no Greek democrat ever thought to be wrong; no Greek state or people thought it an injustice to take away the freedom of other Greek states, still less of foreign peoples, or deemed it immoral to rule over subject races. The same inconsistency has held sway over human ideas until recent times and still holds sway over international practice even now. The modern ideas on the subject, the right of all to liberty both individuals and nations, the immorality of conquest and empire, or, short of such absolutist ideas, such compromises as the British idea of training subject races for democratic freedom, are new values, an evolutionary movement, a new Dharma which has only begun slowly and initially to influence practice, — an infant Dharma that would be throttled for good if Hitler succeeded in his “Avataric” mission and established his new “religion” over all the earth. Subject nations naturally accept the new Dharma and severely criticise the old imperialisms; it is to be hoped that they will practise what they now preach when they themselves become strong and rich and powerful. But the best will be if a new world-order evolves which will make the old things impossible, — a difficult task, but not, with God’s grace, absolutely impracticable.

The Divine takes men as they are and uses them as his instruments even if they are not flawless in character, without stain or sin or fault, exemplary in virtue, or angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord’s side, that is enough for the work to be done.

Even if I knew that the Allies (I am speaking of the “big” nations, America, Britain, China) would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities opened to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate, things could not be one hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open — to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real issue and leave for a later time all side-issues and minor issues or hypothetical problems that would cloud the one all-important and tragic issue before us.

P.S. This is an answer to what is implied in your letter and, I suppose, in those of your correspondents, not to anything in K’s letter. His observations are all right, but circumstances alter cases. Ours is a *sadhana* which involves not only devotion or union with the Divine or a perception of him in all things and beings, but also action as workers and instruments and a work to be done in the world, a spiritual force to be brought on the world, under difficult conditions; then one has to see one’s way and do what is commanded and support what has to be supported, even if it means war and strife carried on whether through chariots and bows and arrows or tanks and cars and American bombs and aeroplanes, in either case a *ghoram karma*: the means and times and persons differ, but it does not seem to me that Nolini is wrong in seeing in it the same problem as in Kurukshetra. As for war, violence, the use of force to maintain freedom for the world, for the highest values of human civilisation, for the salvation of humanity from a terrible fate, etc., the old command rings out once again after many ages for those who must fight or support this battle for the right, *mayaiivate nihataḥ pūrvam eva nimittamātram bhava savyasācin*. 2 September 1943

The War and Sri Aurobindo’s Work

The other day X said that Hitler had so arranged things that the Allies will not be able to make any headway in Italy. Also that in Russia he has shortened his front so that the Russians will not move any further.

Well, they seem to be making some headway in spite of Hitler's arrangement. I seem to remember Hitler made arrangements for taking Stalingrad; the result was that he has been kicked out almost entirely from old Russia.

Also he said that Japan was going to crush China in three months.

It doesn't look like it; but perhaps they have confidential information?

Then the day before yesterday I heard about Y's remark about the Allied paratroops having been wiped out. X categorically declared that Y had said no such thing. I wondered about this, made inquiries and was told that he had said something. Did he? What?

People say that he did — on the authority of the man to whom he said it. Does Y deny his saying it?

Write to me if you find a little time whether I am right in feeling that speculating intellectually about Allied reverses is not a right movement as it may easily lead us, unawares, into sympathy with the hostile hordes who are against your work.

All these things are silly utterances in which the wishes of the mind are presented as truth and fact. That is a common habit in this very imperfect humanity and ordinarily it would be of no importance, except that such inventions and falsehoods are most improper in the mouth of a sadhaka and the habit must be a great obstacle to any progress. But here the wish behind, whether they are conscious of it or not, is that the Asura shall prevail against the Divine. That means a most dangerous giving of oneself to the Falsehood that is seeking to prolong its hold on the world and establish definitely the reign of Evil over the whole world. That is what the victory of Hitler would have meant — it would have meant also the destruction of my work. You are quite right therefore in resenting this kind of attitude (also there is the fact that it establishes a centre of support for the Falsehood and Evil

in the Asram). The propagation of this Falsehood, false ideas, false feelings, false actions and persuading people that they are right is the chief instrument of the Asura and its prevalence and success a sign of the growth of darkness on the earth. Fortunately the intensity of the peril is over, however long the struggle may still last. Other perils and manoeuvres of the Asura may follow afterwards; so it is good to discourage firmly the tendency so that it may not do harm hereafter. 10 June 1944

The Situation after the War

All that [*answers to various questions*] is however another matter than the question about the present human civilisation. It is not this which has to be saved; it is the world that has to be saved, and that will surely be done, though it may not be so easily or so soon as some wish or imagine or in the way that they imagine. The present civilisation must surely change, but whether by a destruction or a new construction on the basis of a greater truth, is the issue. The Mother has left the question hanging and I can only do the same. After all, the wise man, unless he is a prophet or the Director of the Madras Astrological Bureau, must often be content to take the Asquithian position. Neither optimism nor pessimism is the truth, they are only modes of the mind or moods of the temperament. Let us then, without either excessive optimism or excessive pessimism, “wait and see”.

2 September 1945

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This is no time for patting the Germans on the back or embracing and consoling them. If they are allowed to get on their legs again without trouble or without making an atonement for the horror of darkness and suffering they have inflicted on the world, they will rise only to repeat their performance, — unless somebody else forestalls them. The only help we can give to Germany now is silence. 19 March 1946

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I know that this is a time of trouble for you and everybody. It is so for the whole world; confusion, trouble, disorder and upset everywhere is the general state of things. The better things that are to come are preparing or growing under a veil and the worse are prominent everywhere. The one thing is to hold on and to hold out till the hour of light has come. 2 June 1946

Capitalism and Socialism

Sri Aurobindo is in no way bound by the present world's institutions or current ideas whether in the political, social or economic field; it is not necessary for him either to approve or disapprove of them.⁵ He does not regard either capitalism or orthodox socialism as the right solution for the world's future; nor can he admit that the admission of private enterprise by itself makes the society capitalistic, a socialistic economy can very well admit some amount of controlled or subordinated private enterprise as an aid to its own working or a partial convenience without ceasing to be socialistic. Sri Aurobindo has his own view as to how far Congress economy is intended to be truly socialistic or whether that is only a cover, but he does not care to express his view on that point at present. 15 April 1949

⁵ *Sri Aurobindo dictated this note to his secretary, who replied to the correspondent.*
—Ed.

Part Two

His Sadhana or Practice of Yoga

Section One

Sadhana before Coming
to Pondicherry in 1910

Ordinary Life and Yoga

Faith and Knowledge

Is it true that only those who have obtained a clear knowledge of their spiritual possibility through a definite glimpse, received by the Grace of the Divine, are able to stick to the path till the end?

At least I had no such glimpse before I started Yoga. I can't say about others — perhaps some had — but the glimpse could only bring faith, it could not possibly bring knowledge; knowledge comes by Yoga, not before it.

Those who had no such glimpse may get some experience but will not be able to stick to their sadhana.

I repeat that all one needs to know is whether the soul in one has been moved to the Yoga or not.

5 May 1933

Education, Belief and Yoga

I suppose I have had myself an even more completely European education than you and I have had too my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe. Abnormal, otherwise supraphysical experiences and powers, occult or Yogic, have always seemed to me something perfectly natural and credible. Consciousness in its very nature could not be limited by the ordinary physical human-animal consciousness; it must have other ranges. Yogic or occult powers are no more supernatural or incredible than is supernatural or incredible the power to write a great poem or compose great music. Few people can do it, as things are, — not even one in a million; for poetry and music come from the inner

being and to write or to compose true and great things one has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being. That is why you got the poetic power as soon as you began Yoga — Yoga-force made the passage clear. It is the same with Yogic consciousness and its powers; the thing is to get the passage clear, — for they are already there within you. Of course the first thing is to believe, aspire and, with the true urge within, make the endeavour. 2 September 1931

Ordinary Consciousness and Awakening

Somebody writing a biography of Confucius in Bengali says: “Why do the Dharmagurus marry, we can’t understand. Buddha did and his wife’s tale is heart-rending [হৃদয়-বিদারক].”

Why? What is there বিদারক in it?

He goes on: “Aurobindo Ghose, not a Dharmaguru, though he may be called Dharma-mad [ধর্মপাগল]” — how do you feel about that, Sir? — “has done it too.”

Well, it is better to be ধর্মপাগল than to be a sententious ass and pronounce on what one does not understand.

“We don’t understand why they marry and why this change comes soon after marriage.”

Perfectly natural — they marry before the change — then the change comes and the marriage belongs to the past self, not to the new one.

“The wives of Buddha and Ramakrishna felt proud when they were deserted.”

Then what’s the harm?

“If married life is an obstacle to spirituality, then they might as well not marry.”

No doubt. But then when they marry, there is not an omniscient ass like this biographer to tell them that they were going to be ধর্মগুরু or ধর্মপাগল or in any way concerned with any other ধর্ম than the biographer's.

So, according to the biographer, all of you, except Christ, showed a lack of wisdom by marrying.

Well, if a biographer of Confucius can be such an unmitigated ass, Confucius may be allowed to be unwise once or twice, I suppose.

I touch upon a delicate subject, but it is a puzzle.

Why delicate? and why a puzzle? Do you think that Buddha or Confucius or myself were born with a prevision that they or I would take to the spiritual life? So long as one is in the ordinary consciousness, one lives the ordinary life — when the awakening and the new consciousness come, one leaves it — nothing puzzling in that.

27 April 1936

Meditation as a Means

What do you call meditation? Shutting the eyes and concentrating? It is only one method for calling down the true consciousness. To join with the true consciousness or feel its descent is the only thing important and if it comes without the orthodox method, as it always did with me, so much the better. Meditation is only a means or device, the true movement is when even walking, working or speaking one is still in sadhana.

10 June 1933

Meditation and Purification

In an article Krishnaprem says that meditation can't be fruitful for those who have not achieved a high degree of inner development and purification.

I do not know what Krishnaprem said or in which article, I do not have it with me. But if the statement is that nobody can have a successful meditation or realise anything till he is pure and perfect, I fail to follow it; it contradicts my own experience. I have always had realisation by meditation first and the purification started afterwards as a result. I have seen many get important, even fundamental realisations by meditation who could not be said to have a great inner development. Are all Yogis who have meditated to effect and had great realisations in their inner consciousness perfect in their nature? It does not look like it to me. I am unable to believe in absolute generalisations in this field, because the development of spiritual consciousness is an exceedingly vast and complex affair in which all sorts of things can happen and one might almost say that for each man it is different according to his nature and that the one thing that is essential is the inner call and aspiration and the perseverance to follow always after it no matter how long it takes or what are the difficulties or impediments — because nothing else will satisfy the soul within us.

17 May 1936

Early Experiences

An Experience in England

Someone told me that it is written somewhere that you had a realisation in 1890 when you were 18. Is this true?

A realisation in 1890? It does not seem possible. There was something, though I was not doing Yoga and knew nothing about it in the year of my departure from England; I don't remember which it was but probably 1892–3 which would make 20 years, not 18. I don't remember anything special in 1890. Where did he see this written?

22 August 1936

First Experience of the Self

For, as to this “Grace”, we describe it in that way because we feel in the infinite Spirit or Self of existence a Presence or a Being, a Consciousness that determines — that is what we speak of as the Divine, — not a separate Person, but the one Being of whom our individual self is a portion or a vessel. But it is not necessary for everybody to regard it in that way. Supposing it is the impersonal Self of all only, yet the Upanishad says of the Self and its realisation, “This understanding is not to be gained by reasoning nor by tapasya nor by much learning, but whom this Self chooses, to him it reveals its own body.” Well, that is the same thing as what we call the Divine Grace, — it is an action from above or from within independent of mental causes which decides its own movement. We can call it the Divine Grace; we can call it the Self within choosing its own hour and way to manifest to the mental instrument on the surface; we can call it the flowering of the inner being or inner nature into self-realisation and self-knowledge. As something in us approaches it or as it presents itself to us, so the mind sees it. But in reality,

it is the same thing and the same process of the being in the Nature.

I could illustrate my meaning more concretely from my own first experience of the Self, long before I knew even what Yoga was or that there was such a thing, at a time when I had no religious feeling, no wish for spiritual knowledge, no aspiration beyond the mind, only a contented agnosticism and the impulse towards poetry and politics. But it would be too long a story, so I do not tell it here. 29 October 1935

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I have seen your letter to X [*the letter of 29 October 1935 published immediately above*]. When I finished reading it, I let out a sigh and exclaimed “How cruel!” — after raising our hopes you mercilessly cut them off because the letter would be too long! Nothing is too long for us, especially such personal examples which are more valuable for the likes of us than any promises and possibilities.

Good Lord! I never said it was too long for you to read, I meant it was too long for me to write now. And I can’t write such things by themselves as an autobiographical essay — it is only if they turn up in the course of something that I can do so. Last night I had no blessed time to illustrate. I thought of writing it because it seemed very appropriate, but when I couldn’t, I just mentioned it in order to hint that what I had written was not mere theory, but provable by solid experience. No fell intention to tantalise. 30 October 1935

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But it is unthinkable and almost unbelievable to have any experience of the Self in the circumstances you have described [*in the letter of 29 October 1935*].

I can’t help that. It happened. The mind’s canons of the rational and the possible do not govern spiritual life and experience.

But can you not tell us what the experience was like? Was it by any chance like the one you speak of in your Uttarpara

Speech — Vasudeva everywhere?

Great Jumble-Mumble! What has Vasudeva to do with it? Vasudeva is a name of Krishna, and in the Uttarpara Speech I was speaking of Krishna, if you please.

But how can that be? Didn't you begin Yoga later on in Gujarat?

Yes. But this began in London, sprouted the moment I set foot on Apollo Bunder, touching Indian soil, flowered one day in the first year of my stay in Baroda, at the moment when there threatened to be an accident to my carriage. Precise enough?

By the Self, I suppose, you mean the individual Self!

Good Lord, no. I mean the Self, sir, the Self, the Adwaita, Vedantic, Shankara self. Atman, Atman! A thing I knew nothing about, never bargained for, didn't understand either. 31 October 1935

This-Worldliness and Other-Worldliness

One thing I feel I must say in connection with your remark about the soul of India and X's observation about "this stress on this-worldliness to the exclusion of other-worldliness". I do not quite understand in what connection his remark was made or what he meant by this-worldliness, but I feel it necessary to state my own position in the matter. My own life and my Yoga have always been, since my coming to India, both this-worldly and other-worldly without any exclusiveness on either side. All human interests are, I suppose, this-worldly and most of them have entered into my mental field and some, like politics, into my life, but at the same time, since I set foot on Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and intimate bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical

worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane, so I could make no sharp divorce or irreconcilable opposition between what I have called the two ends of existence and all that lies between them. For me all is the Brahman and I find the Divine everywhere. Everyone has the right to throw away this-worldliness and choose other-worldliness only and if he finds peace by that choice he is greatly blessed. I, personally, have not found it necessary to do this in order to have peace. In my Yoga also I found myself moved to include both worlds in my purview, the spiritual and the material, and to try to establish the divine Consciousness and the divine Power in men's hearts and in earthly life, not for personal salvation only but for a life divine here. This seems to me as spiritual an aim as any and the fact of this life taking up earthly pursuits and earthly things into its scope cannot, I believe, tarnish its spirituality or alter its Indian character. This at least has always been my view and experience of the reality and nature of the world and things and the Divine: it seemed to me as nearly as possible the integral truth about them and I have therefore spoken of the pursuit of it as the integral Yoga. Everyone is, of course, free to reject and disbelieve in this kind of integrality or to believe in the spiritual necessity of an entire other-worldliness excluding any kind of this-worldliness altogether, but that would make the exercise of my Yoga impossible. My Yoga can include indeed a full experience of the other worlds, the plane of the supreme Spirit and the other planes in between and their possible effects upon our life and material world; but it will be quite possible to insist only on the realisation of the supreme Being or Ishwara even in one aspect, Shiva, Krishna as Lord of the world and Master of ourselves and our works or else the universal Sachchidananda, and attain to the essential results of this Yoga and afterwards to proceed from them to the integral results if one accepted the ideal of the divine life and this material world conquered by the Spirit. It is this view and experience of things and of the truth of existence that enabled me to write *The Life Divine* and *Savitri*. The realisation of the Supreme, the Ishwara, is certainly the essential thing; but to approach him with love and devotion and bhakti,

to serve him with one's works and to know him, not necessarily by the intellectual cognition, but in a spiritual experience, is also essential in the path of the integral Yoga. 28 April 1949

An Experience in Kashmir

Kashmir is a magnificent place, its rivers unforgettable and on one of its mountains with a shrine of Shankaracharya on it I got my second realisation of the Infinite (long before I started Yoga). June 1934

Signs of Yogic Opening

Your bells etc. mentioned by you as recent experiences were already enumerated as long ago as the time of the Upanishads as signs accompanying the opening to the larger consciousness, *brahmanyabhiyaktikarāṇi yoge*. If I remember right your sparks come in the same list. The fact has been recorded again and again in yogic literature. I had the same experience hundreds of times in the earlier part of my sadhana. So you see you are in very honourable company in this matter and need not trouble yourself about the objections of physical science.

13 March 1931

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I remember, when I first began to see inwardly (and outwardly also with the open eye), a scientific friend of mine began to talk of after-images — “these are only after-images!” I asked him whether after-images remained before the eye for two minutes at a time — he said, “no”, to his knowledge only for a few seconds; I also asked him whether one could get after-images of things not around one or even not existing upon this earth since they had other shapes, another character, other hues, contours and a very different dynamism, life-movements and values — he could not reply in the affirmative. That is how these so-called scientific explanations break down as soon as you pull them out of their cloudland of mental theory and face them with the

actual phenomena they pretend to decipher. 19 February 1932

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It is only at the beginning that concentration is necessary to see these colours, afterwards it comes of itself. There was a long time when I used to see colours spontaneously or wherever I cast my eyes, just as you do now, and at every time of concentrated meditation they used to fill the room. Many, indeed, begin to see them spontaneously without any concentration at all, first with closed eyes, afterwards with the eyes open. Seeing them with the eyes closed happens often enough to people who have never practised or even heard of Yoga; but in such cases it proves that there is some kind of occult vision there very near to the surface. 25 February 1932

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If seeing the Divine depended on the developed occult faculty, how do you explain people's seeing Ram, Krishna, Shiva, etc. in you at Darshan? — I mean by people who have apparently no such faculty. We've heard about Krishna presenting himself before small boys, taking them to school, etc. — fables?

With many people the faculty of this kind of occult vision is the first to develop when they begin sadhana. With others it is there naturally or comes on occasions without any practice of Yoga. But with people who live mainly in the intellect (a few excepted) this faculty is not usually there by nature and most have much difficulty in developing it. It was so even with me.

What I understand of the matter is that if you intend that somebody should see the Divine in you — be it a blind man — he is able to see. No faculty is required.

It would be something of a miracle to see things without the faculty of seeing. We don't deal much in miracles of that kind.

30 July 1935

Practice of Pranayama

You yourself had to concentrate for 4 or 5 hours a day for so many years, after which everything flowed in a river . . .

By the way what is this story about my four or five hours' concentration a day for several years before anything came down? Such a thing never happened, if by concentration you mean laborious meditation. What I did was four or five hours a day pranayam — which is quite another matter. And what flow do you speak of? The flow of poetry came down while I was doing pranayam, not some years afterwards. If it is the flow of experiences, that did come after some years, but after I had stopped the pranayam for a long time and was doing nothing and did not know what to do or where to turn once all my efforts had failed. And it came as a result not of years of pranayam or concentration, but in a ridiculously easy way, by the grace either of a temporary guru (but it wasn't that, for he was himself bewildered by it) or by the grace of the eternal Brahman and afterwards by the grace of Mahakali and Krishna. So don't try to turn me into an argument against the Divine; that attempt will be perfectly ineffective.

20 January 1936

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You have often inveighed against my using you as an argument against the Divine. But what is the history of your sadhana in your own words — a Herculean practice of Pranayam, concentration and what not and then after years and years of waiting the Grace of Brahman.

What a wooden head! What is the use of saying things if you deliberately misinterpret what I write? I said clearly that the pranayam brought me nothing of any kind of spiritual realisation. I had stopped it long before. The Brahman experience came when I was groping for some way, doing no sadhana at all, making no effort because I didn't know what effort to make, all having failed. Then in three days I got an experience which most Yogis get only at the end of a long Yoga, got it without wanting or trying for it, got it to the surprise of Lele who was

trying to get me something quite different. But I don't suppose you are able to understand — so I say no more. I can only look mournfully at your ununderstanding pate. 24 January 1936

Beginning of the Practice of Yoga

I wonder if any interesting incident took place in the Mother's or Sri Aurobindo's Yoga or life in the year 1905.

I think it was the year in which I began my Yoga — that is, the practice of Yoga — for I had had experiences before without knowing what they were. 17 January 1934

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How did your intellect become so powerful even before you started Yoga?

It was not any such thing before I started the Yoga. I started the Yoga in 1904 and all my work except some poetry was done afterwards. Moreover my intelligence was inborn and so far as it grew before the Yoga it was not by training but by a wide haphazard activity developing ideas from all things read, seen or experienced. That is not training, it is natural growth.

13 November 1936

The Realisation of January 1908

General Remarks

It is not that there is anything peculiar to you in these difficulties; every sadhaka entering this Way has to get over similar impediments. It took me four years of inner striving to find a real Way, even though the Divine help was with me all the time, and even then it seemed to come by an accident; and it took me ten more years of intense Yoga under a supreme inner guidance to find *the* Way — and that was because I had my past and the world's Past to assimilate and overpass before I could find and found the future.

5 May 1932

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I think you have made too much play with my phrase “an accident” [*in the preceding letter*], ignoring the important qualification, “it *seemed* to come by an accident”. After four years of *prāṇāyāma* and other practices on my own, with no other result than an increased health and energy, some psycho-physical phenomena, a great outflow of poetic creation, a limited power of subtle sight (luminous patterns and figures etc.) mostly with the waking eye, I had a complete arrest and was at a loss. At this juncture I was induced to meet a man without fame whom I did not know, a bhakta with a limited mind but some experience and evocative power. We sat together and I followed with an absolute fidelity what he instructed me to do, not myself in the least understanding where he was leading me or where I was myself going. The first result was a series of tremendously powerful experiences and radical changes of consciousness which he never intended — for they were Advaitic and Vedantic and he was against Advaita Vedanta — and which were quite contrary to my own ideas, for they made me see with a stupendous intensity the world as a cinematographic play of vacant forms

in the impersonal universality of the Absolute Brahman. The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining an absolute surrender to its will, a principle or rather a seed-force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or system or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter. Yet he understood so little what he was doing that when he met me a month or two later, he was alarmed, tried to undo what he had done and told me that it was not the Divine but the Devil that had got hold of me. Does not all that justify my phrase “it seemed to come by an accident”? But my meaning is that the ways of the Divine are not like that of the human mind or according to our patterns and it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for Him what He shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we do. If we admit the Divine at all, both true reason and bhakti seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender. I do not see how without them there can be *avyabhicāriṇī bhakti* (one-pointed adoration).
7 May 1932

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I am rather astonished at your finding Wordsworth’s realisation, however mental and incomplete, to be abstract and vague or dictated by emotional effervescence. Wordsworth was hardly an emotional or effervescent character. As for an abstract realisation, it sounds like a round square; I have never had one myself and find it difficult to believe in it. But certainly a realisation in its beginning can be vague and nebulous or it can be less or more vivid. Still, Wordsworth’s did not make that impression on me and to him it certainly came as something positive, powerful and determinative. He stayed there and went no farther, did not get to the source, because more was hardly possible in his time and surroundings, at least to a man of his mainly moral and intellectual temper.

In a more deep and spiritual sense a concrete realisation is that which makes the thing realised more real, dynamic,

intimately present to the consciousness than any physical thing can be. Such a realisation of the personal Divine or of the impersonal Brahman or of the Self does not usually come at the beginning of a sadhana or in the first years or for many years. It comes so to a very few; mine came fifteen years after my first pre-Yogic experience in London and in the fifth year after I started Yoga. That I consider extraordinarily quick, an express train speed almost — though there may no doubt have been several quicker achievements. But to expect and demand it so soon and get fed up because it does not come and declare Yoga impossible except for two or three in the ages would betoken in the eyes of any experienced Yogi or sadhaka a rather rash and abnormal impatience. Most would say that a slow development is the best one can hope for in the first years and only when the nature is ready and fully concentrated towards the Divine can the definitive experience come. To some rapid preparatory experiences can come at a comparatively early stage, but even they cannot escape the labour of the consciousness which will make these experiences culminate in the realisation that is enduring and complete. It is not a question of my liking or disliking your demand or attitude. It is a matter of fact and truth and experience, not of liking or disliking, two things which do not usually sway me. It is the fact that people who are grateful and cheerful and ready to go step by step, even by slow steps, if need be, do actually march faster and more surely than those who are impatient and in haste and at each step despair or murmur. It is what I have always seen — there may be instances to the contrary and I have no objection to your being one, — none at all. I only say that if you could maintain “hope and fervour and faith”, there would be a much bigger chance — that is all.

This is just a personal explanation — a long explanation but which seemed to be called for by your enhancement of my glory — and is dictated by a hope that after all in the long run an accumulation of explanations may persuade you to prefer the sunny path to the grey one. My faith again perhaps? But, sunny path or grey one, the one thing wanted is that you should push through and arrive.

June 1934

Meeting with Vishnu Bhaskar Lele

It is not the human defects of the Guru that can stand in the way when there is the psychic opening, confidence and surrender. The Guru is the channel or the representative or the manifestation of the Divine, according to the measure of his personality or his attainment; but whatever he is, it is to the Divine that one opens in opening to him, and if something is determined by the power of the channel, more is determined by the inherent and intrinsic attitude of the receiving consciousness, an element that comes out in the surface mind as simple trust or direct unconditional self-giving, and once that is there, the essential things can be gained even from one who seems to others than the disciple an inferior spiritual source and the rest will grow up in the sadhak of itself by the grace of the Divine, even if the human being in the Guru cannot give it. It is this that Krishnaprem appears to have done perhaps from the first; but in most nowadays this attitude seems to come with difficulty, after much hesitation and delay and trouble. In my own case I owe the first decisive turn of my inner life to one who was infinitely inferior to me in intellect, education and capacity and by no means spiritually perfect or supreme; but, having seen a Power behind him and decided to turn there for help, I gave myself entirely into his hands and followed with an automatic passivity the guidance. He himself was astonished and said to others that he had never met anyone before who could surrender himself so absolutely and without reserve or question to the guidance of the helper. The result was a series of transmuting experiences of such a radical character that he was unable to follow and had to tell me to give myself up in future to the Guide within with the same completeness of surrender as I had shown to the human channel. I give this example to show how these things work; it is not in the calculated way the human reason wants to lay down, but by a more mysterious and greater law.

23 March 1932

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To reject doubts means control of one's thoughts—very cer-

tainly so. But the control of one's thoughts is as necessary as the control of one's vital desires and passions or the control of the movements of one's body — for the Yoga, and not for the Yoga only. One cannot be a fully developed mental being even, if one has not control of the thoughts, is not their observer, judge, master, — the mental Purusha, *manomaya puruṣa, sākṣī, anumantā, īśvara*. It is no more proper for the mental being to be the tennis ball of unruly and uncontrollable thoughts than to be a rudderless ship in the storm of the desires and passions or a slave of either the inertia or the impulses of the body. I know it is more difficult because man being primarily a creature of mental Prakriti identifies himself with the movements of his mind and cannot at once dissociate himself and stand free from the swirl and eddies of the mind whirlpool. It is comparatively easy for him to put a control on his body, at least a certain part of its movements: it is less easy but still very possible after a struggle to put a mental control on his vital impulsions and desires; but to sit, like the Tantrik Yogi on the river, above the whirlpool of his thoughts is less facile. Nevertheless it can be done; all developed mental men, those who get beyond the average, have in one way or other or at least at certain times and for certain purposes to separate the two parts of the mind, the active part which is a factory of thoughts and the quiet masterful part which is at once a Witness and a Will, observing them, judging, rejecting, eliminating, accepting, ordering corrections and changes, the Master in the House of Mind, capable of self-empire, *svārājya*.

The Yogi goes still farther; he is not only a master there, but even while in mind in a way, he gets out of it, as it were, and stands above or quite back from it and free. For him the image of the factory of thoughts is no longer quite valid; for he sees that thoughts come from outside, from the universal Mind or universal Nature, sometimes formed and distinct, sometimes unformed and then they are given shape somewhere in us. The principal business of our mind is either a response of acceptance or refusal to these thought-waves (as also vital waves, subtle physical energy waves) or this giving a personal-mental form to

thought-stuff (or vital movements) from the envioning Nature-Force. It was my great debt to Lele that he showed me this. "Sit in meditation," he said, "but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts *coming into it*; before they can enter throw them away from you till your mind is capable of entire silence." I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think of either questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw a thought and then another thought coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of the brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free Intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow circle of personal thought or a labourer in a thought-factory, but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free too to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.

I mention this only to emphasise that the possibilities of the mental being are not limited and that it can be the free Witness and Master in its own house. It is not to say that everybody can do it in the way I did and with the same rapidity of the decisive movement (for of course the later fullest development of this new untrammelled mental Power took time, many years); but a progressive freedom and mastery over one's mind is perfectly within the possibilities of anyone who has the faith and will to undertake it.

5 August 1932

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Literature and art are or can be first introductions to the inner being — the inner mind and vital; for it is from there that they come. And if one writes poems of bhakti, poems of divine seeking etc., or creates music of that kind, it means that there is a bhakta or seeker inside who is supporting himself by that self-expression. There is also the point of view behind Lele's answer to me when I told him that I wanted to do Yoga but for work,

for action, not for Sannyasa and Nirvana, — but after years of spiritual effort I had failed to find the way and it was for that I had asked to meet him. His first answer was, “It should be easy for you as you are a poet.”

18 November 1936

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I don't understand why Lele told you that because you are a poet, sadhana will be easy for you through poetry, or why you quote it either. Poetry is itself such a hard job and sadhana through poetry — well, the less said the better! Or perhaps he saw within your soul the Sri Aurobindo of future Supramental glory?

Because I told him I wanted to do Yoga in order to get a new inner Yogic consciousness for life and action, not for leaving life. So he said that. A poet writes from an inner source, not from the external mind, he is moved by inspiration to write, i.e. he writes what a greater Power writes through him. So the Yogi Karma-chari has to act from an inner source, to derive his thoughts and movements from that, to be inspired and impelled by a greater Power which acts through him. He never said that sadhana will be easy for me through poetry. Where is the “through poetry” phrase? Poetry can be done as a part of sadhana and help the sadhana — but sadhana “through” poetry is a quite different matter.

23 May 1938

Mental Silence

To get rid of the random thoughts of the surface physical mind is not easy. It is sometimes done by a sudden miracle as in my own case, but that is rare. Some get it done by a slow process of concentration, but that may take a very long time. It is easier to have a quiet mind with things that come in passing on the surface, as people pass in the street, and one is free to attend to them or not — that is to say, there develops a sort of double mind, one inner silent and concentrated when it pleases to be so, a quiet witness when it chooses to see thoughts and things, — the other meant for surface dynamism. It is probable in your case

that this will come as soon as these descents of peace, intensity or Ananda get strong enough to occupy the whole system.

16 November 1932

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I find nothing either to add or to object to in Prof. Sorley's comment on the still, bright and clear mind; it adequately indicates the process by which the mind makes itself ready for the reflection of the higher Truth in its undisturbed surface or substance. But one thing perhaps needs to be kept in view — that this pure stillness of the mind is indeed always the required condition, the desideratum, but for bringing it about there are more ways than one. It is not, for instance, only by an effort of the mind itself to get clear of all intrusive emotion or passion, to quiet its own characteristic vibrations, to resist the obscuring fumes of a physical inertia which brings about a sleep or a torpor of the mind instead of its wakeful silence, that the thing can be done. This is indeed an ordinary process of the Yogic path of knowledge; but the same end can be brought about or automatically happen by other processes — for instance, by the descent from above of a great spiritual stillness imposing silence on the mind and heart, on the life stimuli, on the physical reflexes. A sudden descent of this kind or a series of descents accumulative in force and efficacy is a well-known phenomenon of spiritual experience. Or again one may start a mental process of one kind or another for the purpose which would normally mean a long labour and yet may pull down or be seized midway, or even at the outset, by an overmind influx, a rapid intervention or manifestation of the higher Silence, with an effect sudden, instantaneous, out of all proportion to the means used at the beginning. One commences with a method, but the work is taken up by a Grace from above, by a response from That to which one aspires or by an irruption of the infinitudes of the Spirit. It was in this last way that I myself came by the mind's absolute silence, unimaginable to me before I had the actual experience.

circa 1934

Nirvana and the Brahman

I have never said that things (in life) are harmonious now — on the contrary, with the human consciousness as it is harmony is impossible. It is always what I have told you, that the human consciousness is defective and simply impossible — and that is why I strive for a higher consciousness to come and set right the disturbed balance. I am glad you are getting converted to silence, and even Nirvana is not without its uses — in my case it was the first positive spiritual experience and it made possible all the rest of the sadhana; but as to the positive way to get these things, I don't know if your mind is quite ready to proceed with it. There are in fact several ways. My own way was by rejection of thought. "Sit down," I was told, "look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back." I sat down and looked and saw to my astonishment that it was so; I saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside.

In three days — really in one — my mind became full of an eternal silence — it is still there. But that I don't know how many people can do. One (not a disciple — I had no disciples in those days) asked me how to do Yoga. I said: "Make your mind quiet first." He did and his mind became quite silent and empty. Then he rushed to me saying: "My brain is empty of thoughts, I cannot think. I am becoming an idiot." He did not pause to look and see where these thoughts he uttered were coming from! Nor did he realise that one who is already an idiot cannot become one. Anyhow I was not patient in those days and I dropped him and let him lose his miraculously achieved silence.

The usual way, the easiest if one can manage it at all, is to *call down* the silence from above you into the brain, mind and body.

About Nirvana:

When I wrote in the *Arya*, I was setting forth an overmind view of things to the mind and putting it in mental terms, that was why I had sometimes to use logic. For in such a work — mediating between the intellect and the supra-intellectual — logic has a place, though it cannot have the chief place it occupies in purely mental philosophies. The Mayavadin himself labours to establish his point of view or his experience by a rigorous logical reasoning. Only, when it comes to an explanation of Maya he, like the scientist dealing with Nature, can do no more than arrange and organise his ideas of the process of this universal mystification; he cannot explain how or why his illusionary mystifying Maya came into existence. He can only say, “Well, but it is there.”

Of course, it is there. But the question is, first, “What is it? is it really an illusionary Power and nothing else, or is the Mayavadin’s idea of it a mistaken first view, a mental imperfect reading, even perhaps itself an illusion?” And next, “Is illusion the sole or the highest Power which the Divine Consciousness or Superconsciousness possesses?” The Absolute is an absolute Truth free from Maya, otherwise liberation would not be possible. Has then the supreme and absolute Truth no other active Power than a power of falsehood and with it, no doubt, for the two go together, a power of dissolving or disowning the falsehood, — which is yet there for ever? I suggested that this sounded a little queer. But queer or not, if it is so, it is so — for as you point out, the Ineffable cannot be subjected to the laws of logic.

But who is to decide whether it is so? You will say, those who get there. But get where? To the Perfect and the Highest, *pūrṇam param*. Is the Mayavadin’s featureless Brahman that Perfect, that Complete — is it the very Highest? Is there not or can there not be a higher than that highest, *parātparam*? That is not a question of logic, it is a question of spiritual fact, of a supreme and complete experience. The solution of the matter must rest not upon logic, but upon a growing, ever heightening, widening spiritual experience — an experience which must

of course include or have passed through that of Nirvana and Maya, otherwise it would not be complete and would have no decisive value.

Now to reach Nirvana was the first radical result of my own Yoga. It threw me suddenly into a condition above and without thought, unstained by any mental or vital movement; there was no ego, no real world—only when one looked through the immobile senses, something perceived or bore upon its sheer silence a world of empty forms, materialised shadows without true substance. There was no One or many even, only just absolutely That, featureless, relationless, sheer, indescribable, unthinkable, absolute, yet supremely real and solely real. This was no mental realisation nor something glimpsed somewhere above, — no abstraction — it was positive, the only positive reality — although not a spatial physical world, pervading, occupying or rather flooding and drowning this semblance of a physical world, leaving no room or space for any reality but itself, allowing nothing else to seem at all actual, positive or substantial. I cannot say there was anything exhilarating or rapturous in the experience, as it then came to me, — the ineffable Ananda I had years afterwards, — but what it brought was an inexpressible Peace, a stupendous silence, an infinity of release and freedom. I lived in that Nirvana day and night before it began to admit other things into itself or modify itself at all, and the inner heart of experience, a constant memory of it and its power to return remained until in the end it began to disappear into a greater Superconsciousness from above. But meanwhile realisation added itself to realisation and fused itself with this original experience. At an early stage the aspect of an illusionary world gave place to one in which illusion¹ is only a small surface phenomenon with an immense Divine Reality behind it and a supreme Divine Reality above it and an intense Divine Reality in the heart of everything that had seemed at first only a cinematic shape or shadow. And this was

¹ In fact it is not an illusion in the sense of an imposition of something baseless and unreal on the consciousness, but a misinterpretation by the conscious mind and sense and a falsifying misuse of manifested existence.

no reimprisonment in the senses, no diminution or fall from supreme experience, it came rather as a constant heightening and widening of the Truth; it was the spirit that saw objects, not the senses, and the Peace, the Silence, the freedom in Infinity remained always with the world or all worlds only as a continuous incident in the timeless eternity of the Divine.

Now that is the whole trouble in my approach to Mayavada. Nirvana in my liberated consciousness turned out to be the beginning of my realisation, a first step towards the complete thing, not the sole true attainment possible or even a culminating finale. It came unasked, unsought for, though quite welcome. I had no least idea about it before, no aspiration towards it, in fact my aspiration was towards just the opposite, spiritual power to help the world and do my work in it, yet it came — without even a “May I come in” or a “By your leave”. It just happened and settled in as if for all eternity or as if it had been really there always. And then it slowly grew into something not less but greater than its first self! How then could I accept Mayavada or persuade myself to pit against the Truth imposed on me from above the logic of Shankara?

But I do not insist on everybody passing through my experience or following the Truth that is its consequence. I have no objection to anybody accepting Mayavada as his soul’s truth or his mind’s truth or their way out of the cosmic difficulty. I object to it only if somebody tries to push it down my throat or the world’s throat as the sole possible, satisfying and all-comprehensive explanation of things. For it is not that at all. There are many other possible explanations; it is not at all satisfactory, for in the end it explains nothing; and it is — and must be unless it departs from its own logic — all-exclusive, not in the least all-comprehensive. But that does not matter. A theory may be wrong or at least one-sided and imperfect and yet extremely practical and useful. That has been amply shown by the history of science. In fact a theory whether philosophical or scientific is nothing else than a support for the mind, a practical device to help it to deal with its object, a staff to uphold it and make it walk more confidently and get along on its difficult journey. The

very exclusiveness and one-sidedness of the Mayavada make it a strong staff or a forceful stimulus for a spiritual endeavour which means to be one-sided, radical and exclusive. It supports the effort of the Mind to get away from itself and from Life by a short cut into superconscience. Or rather it is the Purusha in Mind that wants to get away from the limitations of Mind and Life into the superconscious Infinite. Theoretically, the most radical way for that is for the mind to deny all its perceptions and all the preoccupations of the vital and see and treat them as illusions. Practically, when the mind draws back from itself, it enters easily into a relationless peace in which nothing matters — for in its absoluteness there are no mental or vital values — and from which the mind can rapidly move towards that great short cut to the Superconscious, mindless trance, *suṣupti*. In proportion to the thoroughness of that movement all the perceptions it had once accepted become unreal to it — illusion, Maya. It is on its road towards immergence.

Mayavada, therefore, with its sole stress on Nirvana, quite apart from its defects as a mental theory of things, serves a great spiritual end and, as a path, can lead very high and far. Even, if the Mind were the last word and there were nothing beyond it except the pure Spirit, I would not be averse to accepting it as the only way out. For what the mind with its perceptions and the vital with its desires have made of life in this world, is a very bad mess, and if there were nothing better to be hoped for, the shortest cut to an exit would be the best. But my experience is that there is something beyond Mind; Mind is not the last word here of the Spirit. Mind is an ignorance-consciousness and its perceptions cannot be anything else than either false, mixed or imperfect — even when “true”, a partial reflection of the Truth and not the very body of Truth herself. But there is a Truth-Consciousness, not static only and self-introspective, but also dynamic and creative, and I prefer to get at that and see what it says about things and can do rather than take the short cut away from things offered as its own end by the Ignorance.

I do not think . . . that the statement of supra-intellectual things necessarily involves a making of distinctions in the terms of the intellect. For, fundamentally, it is not an expression of ideas arrived at by speculative thinking. One has to arrive at spiritual knowledge through experience and a consciousness of things which arises directly out of that experience or else underlies or is involved in it. This kind of knowledge, then, is fundamentally a consciousness and not a thought or formulated idea. For instance, my first major experience — radical and overwhelming, though not, as it turned out, final and exhaustive — came after and by the exclusion and silencing of all thought — there was, first, what might be called a spiritually substantial or concrete consciousness of stillness and silence, then the awareness of some sole and supreme Reality in whose presence things existed only as forms but forms not at all substantial or real or concrete; but this was all apparent to a spiritual perception and essential and impersonal sense and there was not the least concept or idea of reality or unreality or any other notion, for all concept or idea was hushed or rather entirely absent in the absolute stillness. These things were known directly through the pure consciousness and not through the mind, so there was no need of concepts or words or names. At the same time this fundamental character of spiritual experience is not absolutely limitative; it can do without thought, but it can do with thought also. Of course, the first idea of the mind would be that the resort to thought brings one back at once to the domain of the intellect — and at first and for a long time it may be so; but it is not my experience that this is unavoidable. It happens so when one tries to make an intellectual statement of what one has experienced; but there is another kind of thought that springs out as if it were a body or form of the experience or of the consciousness involved in it — or of a part of that consciousness — and this does not seem to me to be intellectual in its character. It has another light, another power in it, a sense within the sense. It is very clearly so with those thoughts that come without the need of words to embody them, thoughts that are of the nature of a direct seeing in the consciousness, even a kind of intimate

sense or contact formulating itself into a precise expression of its awareness (I hope this is not too mystic or unintelligible); but it might be said that directly the thoughts turn into words they belong to the kingdom of intellect — for words are a coinage of the intellect. But is it so really or inevitably? It has always seemed to me that words came originally from somewhere else than the thinking mind, although the thinking mind secured hold of them, turned them to its use and coined them freely for its purposes. But even otherwise, is it not possible to use words for the expression of something that is not intellectual? Housman contends that poetry is perfectly poetical only when it is non-intellectual, when it is nonsense. That is too paradoxical, but I suppose what he means is that if it is put to the strict test of the intellect, it appears extravagant because it conveys something that expresses and is real to some other kind of seeing than that which intellectual thought brings to us. Is it not possible that words may spring from, that language may be used to express — at least up to a certain point and in a certain way — the supra-intellectual consciousness which is the essential power of spiritual experience? This however is by the way — when one tries to explain spiritual experience to the intellect itself, then it is a different matter.

14 January 1934

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You ask me whether you have to give up your predilection for testing before accepting and to accept everything in Yoga *a priori* — and by testing you mean testing by the ordinary reason. The only answer I can give to that is that the experiences of Yoga belong to an inner domain and go according to a law of their own, have their own method of perception, criteria and all the rest of it which are neither those of the domain of the physical senses nor of the domain of rational or scientific enquiry. Just as scientific enquiry passes beyond that of the physical senses and enters the domain of the infinite and the infinitesimal about which the senses can say nothing and test nothing — for one cannot see or touch an electron or know by the evidence of the sense-mind whether it exists or not or decide by that evidence whether the

earth really turns round the sun and not rather the sun round the earth as our senses and all our physical experience daily tell us — so the spiritual search passes beyond the domain of scientific or rational enquiry and it is impossible by the aid of the ordinary positive reason to test the data of spiritual experience and decide whether those things exist or not or what is their law and nature. As in science, so here you have to accumulate experience on experience following faithfully the methods laid down by the Guru or by the systems of the past, you have to develop an intuitive discrimination which compares the experiences, see what they mean, how far and in what field each is valid, what is the place of each in the whole, how it can be reconciled or related with others that at first sight seem to contradict it, etc. etc. until you can move with a secure knowledge in the vast field of spiritual phenomena. That is the only way to test spiritual experience. I have myself tried the other method and found it absolutely incapable and inapplicable. On the other hand if you are not prepared to go through all that yourself — as few can do except those of extraordinary spiritual stature — you have to accept the leading of a Master, as in science you accept a teacher instead of going through the whole field of science and its experimentation all by yourself — at least until you have accumulated sufficient experience and knowledge. If that is accepting things *a priori*, well, you have to accept *a priori*. For I am unable to see by what valid tests you propose to make the ordinary reason the judge of what is beyond it.

You quote the sayings of Vivekananda and Kobiraj Gopinath. Is this Kaviraj the disciple of the Jewel Sannyasi or is he another? In any case, I would like to know before assigning a value to these utterances what they actually did for the testing of their spiritual perceptions and experiences. How did Vivekananda test the value of his spiritual experiences — some of them not more credible to the ordinary mind than the translation through the air of Bijoy Goswami's wife to Lake Manas or of Bijoy Goswami himself by a similar method to Benares? I know nothing of Kobiraj Gopinath, but what were his tests and how did he apply them? What were his methods? his criteria? It

seems to me that no ordinary mind could accept the apparition of Buddha out of a wall or the half hour's talk with Hayagriva as valid facts by any kind of testing. It would either have to accept them *a priori* or on the sole evidence of Vivekananda which comes to the same thing or to reject them *a priori* as hallucinations or mere mental images accompanied in one case by an auditive hallucination. I fail to see how it could "test" them. Or how was I to test by the ordinary mind my experience of Nirvana? To what conclusion could I come about it by the aid of the ordinary positive reason? How could I test its validity? I am at a loss to imagine. I did the only thing I could, — to accept it as a strong and valid truth of experience, let it have its full play and produce its full experiential consequences until I had sufficient Yogic knowledge to put it in its place. Finally, how without inner knowledge or experience can you or anyone else test the inner knowledge and experience of others?

8 November 1934

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One may be aware of the silent static self without relation to the play of the cosmos. Again, one may be aware of the universal static self omnipresent in everything without being supra-sensuously awake to the movement of the dynamic *viśva-prakṛti*. The first realisation of the Self or Brahman is often a realisation of something that separates itself from all form, name, action, movement, exists in itself only, regarding the cosmos as only a mass of cinematographic shapes unsubstantial and empty of reality. That was my own first complete realisation of the Nirvana in the Self. That does not mean a wall between Self and Brahman, but a scission between the essential self-existence and the manifested world.

9 March 1936

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Don't you think your realisation of the Self helped you in your crucial moments of struggle, kept up your faith and love?

That has nothing to do with love. Realisation of Self and love

of the personal Divine are two different movements.

My struggle has never been about the Self. All that is perfectly irrelevant to the question which concerns the Bhakta's love for the Divine.

The sweet memory of that experience of the Self must have sustained you.

There was nothing sugary about it at all. And I had no need to have any memory of it, because it was with me for months and years and is there now though in fusion with other realisations.

We poor people in dark times which pay us frequent visits, fall back on our petty capital of Ananda, even on some of your jokes, to fortify ourselves. If such things can bring back a momentary wave of love and devotion, restored faith, how much would decisive experience not do?

My point is that there have been hundreds of Bhaktas who have the love and seeking without any concrete experience, with only a mental conception or emotional belief in the Divine to support them. The whole point is that it is untrue to say that one must have a decisive or concrete experience before one can have love for the Divine. It is contrary to the facts and the quite ordinary facts of the spiritual experience.

17 March 1936

*

I quite agree with you in not relishing the idea of another attack of this nature. I am myself, I suppose, more a hero by necessity than by choice — I do not love storms and battles — at least on the subtle plane. The sunlit way may be an illusion, though I do not think it is — for I have seen people treading it for years; but a way with only natural or even only moderate fits of rough weather, a way without typhoons surely is possible — there are so many examples. दुर्गं पथस्तत् may be generally true and certainly the path of laya or nirvana is difficult in the extreme to most (although in my case I walked into nirvana without intending it or rather nirvana walked casually into me not so

far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave). But the path *need* not be cut by periodical violent storms, though that it *is* so for a great many is an obvious fact. But even for these, if they stick to it, I find that after a certain point the storms diminish in force, frequency, duration. That is why I insisted so much on your sticking — for if you stick, the turning-point is bound to come. I have seen some astonishing instances here recently of this typhonic periodicity beginning to fade out after years and years of violent recurrence. 22 January 1937

*

No aspiration, no nothing — says your teaching.

Never taught anything of the kind. I got the blessed Nirvana without even wanting it. Aspiration is first or usual means, that is all. 13 April 1937

*

I myself had my experience of Nirvana and silence in the Brahman, etc. long before there was any knowledge of the overhead spiritual planes; it came first simply by an absolute stillness and blotting out as it were of all mental, emotional and other inner activities — the body continued indeed to see, walk, speak and do its other business but as an empty automatic machine and nothing more. I did not become aware of any pure “I” — nor even of any self, impersonal or other, — there was only an awareness of That as the sole Reality, all else being quite unsubstantial, void, non-real. As to what realised that Reality, it was a nameless consciousness which was not other than That;² one could perhaps say this, though hardly even so much as this, since there was no mental concept of it, but no more. Neither was I aware of any lower soul or outer self called by such and such a personal name that was performing this feat of arriving at the consciousness of Nirvana. Well then, what becomes of

² Mark that I did not think these things, there were no thoughts or concepts nor did they present themselves like that to any Me; it simply just was so or was self-apparently so.

your pure “I” and lower “I” in all that? Consciousness (not this or that part of consciousness or an “I” of any kind) suddenly emptied itself of all inner contents and remained aware only of unreal surroundings and of Something real but ineffable. You may say that there must have been a consciousness aware of some perceiving existence, if not of a pure “I”, but, if so, it was something for which these names seem inadequate.

22 July 1937

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Sri Aurobindo has no remarks to make on Huxley’s comments with which he is in entire agreement. But in the phrase “to its heights we can always reach” very obviously “we” does not refer to humanity in general but to those who have a sufficiently developed inner spiritual life.³ It is probable that Sri Aurobindo was thinking of his own experience. After three years of spiritual effort with only minor results he was shown by a Yogi the way to silence his mind. This he succeeded in doing entirely in two or three days by following the method shown. There was an entire silence of thought and feeling and all the ordinary movements of consciousness except the perception and recognition of things around without any accompanying concept or other reaction. The sense of ego disappeared and the movements of the ordinary life as well as speech and action were carried on by some habitual activity of Prakriti alone which was not felt as belonging to oneself. But the perception which remained saw all things as utterly unreal; this sense of unreality was overwhelming and universal. Only some undefinable Reality was perceived as true which was beyond space and time and unconnected with any cosmic activity but yet was met wherever one

³ *In his book The Perennial Philosophy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946, p. 74), Aldous Huxley quoted and commented on the following passage from Sri Aurobindo’s Life Divine, pp. 13–14: “The touch of Earth is always reinvigorating to the son of Earth, even when he seeks a supraphysical Knowledge. It may even be said that the supraphysical can only be really mastered in its fullness — to its heights we can always reach — when we keep our feet firmly on the physical. ‘Earth is His footing,’ says the Upanishad whenever it images the Self that manifests in the universe.” — Ed.*

turned. This condition remained unimpaired for several months and even when the sense of unreality disappeared and there was a return to participation in the world-consciousness, the inner peace and freedom which resulted from this realisation remained permanently behind all surface movements and the essence of the realisation itself was not lost. At the same time an experience intervened; something else than himself took up his dynamic activity and spoke and acted through him but without any personal thought or initiative. What this was remained unknown until Sri Aurobindo came to realise the dynamic side of the Brahman, the Ishwara and felt himself moved by that in all his Sadhana and action. These realisations and others which followed upon them, such as that of the Self in all and all in the Self and all as the Self, the Divine in all and all in the Divine, are the heights to which Sri Aurobindo refers and to which he says we can always rise; for they presented to him no long or obstinate difficulty. The only real difficulty which took decades of spiritual effort to carry out towards completeness was to apply the spiritual knowledge utterly to the world and to the surface psychological and outer life and to effect its transformation both on the higher levels of Nature and on the ordinary mental, vital and physical levels down to the subconscious and the basic Inconscience and up to the supreme Truth-consciousness or Supermind in which alone the dynamic transformation could be entirely integral and absolute.

4 November 1946

Silence, Thought and Action

While at the top of the staircase, after leaving my letter for you, I felt an intense force of thought coming in. I felt it in the head — but as if it was an open space.

That is a liberation, if completed. Since 1908 when I got the silence, I never think with my head or brain — it is always in the wideness generally above the head that the thoughts occur.

17 October 1933

Is what I feel really yogic emptiness or has my mind misunderstood it? It has lasted for a long time. In other people, I believe, it only lasts for a day or two.

When I got the emptiness, it lasted for years. Whatever else came, came in the emptiness and I could at any time withdraw from the activity into the pure silent peace. 21 September 1934

*

You write: "When I got the emptiness, it lasted for years. Whatever else came, came in the emptiness. . . ." In my case, I do not see anything coming in. It remains always the same, or grows. But of course it may be preparing the nature for a higher descent.

I had the sheer emptiness with nothing in it for many months together. It is not emptiness really — for there is no such thing as emptiness — but the pure experience of the Self. Your mind accustomed to all sorts of movements looks at it in a negative way, that is all. 22 September 1934

*

I found it difficult to read, because the higher consciousness was trying to come down and I felt much pressure on the head.

It ought to be possible to read with the inner consciousness looking on and, as it were, seeing the act of reading. In the condition of absolute inner silence I was making speeches and conducting a newspaper, but all that got itself done without any thought entering my mind or the silence being in the least disturbed or diminished. 27 October 1934

*

Sometimes I feel a sort of void, as if I was just an immobile statue. My mind, life and body are emptied of energy. As a result I find it almost impossible to work.

What you describe is not at all a drawing away of life-energy; it is simply the effect of voidness and stillness caused in the lower parts by the consciousness being located above. It is quite

consistent with action, only one must get accustomed to the idea of the possibility of action under these conditions. In a greater state of emptiness I carried on a daily newspaper and made a dozen speeches in the course of three or four days — but I did not manage that in any way; it happened. The Force made the body do the work without any inner activity.

I am not able to distinguish this voidness caused by the drawing of life-energy and that produced by a spiritual emptiness.

The drawing of the life-energy leaves the body lifeless, helpless, empty and impotent, but it is attended by no experience except a great suffering and unease sometimes. 13 May 1936

*

You had the emptiness for several years together. But yours seemed to be of a different kind than mine. For you could use it as a wall against anything undesirable.

I never used it as a wall against anything. You seem to know more about my sadhana than I do. 4 June 1936

*

I believe I have as many hours of hard external work to do as almost anyone in the Asram and I am not aware that I have any leisure or spend even the very short time I have for concentration in a blissful quietism communing with the silent Brahman. Even my concentration is of the nature of action and it is not an airy quietistic contemplation as your informants seem to imagine.

I may add that I have not spent my life shouting down the quietistic ideal and sadhana without knowing why they followed it. All the experiences that the quietistic sadhana can give, I have had, the realisation of the featureless Parabrahman, Maya, Sunya, the illusoriness of the world, the Akshara Purusha. I know also perfectly well why they turned away from the world and have gone through all the million difficulties which they did not care to face. None of the difficulties of which you enumerate one or two are strange to me — only I did not put the blame of

them on anybody or on the Yoga and I overcame them.

Anybody can do the quietistic Yoga, who wants to do it. But if anyone imagines that they [*the quietistic yogas*] are easy and that these difficulties do not occur there or that the sadhakas of these paths are all of them perfected saints free from the human passions and defects which you see here among the sadhakas, he is labouring under a great delusion. No path of Yoga is easy and to imagine that by leaving the world and plunging inside oneself one automatically shuffles off the vital and external nature is an illusion. If I ask you to develop equanimity and egolessness by work done with opening to the Divine, it is because it is so that I did it and it is so that it can best be done and not by retiring into oneself and shutting oneself away from all that can disturb equanimity and excite the ego. As for concentration and perfection of the being and the finding of the inner self, I did as much of it walking in the streets of Calcutta to my work or in dealing with men during my work as alone and in solitude.⁴

⁴ *This incomplete letter-draft was not sent in this form to the intended recipient. It was written sometime in the mid-1930s. — Ed.*

Experiences in Alipur Jail 1908 – 1909

Pain and Ananda

As for divine rapture, a knock on head or foot or elsewhere *can* be received with the physical Ananda of pain or pain + Ananda or pure physical Ananda — for I have often, quite involuntarily, made the experiment myself and passed with honours. It began, by the way, as far back as in Alipur jail when I got bitten in my cell by some very red and ferocious looking warrior ants and found to my surprise that pain and pleasure are conventions of our senses. But I do not expect that unusual reaction from others. And I suppose there are limits, e.g. the case of a picketer in Madras or Dr. Noel Paton. In any case, this way of having rapture is better off the list and the Lilliputian doorway [*against which the correspondent bumped himself*] was not a happy contrivance.

13 February 1932

The Principle of Levitation

You told me [*in a private interview*]: “I haven’t had the experience of levitation itself but an experience I had could not have been true if there was no levitation.” Could you kindly tell me what the experience was if, that is, it is tellable. I remember X once told me that it was at Alipur you found your body in equilibrium in a lifted angle. Is that it?

There were other things but not at present tellable! You can put it like this. “I take levitation as an acceptable idea, because I have had myself experience of the natural energies which if developed would bring it about and also physical experiences which would not have been possible if the principle of levitation were untrue.”

11 March 1943

Opening to Painting

I can quite understand that the inner knowledge comes with the growth and heightening of consciousness. But what about the outer knowledge — what we ordinarily call knowledge?

The capacity for it can come with the inner knowledge. E.g. I understood nothing about painting before I did Yoga. A moment's illumination in Alipur jail opened my vision and since then I have understood with the intuitive perception and vision. I do not know the technique of course but I can catch it at once if anybody with knowledge speaks of it. That would have been impossible to me before.

29 December 1934

*

Don't be desperate about your incapacity as a connoisseur of painting. I was worse in this respect, knew something about sculpture, but blind to painting. Suddenly one day in the Alipur jail, while meditating saw some "pictures" on the wall of the cell and lo and behold, the artistic eye in me opened and I knew all about painting except of course the more material side of the technique. I don't always know how to express though, because I lack the knowledge of the proper expressions, but that does not stand in the way of a keen and understanding appreciation. So, there you are. All things are possible.

25 July 1936

Contact with Vivekananda

I was wondering if you had seen or met Vivekananda somewhere.

No, not in the body. My contact with him was in the jail when he was speaking with me for about 15 days, giving me the first insight into the Intuition plane (not the intuitive mind which is mental and not supramental) as the first opening to Supermind.

21 October 1934

*

If it is not indiscreet would you ask Sri Aurobindo if it is true that in 1909 — in Alipore jail — seven years after his death — Swami Vivekananda came to him, not in vision, but in actual fact, to ask him to continue the work, that he had not yet finished?

Sri Aurobindo says that Vivekananda came to him not in a visible form but as a presence which was with him for a fortnight during which V. spoke certain things about the processes of the higher Truth-Consciousness.¹

21 December 1938

¹ *This reply was written by the Mother at Sri Aurobindo's dictation or under his instructions. — Ed.*

Section Two

Sadhana in Pondicherry 1910–1950

The Early Years in Pondicherry 1910–1926

Sitting on the Path?

It is not clear what your Guru meant by my sitting on the path; that could have been true of the period between 1915 and 1920 when I was writing the *Arya*, but the sadhana and the work were waiting for the Mother's coming. In 1923 or 1924 I could not be described as sitting on the path, so far as the sadhana was concerned, but it may perhaps be only a metaphor or symbol for the outward form of the work not yet being ready. The statement about my having gone too high to redescend for work in the world was made in almost the identical terms by another Yogi also; it referred to my condition at the time and cannot be taken as anything more.

16 September 1935

Seeking the Way

X seems to have told Y that the old sadhaks, who were here before the Mother took up the work in 1926, had many experiences of Cosmic Consciousness, etc., meaning to convey that their sadhana was much better and more serious than what people are doing now.

Before the Mother came all were living in the mind with only some mental realisations and experiences. The vital and everything else were unregenerated and the psychic behind the veil. I am not aware that anyone of them at that time entered the cosmic consciousness. At that time I was still seeking my way for the transformation and the passage to the supramental (all the part of the Yoga that goes beyond the ordinary Vedanta) and acted very much on a principle of *laissez faire* with the few sadhaks who were there. X is one of those who have never ceased regretting that *laissez faire* — he regrets the vital liberty and absence of discipline they then had.

27 July 1934

The Realisation of 24 November 1926

Descent of the Overmind

Ever since I came here this time I have been experiencing a very intense atmosphere, a very strong pressure, similar in intensity and depth to what I felt in 1926 (months of October to December). It appears to me that the Supermind is about to descend a second time. Is this an entirely wrong feeling on my part or there is some truth in it, if not the full truth?

There is some truth in it — but the descent in 1926 was rather of the Overmind, not of the Supermind proper. 21 August 1935

The Significance of the 24th November

Today I shall request you to “stand and deliver” on a different subject. What is exactly the significance of the 24th of November? Different people have different ideas about it. Some say that the Avatar of the Supramental plane descended in you.

Rubbish! whose imagination was that?

Others say that you were through and through overmentalised.

Well, it is not quite the truth, but nearer to the mark.

I myself understood that on that day you achieved the Supermind.

There was never any mention of that from our side.

If you did not achieve the Supermind at that time, how is it possible for you to talk about it or know anything about it?

Well, I'm hanged. You can't know anything about a thing before you have "achieved" it?

Because I have seen it and am in contact with it, O logical baby that you are! But achieving it is another business.

But didn't you say that some things were getting supramentalised in parts?

Getting supramentalised is one thing and the achieved supramental is another.

You have unnerved a lot of people by that statement that you haven't achieved the supermind.

Good Lord! And what do these people think I meant when I was saying persistently that I was trying to get the supermind down into the material? If I had achieved it on Nov. 24. 1926, it would have been there already for the last nine years, isn't it?

X seems to have declared on that day that you had conquered sleep, food, disease and death. On what authority did she proclaim it then?

I am not aware of this gorgeous proclamation. What was said was that the Divine (Krishna or the Divine Presence or whatever you like) had come down into the material. It was also proclaimed that I was retiring — obviously to work things out. If all that was achieved on the 24th [November] 1926, what on earth remained to work out, and if the Supramental was there, for what blazing purpose did I need to retire? Besides are these things achieved in a single day? If X said anything like that she must have been in a prophetic mood and seen the future in the present!

I have stood, but I have not delivered. I had time for standing a moment, but none for a delivery — however pregnant my mind or my overmind may be. But really what a logic! One must become thoroughly supramental first (achieve supermind) and then only one can begin to know something about supermind?

Well! However if I have time one day, I will deliver — for evidently with such ideas about, an *éclaircissement* is highly advisable. 29 August 1935

*

What exactly is the significance of the 24th November? Overmental, supramental realisation or what? You say it was something like the descent of Krishna in the material. Some say the descent was in you but you are not matter, are you? Not very clear.

Why not? Why can't I be matter? or represent it at least? At least you will admit that I have got some matter in me and you will hardly deny that the matter in me is connected or even continuous (in spite of the quantum theory) with matter in general? Well, if Krishna or the Overmind or something equivalent descended into my matter with an inevitable extension into connected general Matter, what is the lack of clarity in the statement of a descent into the material? 15 September 1935

*

Some say November 24th is a day of victory. By that some mean that the Supermind (supramental consciousness) descended into the physical consciousness of Sri Aurobindo. Others say it was the coming down of Krishna into the physical consciousness. If it was the descent of Krishna, does that mean the descent of the supramental light?

Krishna is not the supramental light. The descent of Krishna would mean the descent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya, he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.

I believe that on the 24th November Sri Aurobindo realised that the Mother is the Divine Consciousness and the Force.

No. I knew that long before. 2 November 1935

*

I knew that Krishna is not the Supermind. But because some say it was the descent of the supramental light and some say it was the descent of Krishna, I asked you to make it clear to me. What I wanted to know was whether the 24th November was the descent of the supramental light or of Krishna's light. Why are we observing the 24th as a special day?

It was the descent of Krishna into the physical.

*

I do not know the significance of the 24th November 1926; some say it is the immortality day while others say it was the descent of Krishna's personality.

It has nothing to do with immortality. It is the descent of Krishna.

13 November 1935

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[A disciple of Sri Aurobindo's wrote an article on the significance of the realisation of 24 November 1926, in which he quoted the following passage from *The Life Divine*:]

In order that the involved principles of Overmind and Supermind should emerge from their veiled secrecy, the being and powers of the superconscience must descend into us and uplift us and formulate themselves in our being and powers; this descent is a *sine qua non* of the transition and transformation.¹

[*The disciple concluded*:] This is referred to in the Vedas as the birth of the gods in men, *devānām janimāni*; Sri Aurobindo regards it as indispensable for supramental realisation on earth. It was this that occurred on the 24th November, 1926, and it is only then that Sri Aurobindo started his Ashram, being sure that with the cooperation of the gods the supermind can descend upon earth.

What happened on the 24th November prepared the possibility of this descent and on that day he retired into seclusion and entered into deep and powerful meditation. 20 November 1950

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, volume 22 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 955–56.

The Sadhana of 1927–1929

Sadhana on the Physical Level

Last night during my meditation I saw a cat — probably one of the Mother’s cats, the one which sleeps on the staircase — come and enter the room where I was meditating. But I at once opened my eyes. Would you very kindly let me know the meaning of this cat and why I opened my eyes.

If it is the cat Bushy, she has some strange connection with the siddhi in the physical consciousness. It was she who ushered us into our present house running before us into each room. The change to this house marked the change from the sadhana on the vital to the sadhana on the physical level.¹ 7 July 1936

Bringing Down the Powers of Transformation

Once X said about Y that the Mother had said that she was a “Vedic Goddess” — that is, Saraswati or another.

I never heard of this Vedic Goddess affair before. There was a time when the Mother was trying to bring down certain powers in the sadhaks here, but there was never any question of the Saraswati power in Y. 6 October 1934

*

Come down, Sir, — for heaven’s sake give us something and make life more substantial and concrete. I am really beginning to doubt that things like divine Love, Knowledge, etc. can be brought down in me.

In the old days long before you came² plenty of things were

¹ *Sri Aurobindo and the Mother moved into 28 rue François Martin, the “Meditation House”, on 7 February 1927. — Ed.*

² *The recipient of this letter first visited the Ashram in 1930 and came to stay in 1933. — Ed.*

brought down — including the love. Hardly one could bear it and even then only in a small measure. Is it any better now, I wonder? It does not look like it. That is why I want the supermind first, — and especially the peace, the balance in an intensity unshakable. There are several who have been trying to push on with the intensities, but — . Well, let us hope for the best. For God's sake, peace, balance, an unshakable supramental poise and sanity first. Ecstasies and intensities of other kinds can come afterwards.

8 April 1935

The Creation Postponed

I have answered the actual points in your letter separately, on the letter itself. But there is besides one thing that you must understand clearly. Things are no longer what they were before, when you were last here.³ At that time the Mother was bringing down a rapid (collective as well as individual) transformation and creation into the mental, vital and physical planes from above, by the power of a supramental Light and Force acting through the higher illumined mind and the psychic being. For that purpose she was calling down beings of a higher plane (like the one of which you speak) as an indispensable aid in that process. All went on well enough so long as the work was on the mental, psychic and higher vital levels. But as soon as it began in the lower vital, it appeared at once that the lower vital and physical nature of human beings (at least of those here) was too small, obscure and full of rebellious impurities to admit of so great a working. One after another failed in the test and you were among the first to fall. The creation had to be postponed, the process changed, and, instead of doing all from above, it became necessary to come down into the lower vital and material nature for a long, slow, patient and difficult work of opening and change.⁴

This is the sadhana that has been going on here. Are you prepared for this opening and change which needs an absolute

³ *The recipient of this letter lived in the Ashram between October 1926 and March 1927, before going away for two and a half years. — Ed.*

⁴ *Compare the letter of 18 October 1934 on pages 330–32. — Ed.*

sincerity and a work in which there is no room for pretence, self-deception or a half-hearted will? You are very evidently deep down in your lower vital and material self, “cooped up” there; but you seem to have been fairly content and self-satisfied in this dark and unswept lodging. Talk of surrender or a mere idea or tepid wish for integral consecration will not do; there must be the push for a radical and total change.

It is not by taking a mere mental attitude that this can be done or even by any number of inner experiences which leave the outer man as he was. It is this outer man who has to open, to surrender and to change. His every least movement, habit, action has to be surrendered, seen, held up and exposed to the divine Light, offered to the divine Force for its old forms and motives to be destroyed and the divine Truth and the action of the transforming consciousness of the Divine Mother to take their place.

If you want to make any progress while you are here, you will first have to realise how much time you have lost and how far you are from this. Afterwards, you will have to see whether you can light a fire of aspiration strong enough to burn up all that is unclean and obscure in you. Then only can you speak of the transformation of your lower vital nature.

29 September 1929

General Remarks on the Sadhana of the 1930s

“A Far Greater Truth”

In a letter dated November 1928, you speak of “a far greater Truth than any yet realised on the earth”. Does this mean that the realisation of the Divine which this world is witnessing at present in the person of Sri Aurobindo eclipses the Light of all the previous Divine Descents of which humanity is aware? Or, is it to be construed as meaning that Sri Aurobindo does not call himself the Avatar but the Divine, having realised the Divine on earth?

“A far greater Truth” has nothing to do with Avatarhood or anything of the kind. I meant by it the descent of the supramental Consciousness upon earth; all truths below the supramental (even that of the highest spiritual on the mental plane, which is the highest that has yet manifested) are either partial or relative or otherwise deficient and unable to transform the earthly life, they can only at most modify and influence it. The supermind is the last Truth-consciousness of which the ancient seers spoke; there have been glimpses of it till now, sometimes an indirect influence or pressure, but it has not been brought down into the consciousness of the earth and fixed there. To bring it down is the aim of our Yoga.

25 April 1930

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In spite of his very deep respect for Sri Aurobindo, X holds the view that the earth did previously attain to the Supramental Consciousness. We reject any such suggestion.

Write to them that it is better not to enter into sterile intellectual discussions. The intellectual mind cannot even realise what the supermind is; what use, then, can there be in allowing it to discuss what it does not know? It is not by reasoning, but by constant experience, growth of consciousness and widening into

the Light that one can reach those higher levels of consciousness above the intellect from which one can begin to look up to the Divine Gnosis. These levels are not yet the supermind, but they can receive something of its knowledge.

As to X's statement I do not catch what he means by *previously*, unless he means that the Vedic Rishis attained to the supermind for the Earth. But that is precisely what they failed to do or perhaps did not even attempt. They tried to rise individually to the supramental plane, but they did not bring it down and make it a permanent part of the earth consciousness. Even there are verses of the Upanishad in which it is hinted that it is impossible to pass through the gates of the Sun (the symbol of Supermind) and yet retain an earthly body. It was because of this failure that the spiritual effort of India culminated in Mayavada. Our Yoga is a double movement of ascent and descent; one rises to higher and higher levels of consciousness, but at the same time one brings down their power not only into mind and life, but in the end even into the body. And the highest of these levels, the one at which it aims is the supermind. Only when that can be brought down is a divine transformation possible in the earth consciousness.

5 May 1930

Sadhana for the Earth Consciousness

Does not the "earth consciousness" include all humanity? And also animals, the vegetable and mineral kingdoms, etc.? Will the higher consciousness be established only in a few people?

Yes, all that is the earth consciousness — mineral = matter, vegetable = the vital-physical creation, animal = the vital creation, man = the mental creation. Into the earth consciousness so limited to mind, vital, matter has to come the supramental creation. Necessarily *at first* it cannot be in a great number — but even if it is only in a few at first, that does not mean that it will have no effect on the rest or will not change the whole balance of the earth-nature.

3 May 1933

What is the earth consciousness? Is it Cosmic Matter? Or only this globe?

The consciousness of this Earth alone. There is a separate global consciousness of the earth (as of other worlds) which evolves with the evolution of life on the planet. 29 July 1933

*

Is the establishment of the supramental activity in the earth consciousness a separate process from its establishment in individuals?

It is first through the individual that it becomes part of the earth consciousness and afterwards it spreads from the first centres and takes up more and more of the global consciousness till it becomes an established force there. 29 July 1933

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The spiritual work of Krishna, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and others achieved nothing permanent.

Whose work? So far as bringing in spiritual forces goes, I suppose their work was fairly successful.

I am not aware that Ramakrishna or any other of those you speak of wanted to change the earth consciousness — they were concerned to raise people out of it, not to bring down anything into it, except spiritual force for personal salvation.

Are we to expect the same results for us — unsteadiness, fall and fiasco?

It does not matter very much what you expect. It depends on whether the greater consciousness can be brought down and fixed here (as mind fixed itself in the vital life of earth) or not.

4 January 1934

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It seems to me that the purpose of the supramental yoga is to dissipate ignorance from the entire cosmos and remove the

darkness of earthly nature, in order to make the divine life possible.

Not from the entire cosmos — from the earth consciousness, — because the earth is the place of evolution.

Through the descent and manifestation of the supermind, a new race will be born — a new creation. But what exactly will this new creation be?

The supramental being on earth, as man is the mental being, the animal the vital etc. 8 May 1934

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When I hear people talking about the supramental descent it makes me somewhat sceptical. They expect that when the descent happens everything will soon be spiritualised and even in the most outward political life all that is now wrong will immediately be set right. Such expectations create a great curiosity and flutter.

All that is absurd. The descent of the supramental means only that the Power will be there in the earth consciousness as a living force just as the thinking mental and the higher mental are already there. But an animal cannot take advantage of the presence of the thinking mental Power or an undeveloped man of the presence of the higher mental Power — so too everybody will not be able to take advantage of the presence of the supramental Power. I have also often enough said that it will be at first for the few, not for the whole earth, — only there will be a growing influence of it on the earth life. 15 December 1934

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Do you seriously want me to swallow this mountainous absurdity that any man can be made a Krishna or a Sri Aurobindo, any woman a Mother, any X a Tyagaraj, any Y a Tansen, any Z a Shakespeare, any A a Raphael, any B a Vyasa or a Valmiki? . . .

I have never said any or all of these things. These egoistic terms

are not those in which I think any more than these egoistic ambitions are those in which my vital moves. It is a higher Truth I seek, whether it makes men greater or not is not the question but whether it will give them truth and peace and light to live in and make life something better than a struggle with ignorance and falsehood and pain and strife. Then even if they are less great than the men of the past, my object will have been achieved. For me mental conceptions cannot be the end of all things. I know that the supermind is a truth.

You really want me to swallow this even if I suffocate? Your logical proposition is “Everything is possible”, but this makes all human experience look so hopeless, so childish and so frightening. It is difficult to believe that any amount of the divine force will turn a C into a Sri Aurobindo or a D into a Sri Mira. I am not joking. I mean it.

You do not seem to have followed the sense of my reasoning very well — perhaps because I clothe my arguments with *E* in a tone of humour.¹ You have taken my humorous comment about Muthu with a portentous seriousness — if you really are not joking; but I suppose you are in spite of your disclaimer.

It is not for personal greatness that I am seeking to bring down the supermind. I care nothing for greatness or littleness in the human sense. I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth consciousness — I see it above and know what it is — I feel it overgleaming my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing to remain in half-light, half-darkness. I believe the descent of this Truth opening the way to a development of divine consciousness here to be the final sense of the earth-evolution. If greater men than myself have not had this vision and this ideal before them, that is no reason why I should not follow my Truth-sense and Truth-vision. If human

¹ See the letters of 9 and 10 February 1935 on pages 402–10. — Ed.

reason regards me as a fool for trying to do what Krishna did not try, I do not in the least care. There is no question of *C* or *D* or anybody else in that. It is a question between the Divine and myself — whether it is the Divine Will or not, whether I am sent to bring that down or open the way for its descent or at least make it more possible or not. Let all men jeer at me if they will or all Hell fall upon me if it will for my presumption, — I go on till I conquer or perish. This is the spirit in which I seek the supermind, no hunting for greatness for myself or others. (This is not to be circulated.)

10 February 1935

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Your “superman” reminds me of an interesting debate we had. Some people ridicule us for our aspiration after supermanhood. They say it is not a sober aspiration. We don’t even have the divine realisation, and we want the supramental! I replied that it is Sri Aurobindo who wants the supermind for us.

By divine realisation is meant the spiritual realisation — the realisation of Self, Bhagavan or Brahman on the mental-spiritual or else the overmental plane. That is a thing (at any rate the mental-spiritual) which thousands have done. So it is obviously easier to do than the supramental. Also nobody can have the supramental realisation who has not had the spiritual. So far your opponent is right.

They say that one must see what one is aspiring for. When our movements and consciousness are as externalised as they are, what is the point of aspiring for the Supermind? But I don’t see why I shouldn’t aspire for the highest, in spite of my weaknesses. We rely on the Divine Grace. It is the central sincerity that is needed.

It is true that neither can be got in any effective way unless the whole being is turned towards it — unless there is a real and very serious spirit and dynamic reality of sadhana. So far you are right and the opponent also is right.

It is true that I want the supramental not for myself but for

the earth and souls born on the earth, and certainly therefore I cannot object if anybody wants the supramental. But there are the conditions. He must want the Divine Will first and the soul's surrender and the spiritual realisation (through works, bhakti, knowledge, self-perfection) on the way. So there everybody is right.

Any flaws in my argument?

The central sincerity is the first thing and sufficient for an aspiration to be entertained, — a total sincerity is needed for the aspiration to be fulfilled. Amen!

15 April 1935

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If it is reasonable for those who follow other gurus to expect divine realisation — that is, union with the spiritual consciousness — is it not reasonable for us here to expect something beyond that — assuming you intend to give it and we truly follow your lead? The answer to this depends, I believe, on whether it is your intention to give the supramental for others after achieving it yourself.

I have no intention of achieving the supramental for myself only — I am not doing anything for myself, as I have no personal need of anything, neither of salvation (Moksha) nor supramentalisation. If I am seeking after supramentalisation, it is because it is a thing that has to be done for the earth consciousness and if it is not done in myself, it cannot be done in others. My supramentalisation is only a key for opening the gates of the supramental to the earth consciousness; done for its own sake, it would be perfectly futile. But it does not follow either that if or when I become supramental, everybody will become supramental. Others can so become who are ready for it, when they are ready for it — though of course the achievement in myself will be to them a great help towards it. It is therefore quite legitimate to have the aspiration for it — provided (1) one does not make too personal or egoistic an affair of it turning it into a Nietzschean or other ambition to be a superman, (2) one is ready to undergo

the conditions and stages needed for the achievement, (3) one is sincere and regards it as part of the seeking for the Divine and a consequent culmination of the divine Will in one and insists on no more than the fulfilment of that Will whatever it may be, psychisation, spiritualisation or supramentalisation. It should be regarded as the fulfilment of God's working in the world, not as a personal chance or achievement. 20 April 1935

*

I have been pondering over your letter [*pp.* 346–47]. I trust I have grown wiser, not less so as a result of the irony in your letter in regard to us mental beings. But you have expressed yourself, willy-nilly, in the language which the mental has invented after all. So you are in no less of a fix than I.

Why should I be in a fix for that? I use the language of the mind because there is no other which human beings can understand, — even though most of them understand it badly. If I were to use a supramental language like Joyce, you would not even have the illusion of understanding it; so, not being an Irishman, I don't make the attempt. But of course anyone who wants to change earth-nature must first accept it in order to change it. To quote from an unpublished poem of my own:

He who would bring the heavens here
 Must descend himself into clay
 And the burden of earthly nature bear
 And tread the dolorous way.²

23 August 1935

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Would you say something in brief about how the Supermind works on the earth consciousness in order to transform it?

No. I have never written on that except in *Arya* and do not propose to start now. It would be mere words to the mind which would be likely to make its own wrong constructions about it.

² Lines from "A God's Labour", in *Collected Poems, volume 2 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO*, p. 534. — Ed.

The sadhak should first get the higher consciousness down and know something by experience of the higher planes before trying to know what is the Supermind. 10 January 1936

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Somewhere you said that it would be sufficient for most sadhaks to become psychicised. This would mean that only a very few will be able to reach the Intuition and fewer still the Overmind. If this is so, who will be able to reach the Supermind and how will it be established in the earth consciousness?

Well, what I meant is that taking in view their present nature the psychisation would be a big change that is quite enough for them to concentrate on. To aim at the Intuition plane or Overmind now would be useless. But the result of psychisation of the whole nature is not small; it can bring about or embrace most of what have been celebrated as the great spiritual realisations. Only these are got by a sort of reflection in the human consciousness (mind, life, body), not by a *permanent* ascension of the consciousness to the highest planes or a *permanent* descent from above. There are upgoings and downflowings from there only. If that much is gained one may think of the rest afterwards. On the other hand there are others in whom there is the clear possibility of rising above after a sufficient psychisation (when completed) of the being and then these two things go on together — psychisation and spiritualisation of the being, the latter process opening up the highest planes entirely. 29 September 1936

*

If the preparatory work for the supramental descent into the earth consciousness goes on so slowly, will it not be years before the earth consciousness is wholly transformed?

There is no proposal to transform the whole earth consciousness — it is simply to introduce the supramental principle there which will transform those who can receive and embody it.

16 December 1936

Descent and the Supramental Yoga

Was there not anything like descents of peace in Ramakrishna or Chaitanya? It seems like they had intense realisations and visions and depths of Samadhi, but we do not read of their having descents of peace. Perhaps their realisations brought with them the peace and Light during Samadhi or intense emotional moments, so that it was not particularly noted — and for supporting and stabilising all that, there must have been a basis of calm and peace.

It happens that people may get the descent without noticing that it is a descent because they feel the result only. The ordinary Yoga does not go beyond the spiritual mind — people feel at the top of the head the joining with the Brahman, but they are not aware of a consciousness above the head. In the same way in the ordinary Yoga one feels the ascent of the awakened inner consciousness (Kundalini) to the *brahmarandhra* where the Prakriti joins the Brahman-consciousness, but they do not feel the descent. Some may have had these things, but I don't know that they understood their nature, principle or place in a complete sadhana. At least I never heard of these things from others before I found them out in my own experience. The reason is that the old Yogins when they went above the spiritual mind passed into samadhi, which means that they did not attempt to be conscious in these higher planes — their aim being to pass away into the Superconscious and not to bring the Superconscious into the waking consciousness, which is that of my Yoga.

26 July 1935

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We do not find the process of descent elsewhere — not in Patanjali or Sankhya or Hathayoga, not even in the Upanishads that I have read. In the Tantras there is the rising of the Kundalini but not the descent of peace or force. Why then do people not recognise the newness of your Yoga?

They will perhaps say that there are “equivalents” in the old things or if the descent is not spoken of as descent it still happens

in the old Yogas.

21 March 1936

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In other Yogas does the silence *descend* or is it rather the mind that goes into the silence? It does not seem that there is anything like a process of descent in Rajayoga or Vedantic Jnanayoga. Moreover, in Rajayoga there is nowhere any mention of silence in the waking consciousness — always it is a question of going into Samadhi. In Jnanayoga, however, it does seem as though the waking state becomes illumined and full of peace and *brahmānanda*.

I never heard of silence descending in other Yogas — the mind goes into silence. Since however I have been writing of ascent and descent, I have been told from several quarters that there is nothing new in this Yoga — so I am wondering whether people were not getting ascents and descents without knowing it! or at least without noticing the process. It is like the rising above the head and taking the station there — which I and others have experienced in this Yoga. When I spoke of it first, people stared and thought I was talking nonsense. Wideness must have been felt in the old Yogas because otherwise one could not feel the universe in oneself or be free from the body consciousness or unite with the Anantam Brahman. But generally as in Tantrik Yoga one spoke of the consciousness rising to the Brahmarandhra, top of the head, as the summit. Rajayoga of course lays stress on Samadhi as the means of the highest experience. But obviously if one has not the Brahmi sthiti in the waking state, there is no completeness in the realisation. The Gita distinctly speaks of being *samāhita* (which is equivalent to being in samadhi) and the Brahmi sthiti as a waking state in which one lives and does all actions.

9 June 1936

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Such a concrete process of ascent and descent could not have escaped notice if other Yogis had it. They do mention a rising of Kundalini to the Brahmarandhra. Why then do they not mention a coming down of, say, a current of *brahmānanda*

or of light from the Brahmarandhra into the Kundalini to the Muladhara? If we suppose they did not mention it because it was a secret, then how could they mention the rising up of the Kundalini? If there is nothing new in this Yoga, those who believe so should quote something which is similar to descent — either in Patanjali or the *Hathayoga Pradipika* or in the *Panchadashi* and other Vedantic books wherein experiences are mentioned.

So I have always thought. I explain this absence of the descent experiences myself by the old Yogas having been mainly confined to the psycho-spiritual-occult range of experience — in which the higher experiences come into the still mind or the concentrated heart by a sort of filtration or reflection — the field of this experience being from the Brahmarandhra downward. People went above this only in samadhi or in a condition of static mukti without any dynamic descent. All that was dynamic took place in the region of the spiritualised mental and vital-physical consciousness. In this Yoga the consciousness (after the lower field has been prepared by a certain amount of psycho-spiritual-occult experience) is drawn upwards above the Brahmarandhra to ranges above belonging to the spiritual consciousness proper and instead of merely receiving from there has to live there and from there change the lower consciousness altogether. For there is a dynamism proper to the spiritual consciousness whose nature is Light, Power, Ananda, Peace, Knowledge, infinite Wideness and that must be possessed and descend into the whole being. Otherwise one can get mukti but not perfection or transformation (except a relative psycho-spiritual change). But if I say that, there will be a general howl against the unpardonable presumption of claiming to have a knowledge not possessed by the ancient saints and sages and pretending to transcend them. In that connection I may say that in the Upanishads (notably the Taittiriya) there are some indications of these higher planes and their nature and the possibility of gathering up the whole consciousness and rising into them. But this was forgotten afterwards and people spoke only of the buddhi as the highest thing with the Purusha or Self just above, but there was no clear idea of these higher planes.

Ergo, ascent possibly to unknown and ineffable heavenly regions in samadhi, but no descent possible — therefore no resource, no possibility of transformation here, only escape from life and mukti in Goloka, Brahmaloaka, Shivaloka or the Absolute.

11 June 1936

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What good is the dynamic descent if it needs years and years merely to touch the heart centre? What exactly is this descent?

It is a thing which is new and has to be worked out by this Yoga.

12 June 1936

The Supramental Yoga and Humanity

I can say little about the method he [*Krishnaprem*] speaks of for getting rid of dead concepts. Each mind has its own way of moving. My own has been a sort of readjustment or rectification of positions and I should rather call it discrimination accompanied by a rearrangement of intuitions. At one time I had given much too big a place to “humanity” in my scheme of things with a number of ideas attached to that exaggeration which needed to be put right. But the change did not come by doubt about what I had conceived before, but by a new light on things in which “humanity” automatically stepped down and got into its right place and all the rest rearranged itself in consequence. But all that is probably because I am constitutionally lazy (in spite of my present feats of correspondence) and prefer the easiest and most automatic method possible. I have a suspicion however that Krishnaprem’s method is essentially the same as mine, only he does it in a more diligent and conscientious spirit. For his remark about the concepts as flags and not the means of advance seems to indicate that.

26 October 1934

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I certainly hope to bring down an effective power of the Truth which will replace eventually the Falsehood that has governed the minds and hearts of men for so long. The liberation of a few

individuals is a thing that is always possible and has always been done — but, to my seeing, it cannot be the sole aim of existence. Whatever the struggles and sufferings and blunders of humanity, there is still in it an urge towards the Light, an impulse towards a greater Truth not only of the soul but the life. If it has not been done yet, it is surely because those who reached the Light and the greater Truth, rested there and saw in it more a means of escape for the soul than a means of transformation for the life. The liberation of the spirit is necessary, nothing can be done without it — but the transformation is also possible. 26 January 1935

*

I am disgusted with the world and would have preferred to go away from it to some subtler existence had it not been for your programme of changing the world and bringing some better things into it. But does the world want to change and buy your wares at the heavy cost of giving up all it is and has and does?

It wants and it does not want something that it has not got. All that the supramental could give, the inner mind of the world would like to have, but its outer mind, its vital and physical do not like to pay the price. But after all I am not trying to change the world all at once but only to bring down centrally something into it it has not yet, a new consciousness and power.

31 July 1935

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It seems that wherever one turns one sees the same humanity — with all its ignorance and incapacity.

Of course. That's what I have been telling you all along. It is not without reason that I am eager to see something better in this well-meaning but woe-begone planet. 3 August 1935

*

But you are surely mistaken in thinking that I said that we work spiritually for the relief of the poor. I have never done that. My work is not to intervene in social matters within the frame of the

present humanity but to bring down a higher spiritual light and power of a higher character which will make a radical change in the earth consciousness. 22 December 1936

Physical Transformation

You have written that particular creations each have a beginning and an end. Will there be an end to this creation even after you manifest the Divine in the physical?

That is not a question of any importance, since the earth has millions of years of life before it and, if the Divine creation begins, it will develop at that time and itself decide the question.

Will anyone leave his body even after manifesting the Divine in his physical body?

It will depend upon the person whether he wants to leave it or not. 19 November 1933

*

You have said that the Overmind is not sufficient to deal with the physical.³ Does this mean that the physical is not liberated or spiritualised even by the Overmind?

There is an inner liberation and a strong spiritualisation of the mind and vital and a partial effect on the physical especially the physical mind, but mostly subjective. A mixture of the Ignorance, or at the very least a limitation of the active Knowledge, power, Ananda etc. remains always. At the same time if one withdraws from the outward physical consciousness, one can feel always the wide spiritual liberation, peace, living in the silent Divine. 29 November 1933

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Some say that Sri Aurobindo brought down the Supermind

³ See the letter of 20 November 1933 on pages 145–46. — Ed.

even into his physical cells and is only preparing others to manifest it in them.

Some say it is not yet manifested in his physical cells but he is bringing it down and only after he gets it fully will he give it to others.

Some say that since 1927 he has been describing how his body has been changing after the Supramental Light began to come down, and so we have to think that the Supermind is not yet manifested fully in his body.

Some say Sri Aurobindo normally lives in the Overmind and whenever he wants he will go into the Supermind. . . .

These are questions and statements which people idly make as a matter of talk. They do not even know what it means or what is the difference between Supermind and Overmind. It is better therefore to leave all such questionings alone at present.

circa 1935

*

Have you written anywhere what would be the nature of the physical transformation?

I have not, I carefully avoided that ticklish subject.

What would it be like? Change of pigment? Mongolian features into Aryo-Grecian? Bald head into luxuriant growth? Old men into gods of eternal youth?

Why not seven tails with an eighth on the head—everybody different colours, blue, magenta, indigo, green, scarlet, etc.; hair luxuriant but vermilion and flying erect skywards; other details to match? Amen.

15 September 1935

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I have been thinking about the physiological chemistry of transformation. It seems to me that there are two possibilities. (1) The chemical composition of the body would remain the same, but the chemicals would become more Peace-active, Light-active, Force-active (radio-active, as they say). (2) The

chemical composition of the blood, glands, secretions, nervous materials would undergo a radical change, leading to a complete, if gradual, transformation into a supramental body.

It has been the idea of many who have speculated on the subject that the body of the future race will be a luminous body (*corps glorieux*) and that might mean radio-active. But also it has to be considered (1) that a supramental body must necessarily be one in which the consciousness determines even the physical action and reaction to the most material and these therefore are not wholly dependent on material conditions or laws as now known, (2) that the subtle process will be more powerful than the gross, so that a subtle action of Agni will be able to do the action which would now need a physical change such as increased temperature.

18 November 1935

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I agree that the action would not be “wholly dependent on material conditions or laws as now known”, but that it will necessarily change material conditions or laws. If this necessity was not there, it could act under present conditions and laws — but it doesn't.

But how is it going to change material conditions and laws without acting on the body as it is?

Will the “subtle action of Agni” take place in our present bodies?

The subtle action of Agni is part of the workings of the Yoga-shakti even now; only its action is at present for perfecting and transformatory.

Certainly it is understood that “the subtle process will be more powerful than the gross”, but will not the subtle process change the present character of the gross process?

If the consciousness cannot determine the physical action and reaction in the present body, if it needs a different basis, then that

means this different basis must be prepared by different means. By what means? Physical? The old Yogis tried to do it by physical tapasya; others by seeking the elixir of life etc. According to this Yoga, the action of the higher Force and consciousness which includes the subtle action of Agni has to open and prepare the body and make it more responsive to Consciousness-Force instead of being rigid in its present habits (called laws). But a different basis can only be created by the supramental action itself. What else but the supermind can determine its own basis?

20 November 1935

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Either I have not been clear or you have missed my point. What I meant is this: how is it possible for the Supramental to act in the body with its present chemical and physiological processes? A new composition and a new activity of various organs will be the proper basis for a Supramental action — if at all there is to be one.

What I did not understand is why the Supramental Force should not act at all on the present basis of the body. That it cannot act fully without changing many things is obvious.

You are evading the question of the physiological and chemical side of the thing when you say, “What else but the supermind can determine its own basis?” The real question is whether this “own basis” will have a different character, chemical composition, physiochemical activity, etc. Do you mean to say that the Supermind can work in ordinary bodies of ordinary people?

I did not intend to evade anything, except that in so far as I do not yet know what will be the chemical constitution of the changed body, I could not answer anything to that. That was why I said it needed investigation.

I was simply putting my idea on the matter which has always been that it is the supramental which will create its own physical basis. If you mean that the supramental cannot *fulfil itself* in the present body with its present processes that is true. The processes will obviously have to be altered. How far the constitution

of the body will be changed and in what direction is another question. As I said it may become as you suggest radio-active: Théon (Mother's teacher in occultism) spoke of it as luminous, *le corps glorieux*. But all that does not make it impossible for the supramental to act in the present body for change. It is what I am looking forward to at present.

Of course a certain preliminary transformation is necessary, just as the psychic and spiritual transformation precedes the supramental. But this is a change of the physical consciousness down to the submerged consciousness of the cells so that they may respond to higher forces and admit them and to a certain extent a change or at least a greater plasticity in the processes. The rules of food etc. are meant to help that by minimising obstacles. How far this involves a change of the chemical constitution of the body I cannot say. It seems to me still that whatever preparatory changes there may be, it is only the action of the supramental Force that can confirm and complete them.

21 November 1935

The Conquest of Death

In one of your talks in the early days you seem to have acclaimed yourself as immortal except under three conditions — accident, poison or *icchā mrtyu*.

It must have been a joke taken as a self-acclamation. Or perhaps what I said was that I have the power to overcome illness, but accident and poison and the I.M. still remain as possible means of death. Of course, the Mother and myself have hundreds of times thrown back the forces of illness and death by a slight concentration of force or even a use of will merely.

Another conviction which all of us share is that you could never have any illness; but your eye problem, due to whatever cause, has shattered it.

It is long since I have had anything but slight fragments of illness — (e.g. sneezes, occasional twitches of rheumatism or neuralgia:

but the last is mostly now outside the body and does not penetrate) — with the exception of the eye and the throat (only one kind of cough though, the others can't come) which are still vulnerable points. Ah yes, there is also prickly-heat; but that has diminished to almost nothing these last years. There is sometimes an attempt at headache, but it remains above the head, tries to get in and then recedes. Giddiness also the same. I don't just now remember anything else. Those are the facts about "having no illness". As for the conclusion, well, you can make a medical one or a Yogic one according to your state of knowledge.

26 March 1935

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From whatever you have said in joke or in earnest, it logically follows that you are immortal. Because if you say that the Supramental can alone conquer death, one who has become that is evidently and consequently immortal. So if one is immortal or has conquered death, no poison or accident can affect him.

Your syllogism is:

“One who becomes supramental, can conquer death.
Sri Aurobindo has become supramental.
Sri Aurobindo has conquered death.”

1st premiss right; second premiss premature; conclusion at least premature and in any case excessive, for “can conquer” is turned into “has conquered” = is immortal. It is not easy, my dear doctor, to be a logician; the human reasoning animal is always making slight inaccuracies like that in his syllogisms which vitiate the whole reasoning. This might be correct:

“One who becomes wholly supramental conquers death.
Sri Aurobindo is becoming supramental.
Sri Aurobindo is conquering death.”

But between “is conquering” and “has conquered” is a big difference. It is all the difference between present and future, logical possibility and logical certitude.

I hope I haven't made a rigid mental conclusion.

The premiss is false. I have never said that I am supramental — I have always said that I have achieved the overmind and am bringing down the supramental. That is a process and until the process is complete it cannot be said that "I am supramental". Of course when I say "I" — I mean the instrument — not the Consciousness above or the Person behind which contain all things in them. 27 March 1935

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My logic again: Sri Aurobindo is bound to become wholly supramental and is being supramentalised in parts. If that is true — and it is — well, he can't die till he is supramental — and once he is so, he is immortal.

It looks very much like a non sequitur. The first part and the last are all right — but the link is fragile. How do you know I won't take a fancy to die in between as a joke? 30 March 1935

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By the way, none of those perverse "fancies" please. If at all you think of going, let us know beforehand, so that we may disappear before you!

Where would be the fun if I told you beforehand? However, I have no bad intentions for the moment. 31 March 1935

The Supramental Yoga and Other Spiritual Paths

Indian Systems and the Cabbala

I do not think exact correlations can always be traced between one system of spiritual and occult knowledge and another. All deal with the same material, but there are differences of standpoint, differences of view-range, a divergence in the mental idea of what is seen and experienced, disparate pragmatic purposes and therefore a difference in the paths surveyed, cut out or followed; the systems vary, each constructs its own schema and technique. I have looked at the diagrams you sent me; I do not know whether I have grasped them rightly and many of the details are not clear to me. I suppose however that the three supernals are at the top, that the two below them (led to by Justice and Prudence from the psychic centre) are mind-planes or mind-centres, that Tiphareth in the middle is the psychic, the three between it and the earth are vital planes. In the absence of precise information I cannot carry the correlation farther.

Now as to the three Supernals. I do not quite understand L.O.E.'s sentence about them — for she speaks of two only, the real and higher man and the separated man. Should I understand that these are the two on either side and that at the top is the Divine? If not, which are they and what is the third? In the ancient Indian system there is only one triune supernal, Sachchidananda. Or if you speak of the upper hemisphere as the supernal, there are three, Sat plane, Chit plane and Ananda plane. The Supermind could be added as a fourth, as it draws upon the other three and belongs to the upper hemisphere. The Indian systems did not distinguish between the Overmind and the Supermind, which is the reason why they got confused about Maya (Overmind-Force), took it for the supreme creative power and lost the secret of the transformation — although the Vaishnava and Tantra Yogas groped to find it again and were

sometimes on the verge of success. For the rest, this, I think, has been the stumbling-block of all attempts at the discovery of the dynamic divine Truth; I know of none that has not imagined, as soon as it felt the Overmind lustres descending, that this was the true illumination, the gnosis — with the result that they either stopped short there and could get no farther, or else concluded that this too was only Maya or Lila and that the one thing to do was to get beyond it into the Supreme.

Again, what may be meant is rather the three fundamentals of the present manifestation. In the Indian system, these are Ishwara, Shakti and Jiva, or else Sachchidananda, Maya and Jiva. But in our system which seeks to go beyond the present manifestation, these could very well be taken for granted and, looked at from the point of view of the planes of consciousness, the three highest — Ananda (with Sat and Chit resting upon it), Supermind and Overmind might be called the three Supernals. My difficulty in correlating them with the three Cabbalistic supernals is twofold. First, white may very well be the symbolic hue of Sachchidananda, but black and grey have no suitability for the two others; the symbol hue of Supermind is gold, and Overmind, which is in contact with Supermind, has an iridescent brilliance which is anything but grey. Unless we are to understand it like the Christian mystics of the negative path (see the Christa Seva Sangha journal) to whom the Divine is a supreme Darkness and the plane of consciousness through which he is reached a supreme Ignorance! Then again, here the Supermind and Overmind would be parallel worlds (?), but in fact these two are one above, one below the other, and you have to pass through and beyond Overmind, if you would reach Supermind, while still above and beyond Supermind are the worlds of Sachchidananda.

Tiphareth is certainly the psychic, not the emotional only. It is central, (in our system the psychic stands behind the others, supporting them from behind the heart-centre); it is also in direct connection with all except the earth-centre (in ours it is not quite so, but still in the earth consciousness the psychic is so covered with the darkened vital that to get to it from the outer physical consciousness you have usually to make your way through the

covering vital). All this makes it pretty clear that Tiphareth is either the psychic or else the psychic + the emotional plane or centre.

You speak of the flaming sword and the gulf below the Overmind. But is there a gulf—or any other gulf than human unconsciousness? In all the series of the planes or grades of consciousness there is nowhere any real gulf, always there are connecting gradations and one can ascend from step to step. Between the Overmind and the human mind there are a number of more and more luminous gradations; but, as these are super-conscious to human mind (except one or two of the lowest of which it gets some direct touches) it is apt to regard them as a superior Inconscience. So one of the Upanishads speaks of the Ishwara consciousness as *susupta*, deep Sleep, because it is only in Samadhi that man usually enters into it, so long as he does not try to turn his waking consciousness into a higher state.

Finally, I may observe that the Cabbala system seems to look at and describe the whole from a certain spiritual-mental or spiritual-psychic view from below the supernals. This is quite natural so long as we live in the human centres. There are two systems, one concentric with the psychic at the centre; another vertical, an ascension and descent, like a flight of steps, a series of superimposed planes with the Supermind + Overmind as the crucial nodus of the transition beyond the human into the Divine. In our system there are not multiple paths of inter-connection, or rather there are, but these are a subsidiary and not the central knowledge. For us there is one way, one path; first, a conversion inwards, a going within to find the inmost psychic being and bring it out to the front, disclosing at the same time the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical parts of the nature; next, an ascension, a series of conversions upwards and a turning down to convert the lower parts. When one has made the inward conversion, one psychicises the whole lower nature so as to make it ready for the divine change. Going upwards, one passes beyond the human mind and at each stage of the ascent there is a conversion into a new consciousness and an infusion of this new consciousness into the whole of the nature.

Thus rising beyond intellect through illuminated higher mind to the intuitive consciousness, we begin to look at everything not from the intellect range or through intellect as an instrument, but from a greater intuitive height and through an intuitivised will, feeling, emotion, sensation and physical contact. So, proceeding from intuition to a greater overmind height, there is a new conversion and we look at and experience everything from the overmind consciousness and through a mind, heart, vital and body surcharged with the overmind thought, sight, will, feeling, sensation, play of force and contact. And the last conversion is the supramental, for once there, once the nature is supramentalised, we are beyond the Ignorance and conversion of consciousness is no longer needed, though a farther divine progression is still possible.

15 April 1931

The Path of the Vedic Rishis

In an article written by a Swami on your book *The Riddle of This World*, he remarks that you have the boldness to say that you have done what the Vedic Rishis could not do.

It is not I only who have done what the Vedic Rishis did not do. Chaitanya and others developed an intensity of Bhakti which is absent in the Veda and many other instances can be given. Why should the past be the limit of spiritual experience?

19 December 1934

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Is it a fact that some ancient sages and Rishis have taken birth here in order to help your work?

If so, it is not a fact of much importance.

27 October 1935

Vedanta and Other Paths of Self-Realisation

The following doubt came to me: "Is not the realisation of the Self sufficient? Hearing about your yoga, a Vedantin who sought the Self might say that it was only because you had

not reached the highest that you wanted to do something on earth by means of the divine power, but that this aim had to be rejected before one could reach the highest.”

These doubts come from the mind — for which action is inferior to thought and thought itself something that comes out from the Silence. It cannot understand the supramental view of things in which there is no division or opposition between the Supreme Existence and the supreme Power that sees, thinks, acts and creates.

7 December 1933

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I was reading in Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* about certain yogis that he met. I don't find anything new in them. They just repeat the old yogas, and the old yogas stopped short at self-realisation, which is not a very difficult stage.

Wonderful! The realisation of the Self which includes the liberation from ego, the consciousness of the One in all, the established and consummated transcendence out of the universal Ignorance, the fixity of the consciousness in the union with the Highest, the Infinite and Eternal is not anything worth doing or recommending to anybody — is “not a very difficult stage”!

Nothing new? Why should there be anything new? The object of spiritual seeking is to find out what is eternally true, not what is new in Time.

From where did you get this singular attitude towards the old Yogas and Yogis? Is the wisdom of the Vedanta and Tantra a small and trifling thing? Have then the sadhaks of this Asram attained to self-realisation and are they liberated Jivan-muktas free from ego and ignorance? If not, why then do you say “it is not a very difficult stage” “their goal is not high” “Is it such a long process?”

I have said that this Yoga was “new” because it aims at a change in this world and not only beyond it and at a supramental realisation. But how does that justify a superior contempt for the spiritual realisation which is as much the aim of this Yoga as of any other?

What I fail to comprehend is how they spend their whole lives in the pursuit of self-realisation. Is it such a long process?

It is not a long process? The whole life and several lives more are often not enough to achieve it. Ramakrishna's guru took 30 years to arrive and even then he was not satisfied that he had realised it.

I also read that some yogis like "the sage who never speaks" remain in samadhi day and night, coming out of it only occasionally for food. What do they do in such a long samadhi, since their goal is not so high?

Do? why should he want to do anything if he was in the eternal peace or Ananda or union with the Divine? If a man is spiritual and has gone beyond the vital and mind, he does not need to be always "doing" something. The self or spirit has the joy of its own existence. It is free to do nothing and free to do everything — but not because it is bound to action and unable to exist without it.

Still harder is it to understand how a self-realised yogi can help others. For self-realisation does not grant such powers.

Do you think that self-realisation is a tamasic state — a complete incapacity and inertia?

13 April 1936

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Do you think then that Yogis can attain a full self-realisation without the help of the supramental planes?

Certainly they can realise the self. It is not at all necessary to go to the supramental planes for that.

I see now that I had some fundamentally wrong ideas about the old Yogas and Yogins. They were actually not my own but borrowed from some sadhaks. Still I am not quite clear about the old Yogas.

I have heard that people from outside often find the sadhaks

here full of an insufferable pride and arrogance, looking on all others outside as far below them! If it is so, it is a most foolish and comically ridiculous attitude.

As for the depreciation of all the old Yogas as something quite easy, unimportant and worthless, and the consequent depreciation of Buddha and Yajnavalkya and other great spiritual figures of the past, is it not evidently absurd on the face of it?

When I asked, “What do they do?”, I did not mean physical or mental action. Rather I wanted to know if by merely remaining in a samadhi of eternal Peace and Ananda, it is possible to liberate oneself completely from the ego. Would that bring about other necessary changes like purification and transformation?

Without purification it is not possible to live always in the Brahman consciousness. While living in that Brahman consciousness one is free from the sense of a separative ego. As for the transformation of the nature, that is not their object.

My question was this: How can one bring down the higher force and apply it to one’s nature if one remains in the impersonal Peace or Ananda?

All that is not necessary for those who seek only liberation.

14 April 1936

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When you write, “Certainly they can realise the self. It is not at all necessary to go to the supramental planes for that” [*p.* 303], I suppose what you mean is that in such cases it is the mind that realises the self; it is not an integral realisation. But when the mind alone realises the self, the vital and physical will constantly disturb it. A separation will become necessary. But can they be separated without the help of the supramental planes?

There are many planes above man’s mind — the supramental is not the only one, and on all of them the self can be realised, — for they are all spiritual planes.

Mind, vital and physical are inextricably mixed together only in the surface consciousness — the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical are separate from each other. Those who seek the self by the old Yogas separate themselves from mind, life and body and realise the self apart from these things. It is perfectly easy to separate mind, vital and physical from each other without the need of supermind. It is done by the ordinary Yogas.

The difference between this and the old Yogas is not that they are incompetent and cannot do these things — they can do them perfectly well — but that they proceed from realisation of self to Nirvana or some Heaven and abandon life, while this does not abandon life. The supramental is necessary for the transformation of terrestrial life and being, not for reaching the self. One must realise self first — only afterwards can one realise the supermind.

If any Yogi can bring about this separation without the supramental, that is really something. For here we are helped by the supramental planes, sometimes there is even a direct action, but still we find it difficult to detach our mind from the life and body.

Who here has a direct action from the Supermind? It is the first news I have of it. Even indirect action from the supramental is rare. Whatever comes to most comes from the intermediate planes.

16 April 1936

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With your help I have been able to make this progress: whatever my state, I can rise into the higher consciousness and, so long as I am inactive, remain there undisturbed by revolt, resistance, impulses or desire.

The men who live in the Self are always there at all times. Nothing in the outer nature can affect that.

You write, “Those who seek the self by the old Yogas separate themselves from mind, life and body and realise the self

apart from these things.” How do they manage to separate themselves from mind, life and body so easily? Will not these things interfere with their realisation? In allowing them to do this, will not the mind, vital and physical have to withdraw from their ordinary movements of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*?

Of course they will — it can only be prevented by the lower movements if you assent to the lower movements; one who refuses to accept them as his real being, can always withdraw from them to the self. The movements of Nature become for them an outer thing not belonging to their true being and having no power to pull them down from it.

Is there any difference between our way of seeking the self and that of the old Yogas?

Only that they often sought it by one line alone, the line varying in different Yogas, while in ours it may come in several ways.

I suppose that one who wants to realise the self can only do it by separating himself from mind, life and body.

Naturally.

You write, “It is perfectly easy to separate mind, vital and physical from each other without the need of supermind” [*p.* 305]. But you should have seen that by “supramental planes” I did not mean supermind, but any of the spiritual planes above the mind. Is there no need of the higher spiritual planes for separating the mind, vital and physical from one another?

Spiritual and supramental are not the same thing. The spiritual planes from higher mind to Overmind are accessible to the old *sadhanas* so there is no difficulty about that. If they were not accessible there would have been no Yoga at all and no Yogis in the past in India.

17 April 1936

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It is not always discreet to speak of all these things to the visitors who come here from abroad. X is a man with a trained

intellect; he must be left to see for himself and judge. He has a great respect for the Ramakrishna Mission as the creation of Vivekananda and the continuer of the work of Ramakrishna and for Europeans like him these metaphysical differences of opinion — for so he would regard them — are of no importance, — it is the opportunity for a spiritual approach to the Divine Reality that they are looking for and all that opens the way commands their respect. So, to lay emphasis on a difference with regard to the doctrine or the exact course of the Path followed might in his idea be a sign of a sectarian spirit. All ways lead to the Divine; the importance for us of not subscribing to the Shankara idea is that we need freedom to move towards the dynamic realisation of the Divine in the world and the idea of the Great Illusion bars the road to that. But for them the important thing is to reach the Divine. It was therefore not at all useful to point the difference before him at this time.

18 January 1937

Traditional Paths of Yoga

How is it that Patanjali has given such an unusual definition of Yoga: *yogaścittavṛttinirodhah* [*Yoga Sutra* 1.2]? Was “divine union” not the aim of Yoga in those days?

Divine union, yes — but for the ascetic schools it was union with the featureless Brahman, the Unknowable beyond existence or, if with the Ishwara, still it was the Ishwara in a supracosmic consciousness. From that point of view Patanjali’s aphorism is sound enough. When he says Yoga, he means the process of Yoga, the object which has to be kept in view in the process — for by the cessation of *cittavṛtti* one gets into *samādhi* and *samādhi* is the only way of uniting solely and completely with the Brahman beyond existence.

3 May 1933

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There is a Sutra in Patanjali, *prātibhādvā sarvam* [*Yoga Sutra* 3.34], on which Vivekananda comments: “Everything comes to him [to a man with Pratibha] naturally without making

Samyama.”¹ Is it that he brings the highest knowledge down into the outer consciousness rather than being compelled to go into Samadhi? But in that case he is probably aware of the supermind.

It has nothing to do with the supermind, for nobody can be aware of the supermind without opening the higher reaches in him first—the supermind is superconscious to the human consciousness. The man in question is in touch with the higher consciousness, so he has not to put any kind of inner pressure on himself to oblige the mind and other parts to admit the higher state or movements—it needs only a turning of himself upward or a slight movement of opening to set the higher consciousness in motion and get results. This statement is of course true only up to a certain point and within limits. If the same man wanted to reach the supermind or transform his body it would not be possible for that to come to him naturally. 4 June 1933

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In the Sutra *bhuvanajñānam sūrye samyamāt* [*Yoga Sutra* 3.27], where does the knowledge of the worlds by Samyama come from, and what has Surya to do with it?

Surya is the symbol of the Divine Light, the Divine Truth, ultimately of the Supermind. Samyama is a process of pressure on the consciousness by which the secret Truth, the involved intuition is released—so by a constant pressure on the consciousness by which the Divine Truth is liberated the Knowledge of the worlds can come. 4 June 1933

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I suppose if some yogis outside the Asram heard about the Supermind and the higher realms they would think that they had passed these worlds or left them behind as a side-issue. They might regard the idea of a divine manifestation as a desire for Karma. Do you think there are any who have

¹ *Swami Vivekananda, Raja-Yoga, in The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 1 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), p. 280.*

enough plasticity to be prepared, at least theoretically, to accept Supermind and the possibility of its manifestation on earth?

I doubt if there are many — they would give the answers you suggest. As for Overmind and Intuition, there are some who are in contact with these planes, I suppose. Those who live in them must be very rare.

20 March 1934

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There appears to be so much self-concentration in the people of the world that hardly a few would think of doing this yoga. Perhaps a larger number would go (and are going) for the old Hathayoga and Rajayoga, which may bring some small immediately satisfying result. Even of those who are sincere truth-seekers, not many would be able to see the truth of our yoga of transformation.

I suppose they are not intended to take it up — only an opening can be given for those who want to rise into a somewhat higher consciousness than they have now.

5 April 1934

Buddhism and Other Religions

I find it difficult to emerge from the peace I found in meditation. How difficult it must be to come out of the peace of Nirvana or Samadhi! I think that is why Yoga could not be made dynamic up till now.

It is only because they make the peace an end, not, as we aim at doing, a basis for the divine consciousness and all its dynamisms.

25 May 1933

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It seems to me that there would hardly be any difference between the consciousness of peace, light, bliss and wideness in Nirvana and in the transformed supramental status, except perhaps in detail.

There is a great difference in consciousness, because Nirvana means absorption into a static Brahman on the level of spiritual

mind — the other would mean identification with the integral Divine in the much higher Truth of Supermind.

It seems to me that the number of people in the world accepting our Yoga of transformation would not be as large as those who accepted Buddhism, Vedanta or Christianity.

Nothing depends on the numbers. The numbers of Buddhism and Christianity were so great because the majority professed it as a creed without its making the least difference to their external life. If the new consciousness were satisfied with that, it could also and much more easily command homage and acceptance by the whole earth. It is because it is a greater consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, that it will insist on a real change.

Since the spread of the Yoga throughout the world will proceed slowly, its creations in art, literature, architecture, etc., may be inferior to those of Buddhist, Christian and Muslim creators.

Your argument assumes that the greater consciousness will be in its creations inferior to the inferior consciousness.

Ordinary people may obtain more immediate results from the traditional systems than from our Yoga. Many may feel they have benefited from the “miracles” these systems offer. In our Yoga they would find the way closed for that. Naturally they would shrink from it.

It would on the contrary be impossible for them not to feel that a greater Light and Power had come on the earth.

Thus on the whole there would seem to be scope for very few people in our Yoga, and the world would hardly interest itself in it.

How do you know that it will have no effect on the ordinary people? It will inevitably increase their possibilities and even though all cannot rise to the highest, that will mean a great change for the earth.

29 April 1934

Tibetan Yoga

The other day I read the book *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines* by W. Y. Evans-Wentz. . . . The following is an interesting statement of his — not a text, but probably his own understanding of the Mahayana: “So long as there is one being, even the lowliest, immersed in suffering and sorrow, or in Ignorance, there remains one note of disharmony which cannot but affect all beings, since all beings are the One; and until all are Liberated there cannot possibly be true Bliss for any.”² The ideal is excellent, but I find it hard to swallow the whole of this altruism. It looks like an exaggeration to me because (1) it would not be possible to eliminate suffering from, say, animals or men who have just begun their human evolution and (2) true bliss cannot depend on the suffering or liberation of others. . . .

Your objections are sound. It is the usual overstatement by which the human mind tries to give an added and superlative force and value to its ideas and tenets, but only succeeds in making them vulnerable.

What the compassionate Bodhisattwa ought to do is to become a superscientist and find some way of releasing atoms in such style that the whole earth would be blown to smithereens — this would release all beings on it from their sufferings. But unfortunately the force of karma would, I suppose, create a new earth and bring them all back there to suffer. So no release that way either. Still it would give a respite during which he might go to Nirvana and come back again when needed to repeat his compassionate action.

“Until all are Liberated” implies that not a worm will remain unliberated and then only will there be bliss. A grave difficulty presents itself here — or rather a new idea never conceived of by all the Upanishads — liberation for animals before they reach a human incarnation. Would that liberation be the same

² W. Y. Evans-Wentz, ed., *Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines, or Seven Books of Wisdom of the Great Path*, according to the Late Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), p. 11.

as for humans or have a different set of codes? Will they get liberation gratis by a free distribution from the Bodhisattwa?

Next, “since all beings are the One”. Is there any “the One” in Buddhism? Do they admit any such thing? The author seems to have got his information from authoritative sources and texts, but he does not make it clear whether this “One” is to be understood in the sense of a Cosmic Divine or a Supracosmic.

Of course the animal difficulty is insuperable, because animals must enter the human stage first before liberation — unless of course either animals become humanised and begin talking and thinking in philosophical terms (perhaps it will not be necessary for them to write poetry and paint pictures or make music), or else animals disappear altogether being no longer necessary to the evolution.

About the One there are different versions. I just read somewhere that the Buddhist One is a Superbuddha from whom all Buddhas come — but it seemed to me a rehash of Buddhism in Vedantic terms born of a modern mind. The Permanent of Buddhism has always been supposed to be Supracosmic and Ineffable — that is why Buddha never tried to explain what it was; for, logically, how can one talk about the Ineffable? It has really nothing to do with the Cosmos which is a thing of sanskaras and Karma.

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Evans-Wentz writes: “According to the Buddha, the belief that the soul (Skt. *ātmā*), as an eternally individualized, unchanging, and indissoluble spiritual essence, is immortal, even though its preexistence logically be admitted, mentally fetters man and keeps him enslaved to the incessant round of births and deaths. Not until man transcends this belief, in virtue of Right Knowledge, can there come Liberation” [p. 4]. If belief in the soul fetters man, what about the idea that the world is full of misery and that *karma bandhana* keeps man bound to the idea of misery and pain?

According to both Buddha and Shankara liberation means *laya* of the individual in some transcendent Permanence that is not

individualised — so logically a belief in the individual soul must prevent liberation while the sense of misery in the world leads to the attempt to escape.

This implies that those who believed in “Soul” never achieved liberation. Was there no liberation before Buddha?

Buddha said he was repeating an ancient knowledge that had existed before him and restoring its true form, so he evades this objection.

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At the same time, despite Buddha’s idea that belief in soul fetters man, Buddhists are in some way compelled to believe something like it. Evans-Wentz writes: “But the impersonal consciousness-principle is not to be in any way identified with the personality represented by a name, a bodily form, or a *sangsāric* mind; these are but its illusory creations. It is in itself non-*sangsāric*, being uncreated, unborn, unshaped, beyond human concept or definition; and, therefore, transcending time and space, which have only relative and not absolute existence, it is beginningless and endless” [*p.* 5]. Whether by pressure of arguments against the non-acceptance of soul, or through modernisation, they have to accept some such principle. The last sentence quoted above hardly differs from the description of “soul”.

There is no difference between such a description and what is meant by soul, except that it is called “impersonal” — but evidently here impersonal is used as opposed to the thing dependent on name, body and form, which is called personality. Europeans especially, but also people without philosophic ideas would easily mistake this outward personality for the soul and then they would deny the name of soul to the unborn and endless entity. Do they then consider it as spirit or self — *ātman*? But the difficulty is that the old Buddhists rejected the conception of *ātman* also. So we are left entirely at sea. The Nihilistic Buddhist teaching is plain and comprehensible that there is no soul, only a bundle of Sankaras continuing or a stream of them renewing themselves

without dissolution (Nirvana). But this Mahayanist affair seems a sort of loose and covert compromise with Vedanta.

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Evans-Wentz writes: “There is . . . according to Mahāyānic Buddhism . . . unending evolutionary progression; so that *Nirvāṇa* is to be regarded as a Spiritual Rest-House on the Highway through Eternity” [*p.* 149]. And also: “Man, then no longer man, will . . . help to fulfil the Law of the Higher Evolution, of which *Nirvāṇa* is but the beginning” [*p.* 12]. The above indicate that Nirvana is not the final aim — but whether this is a compromise with Vedanta or with modern ideas is very doubtful. There is almost a contradiction with the following:

“When the Ignorance which was to be overcome hath been dispersed, the effort to overcome it ceaseth, and the Path cometh to an end and the Journey is completed.

“The Journeying having ceased, there is no place beyond the ending of the Path to explore; and one obtaineth the Supreme Boon of the Great Symbol, the Unabiding State of *Nirvāṇa*.”³

The two statements [*i.e. the two sentences from Evans-Wentz’s commentary and the two paragraphs from the Tibetan text*] are not only almost but absolutely contradictory. Nirvana cannot be at once the ending of the Path with nothing beyond to explore and yet only a rest house or rather the beginning of the Higher Path with everything still to explore. I think that different views of different Buddhist minds or schools must have been jumbled together without reconciliation. The reconciliation would be that it is the end of the lower Path through the lower Nature and the beginning of the Higher Evolution. In that case it would accord exactly with the teaching of our Yoga.

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It would seem that such a reconciliation would be impossible unless someone had overpassed Nirvana or seen something of

³ *These two paragraphs are from “The Epitome of the Great Symbol” as translated by Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup and Evans-Wentz and published in Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines, p. 149. — Ed.*

the Higher Evolution or Higher Nature. Perhaps the author had some sort of insight, otherwise he could not state that Nirvana is a spiritual rest-house and that there is a Higher Evolution. For he writes: “The Great Ones and the *Bodhi-sattvas* . . . renounce their right to pass on to a still Higher Evolution and remain within the Cosmos for the good of all sentient beings. It is these *Bodhic* Forces, thus active in the Cosmos, which . . . lead mankind, step by step, towards a perfected social order on Earth” [p. 149]. This indicates that they come down or back from Nirvana to lead mankind up to Nirvana. Perhaps it would have been better if they had seen something of the Higher Evolution and then come back to perfect society on earth.

The phrase “to pass on” shows that what is meant by them is an evolution not on earth but somewhere beyond, God knows where. In that case Nirvana would be a place or world on the way to other worlds and the soul evolves from one world to another — e.g. from earth to Nirvana and from Nirvana to some Beyond-Nirvana. This is an entirely European idea and it is most unlikely that it was held by the Buddhists. The Indian idea was that the evolution is here and even the Gods if they want to go beyond their Godhead and get liberation have to come down on earth for the purpose. It is the Western spiritualists and others who think that the birth on earth is a stage of progress from some place inferior to earth and after once being born on earth one does not return but goes to some other world and remains there till one can progress to some other better world and so on and on and on and up and up and up as Ramsay MacDonald would say. Again, this “perfected social order on Earth” is certainly not a Buddhist idea, the Buddhas never dreamed of it — their preoccupation was with helping men towards Nirvana, not towards a perfected order here. All that is a sheer contradiction of Buddhism and smells Europe from 3 miles off.

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Evans-Wentz writes: “Thus the Doctrine of the *Shūnyatā*, underlying the whole of the *Prajñā-Pāramitā*, posits . . . an Absolute as inherent in phenomena; for the Absolute is the

source and support of phenomena; and, in the last analysis of things, by the *Bodhi*-illuminated mind, freed of Ignorance, duality vanishes, and there remains but the One in All, the All in One. . . . This supreme doctrine of Emancipation may be summarized by saying that all things are eternally immersed in *Nirvāṇa* . . .” [p. 351]. But how does the doctrine of Shunyata posit an Absolute as the source and support of phenomena and how does it allow a “One in All” or “All in One”?

The phrase “source and support of phenomena” sounds like your Overmind, which is the support of the Cosmos. Perhaps someone had some such perception while experiencing the silence leading to Nirvana.

How is this Absolute different from the Absolute of the Vedanta? or this emancipation different from the Vedantic mukti? If it were so, there would never have been all this quarrel between Buddhism and the Vedantic schools. It must be a new-fangled version of Buddhism or else it was a later development in which Buddhism reduced itself back to Adwaita.

The phrase “all things are eternally immersed in *Nirvāṇa*” seems to me at once bold and beautiful and gives an idea of the Silence. From this it is clearer that the realisation of Nirvana, if put in your terminology, is just the realisation of the Silence behind the Cosmos — from which Overmind would be two or three steps. But by “renouncing their right to pass on to a still Higher Evolution” they have managed to miss Overmind for two or three thousand years.

Yes. But is this Higher Evolution really a Buddhistic idea or only a European version of what Nirvana might be?

*

“Think not of the past. Think not of the future. Think not that thou art actually engaged in meditation. Regard not the Void as being Nothingness.

“At this stage do not attempt to analyse any of the impressions felt by the five senses, saying, ‘It is; it is not.’ But at least for a little while observe unbroken meditation, keeping the body as calm as that of a sleeping babe, and the mind in

its natural state [i.e. free of all thought-processes].” . . .

“Whatever thoughts, or concepts, or obscuring [or disturbing] passions arise are neither to be abandoned nor allowed to control one; they are to be allowed to arise without one’s trying to direct [or shape] them. If one do no more than merely to recognize them as soon as they arise, and persist in so doing, they will come to be realized [or to dawn] in their true [or void] form through not being abandoned.”⁴

“The Clear Light . . . symbolizes the unconditioned pure *Nirvāṇic* Consciousness, the transcendent, Supramundane Consciousness of a Fully Awakened One. It is a Mystic Radiance of the *Dharma-Kāya*, of the *Nirvāṇic* Consciousness free of all *sangsāric* or conditioned obscuration. It cannot be described; It can only be known; and to know It is to know the Thatness of all things. As being colourless, or without qualities, It is the Clear Light; as being without limitations, It is All-Pervading Intelligence; as being unknowable in terms of *sangsāric* consciousness, and without form, It is the Formless Void.”⁵

The extracts you have sent are very interesting and quite sound — the processes recommended can, if one can carry them out, help greatly in the quieting of the mind.

The Tibetan Nirvana as described in the last extract is very much like the Tao of Laotse. It is more and more said now that that is the real teaching of Buddha and of Buddhism.

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People here became very enthusiastic about that book by Evans-Wentz. But I think their reading of it may be a bit uncritical. They found many things in it that are similar to our

⁴ *These are the first and second to last of fourteen extracts from “The Epitome of the Great Symbol” as translated by Dawa-Samdup and Evans-Wentz and published in Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines, pp. 119–39, which were typed and sent to Sri Aurobindo by a correspondent. — Ed.*

⁵ *This is the third of three extracts from Evans-Wentz’s commentary on texts published in Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines (p. 166). These were typed immediately after the extracts mentioned in footnote 4 and sent along with them to Sri Aurobindo. The correspondent did not mention that the first set of extracts were from the translation and the second set from the commentary. — Ed.*

yoga, but they may be missing whatever defects or misrepresentations the book may contain.

Somebody sent me some extracts about ways of meditation which were good. There are elements in most Yogas which enter into this one, so it is not surprising if there is something in Buddhism also. But such notions as a Higher Evolution beyond Nirvana seem to me not genuinely Buddhistic, unless of course there is some offshoot of Buddhism which developed something so interpreted by the author. I never heard of it as part of Buddha's teachings — he always spoke of Nirvana as the goal and refused to discuss metaphysically what it might be.

12 July 1936

Theosophy

I am reading *Letters from the Masters of the Wisdom*, a Theosophical book. It seems like the principles are quite reasonable. Only there is too much of Buddhism, which they seem to want to make into a world cult.

It is a movement that has taken from each previous movement European or Asiatic some of its knowledge and mixed it with much error and imagination of a rather vital character. It is that mixture and the mental character of its knowledge that prevent it from being a sound thing. Many start with it, but have to leave it if they want to get to real spiritual life and knowledge.

4 November 1933

Remarks on the Current State of the Sadhana, 1931–1947

1931

I am surprised at Tagore's remark¹ about the *two years*; he must have greatly misunderstood or misheard me. I did tell him that I would expand only after making a perfect (inner) foundation here, but I gave no date. I did give that date of two years long before in my letter to Barin,² but I had then a less ample view of the work to be done than I have now — and I am now more cautious about assigning dates than I was once. To fix a precise time is impossible except in the two regions of certitude — the pure material which is the field of mathematical certitudes and the supramental which is the field of divine certitudes. In the planes in between where life has its word to say and things have to evolve under shock and stress, Time and Energy are too much in a flux and apt to kick against the rigour of a prefixed date or programme.

16 August 1931

1932

You will say, “But at present the Mother has drawn back and it is the supramental that is to blame, because it is in order to bring down the supramental into matter that she retires.” The supramental is not to blame; the supramental could very well have come down into matter under former conditions, if the means created by the Mother for the physical and vital contact had not been vitiated by the wrong attitude, the wrong reactions in the Asram atmosphere. It was not the direct supramental Force

¹ Rabindranath Tagore remarked to someone in 1931 that Sri Aurobindo told him in 1928 that he would “expand” after two years. — Ed.

² In a letter written in Bengali to his brother Barindra Kumar Ghose in 1920, Sri Aurobindo said that it might take him “another two years” to complete his sadhana. — Ed.

that was acting, but an intermediate and preparatory force that carried in it a modified Light derived from the supramental; but this would have been sufficient for the work of opening the way for the highest action, if it had not been for the irruption of these wrong forces on the yet unconquered lower (physical) vital and material plane. The interference was creating adverse possibilities which could not be allowed to continue. The Mother would not have retired otherwise; and even as it is it is not meant as an abandonment of the field but is only (to borrow a now current phrase from a more external enterprise) a temporary strategic retirement, *reculer pour mieux sauter*. The supramental is therefore not responsible; on the contrary, it is the descent of the supramental that would end all the difficulty. 12 January 1932

*

Our object is the supramental realisation and we have to do whatever is necessary for that or towards that under the conditions of each stage. At present the necessity is to prepare the physical consciousness; for that a complete equality and peace and a complete dedication free from personal demand or desire in the physical and the lower vital parts is the thing to be established. Other things can come in their proper time. What is the real need now is not insistence on physical nearness, which is one of those other things, but the psychic opening in the physical consciousness and the constant presence and guidance there.

16 February 1932

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If the attainment of supermind does not take us to the last stage of perfection in the objective side of life, if even after its attainment we have to satisfy ourselves with a little more clarity with possibilities and probabilities (as you yourself have said), how can it be called the last and the perfect truth?

I have never said that I wrote from the supermind, so the question does not arise.

You seem to be very much in a hurry to get at the supermind. I have said that it cannot be done like that, a patient preparation

of the nature is needed and I am concerned with that now.

If divinisation of life keeps us in the same condition of death, disease and physical incapacity, how can it be called divinisation at all?

What do you mean by divinisation of life? Death and disease can only disappear by divinisation of the *body* — and that is not yet here. 2 March 1932

*

I am not very impatient about the supermind, but the patient preparation of the nature that you want will go on even if other sides are developing.

I don't know what you mean by developing sides. I am concerned with preparing the nature for the supramental possibility — however long that may take — and I have no time or energy to waste on side issues. That preparation is the only thing I can recommend to you; all the “sides” necessary will come with it.

I know that the supermind is not near and I know that I am impatient — but not especially for supermind.

My answer stands. I have repeatedly said recently that we are trying against great difficulties to bring down the supramental into the physical plane. If the supramental were already there, the body divinised, matter transformed, there would be no difficulty and no need of the endeavour.

I would recall to you what I said in my letter to X³ that it was not the direct supramental Force which was working up till now but a preparatory Force that carried in it a modified Light derived from the supramental. The direct Force can begin working only when the mind, vital and physical are sufficiently ready. 3 March 1932

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³ See the letter of 12 January 1932 on pages 319–20. — Ed.

I must remind you that I have been an intellectual myself and no stranger to doubts — both the Mother and myself have had one side of the mind as positive and as insistent on practical results and more so than any Russell can be. We could never have been contented with the shining ideas and phrases which a Rolland or another takes for gold coin of Truth. We know well what is the difference between a subjective experience and a dynamic outward-going and realising Force. So although we have faith — and who ever did anything great in the world without having faith in his mission or the Truth at work behind him? — we do not found ourselves on faith alone but on a great ground of knowledge which we have been developing and testing all our lives. I think I can say that I have been testing day and night for years upon years more scrupulously than any scientist his theory or his method on the physical plane. That is why I am not alarmed by the aspect of the world around me or disconcerted by the often successful fury of the adverse Forces who increase in their rage as the Light comes nearer and nearer down to the field of earth and Matter.

If I believe in the probability and not only the possibility, if I feel practically certain of the supramental descent — I do not fix a date, — it is because I have my grounds for the belief, not merely a faith in the air. I *know* that the supramental descent is inevitable — I have faith in view of my experience that the time can be and should be now and not in a later age.

But even if I knew it to be for a later time, I would not swerve from my path or be discouraged or flag in my labour. Formerly I might have been, but not now after all the path I have traversed. When one is sure of the Truth, or even when one believes the thing one pursues to be the only possible solution, one does not stipulate for an immediate success, one travels towards the Light taking as well worth facing every risk of the adventure. Still, like you, it is now in this life that I insist on it and not in another or in the hereafter.

30 August 1932

I pray for the quiet strength, faith and wisdom I need to help me pass over this exceedingly difficult period of worries and inquietness and the feeling of physical unwellness and other unpleasantnesses.

But those are the ideas and feelings that always rise up in you when the adverse force presses on you and you give ear or even partly listen to its suggestions. You yourself have given the answer to it — the solutions suggested by these forces are not solutions at all. No doubt, the period is very difficult, not only for you but for everybody, — but the struggle in the material plane was bound to be difficult and prolonged, it is the cause of the whole problem, the critical stage of the whole action, because the victory there would decide everything for good and all.

24 November 1932

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Is it possible for you to give us an idea when the supramental descent will come to pass? Will it be within a decade? And will the result of the completion of your yoga be, as I once asked Mother also, a power to transform us in spite of ourselves? Even at present your power does nothing else, but you leave us still the possibility to resist.

I suppose the (vital's) will to resist will disappear: I don't know about the date — dates are things that one ought not to fix too rigidly; but I certainly hope we won't have to wait for a decade! Let us be more sanguine and put the beginning of the decade and not its end as the era of the Descent. It is more likely then to make haste.

December 1932

1933

As for faith, you write as if I had never had a doubt or any difficulty. I have had worse than any human mind can think of. It is not because I have ignored difficulties, but because I have seen them more clearly, experienced them on a larger scale than anyone living now or before me that, having faced and measured them, I am sure of the results of my work. Even if I still saw the

chance that it might come to nothing (which is impossible), I should go on unperturbed, because I would still have done to the best of my power the work that I had to do and what is so done always counts in the economy of the universe. But why should I feel that all this may come to nothing when I see each step and where it is leading and every week and day — once it was every year and month and hereafter it will be every day and hour — brings me so much nearer to my goal? In the way that one treads with the greater Light above, even every difficulty gives its help and has its value and the Night itself carries in it the burden of the light that has to be.

As for your own case, it comes to this that experiences come and stop, there are constant ups and downs, in times of recoil and depression no advance at all seems to have been made, there is as yet no certitude. So it was with me also, so it is with everyone, not with you alone. The way to the heights is always like that up to a certain point, but the ups and downs, the difficulties and obstacles are no proof that it is a chimera to aspire to the summits.

5 January 1933

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I am afraid I cannot endorse your reading of the situation, at least so far as the Mother and myself and the prospects of the work are concerned. I can agree only that we have had a heavy time of it recently and that there has been a strong attack on the plane of the physical and material — but that (heavy attacks) is a thing we have been accustomed to for the last 20 years and it has never prevented us from making any necessary advance. I have never had any illusions about the path being comfortable and easy — I knew all along that the work could only be done if all the essential difficulties rose and were faced — so their rising cannot tire or dishearten me — whatever obstinacy there may be in the difficulties whether our own or in the sadhaks or in Nature. . . .

No, I am not tired or on the point of giving up. I have made inwardly steps in front in the last two or three months which had seemed impossible because of the obstinate resistance for

years together and it is not an experience which pushes me to despair and give up. If there is much resistance on one side, there have been large gains on the other — all has not been a picture of sterile darkness. You yourself are kept back only by the demon of doubt which bangs on you each door as you are opening it — you have only to set about resolutely slaying the Rakshasa and the doors will open to you as they have done to many others who were held up by their own mind or vital nature.

12 January 1933

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When shall the victory of Supermind manifest on Earth?

One can only say that it advances, but to fix — or at least to proclaim — a time is not permitted — for which there are many good occult reasons.

23 March 1933

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What are the conditions for the descent of the Higher Consciousness in the Asram atmosphere? Or is it already there? Is it good to call it down for all?

The Higher Consciousness is there already — it depends on the sadhak how much (or little) he receives of it and in what way. The supramental consciousness is not yet down in the material, but it is no use calling that for all, — hardly anyone could receive it at present. But up to just below that all is there. It is a question of receiving, not of calling down, for that each has to open — by whatever degrees — and call it into himself.

30 June 1933

*

Is it mostly the Mahasaraswati aspect of the Mother that works in our sadhana here?

At present since the sadhana came down to the physical consciousness — or rather it is a combination of Maheshwari-Mahasaraswati forces.

25 August 1933

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You wrote to me yesterday, “Now there is a sufficient descent of Light and Power.”⁴ Does this show that the psychisation of the sadhaks is advancing?

Yes, there has been some progress in that respect and all progress in the psychic or spiritual consciousness of the sadhaks makes the descent more easy. But the main cause is that the Overmind principle which is the immediate secret support of the present earth-nature with all its limitations is more and more undergoing the pressure of the Supramental and letting through a greater Light and Power. For so long as the Overmind intervenes (the principle of the Overmind being a play of forces, each trying to realise itself as the Truth) the law of struggle remains and with it the opportunity for the adverse Forces. 10 November 1933

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You say [*in the preceding letter*] that the Overmind, as a result of a pressure of the Supramental, is “letting through a greater Light and Power.” Does this mean that a greater spiritual movement is going on at present in various places on earth where the people are receiving the new Light and Power?

No. It is only here that it can act for the present — in the forces outside, there is no preparation to receive it. 10 November 1933

*

No, the supramental has not descended into the body or into matter — it is only at the point where such a descent has become not only possible but inevitable — I am speaking of course of my own experience. But as my own experience is the centre and condition of the rest, that is sufficient for the promise.

I am not able to answer your letter just now for it is full of bristling questions, but I shall do it today — in the course of the day. Only my difficulty is that you all seem to expect some kind of miraculous faery-tale change and do not realise that it is a rapid and concentrated evolution which is the aim of

⁴ See the letter of 9 November 1933 on page 640. — Ed.

my sadhana and that there must be a process for it, a working of the higher on the lower and a dealing with all the necessary materials — not a sudden fiat of the Creator by which everything is done on a given date. It is a suprarational but not an irrational process. What is to be done, will happen — perhaps with a rush even — but in a workmanlike way and not according to fancy.

However I will try to explain all that as far as possible — in principle only of course — as far as it can be explained to the physical mind which has not yet any notion of what the supramental is. For the rest, I will try to meet the points you make.

14 November 1933

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As the moment of the possibility of the supramental Descent grows nearer, these forces have become more eager to keep hold on the Asram atmosphere and break the sadhana of anyone they can touch. Their main aim is to get as many as possible to leave the Asram so that they may not share in the descent and so that the descent itself may be delayed and disturbed by a constant tempest in the atmosphere. That is why I put the notice⁵ suggesting that the sadhaks should not admit these forces and need not. To be on guard and admit no violent and irrational movements, to be calm and insistent in faith and self-opening to us is all that is needed.

15 November 1933

1934

Is there any occult significance of yesterday's date — the succession 1-2-34? The next date in this series will come in 11 years: 2-3-45.

1.2.34. It is supposed to be always a year of manifestation. 2.3.45 is the year of power — when the thing manifested gets full force. 4.5.67 is the year of complete realisation.

2 February 1934

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⁵ *The letter of 8 November 1933 on page 639 was posted on the Ashram notice board. —Ed.*

It is true that there is an increasingly powerful descent of the Higher Force. Many now see the lights and colours around the Mother and her subtle luminous forms—it means that their vision is opening to supraphysical realities, it is not a phantasy. The colours or lights you see are forces from various planes and each colour indicates a special force.

The supramental Force is descending, but it has not yet taken possession of the body or of matter—there is still much resistance to that. It is a supramentalised Overmind Force that has already touched and this may at any time change into or give place to the Supramental in its own native power. 14 September 1934

*

I dreamed that I was at the Pranam ceremony this morning and at the time of making the usual obeisance to the Mother I offered her some flowers which she took in her hands. At that time she broke her customary silence and spoke to me some words of advice and encouragement, the purport of which was that I should stay here until a certain event which was to come after a few days (she mentioned the event but I do not remember what it was), about when I might return home and that even though I would not be living in the Asram, the progress of my sadhana would be assured.

There is indeed something preparing to descend and the dream was probably a suggestion to you to stay so as to receive its touch after which your sadhana could proceed at home without difficulty, as there would be Something else within you doing the sadhana with your constant assent as the one necessity. The only difficulty in the way of health is a certain obscurity in the body consciousness itself which makes it consent readily to habitual touches of the force that makes for illness; otherwise if the body consciousness as well as the mind and vital were open any illness that came would immediately be dissipated. Keep a quiet and steady will for the opening of the consciousness and the union and do not allow depression or any idea of frustration. Keep also a concentrated call in the heart. With those two things the result is sure. 18 September 1934

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X told me that this is the year of the manifestation of the Purushottama, Sri Aurobindo.⁶ Also that the Supramental Force is just now coming down. I feel my previous dream of darshan of Sri Aurobindo in a motor car and another dream of Sri Aurobindo signify this manifestation and the coming down of the Force before long. Am I right?

The motor car by itself only means a rapid progress. It is true that the Supramental Force is preparing its descent.

20 September 1934

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X speaks in very definite terms about this descent that has already come so close. He says it will bring about the final change. Is what he says true? If so, why am I still ignorant of it?

It would not necessarily be known by everybody beforehand. Besides even if the descent were here one would have to be ready before one could get the final change. 14 October 1934

*

It feels as if the Pure Existence is descending into the being. I can feel it manifesting — but then something asks how this can be possible, for the vital and the physical are not yet filled with it.

The Pure Existence is not something abstract but substantial and concrete. Moreover it is descending into the body, so it is quite natural to feel it materially. 16 October 1934

*

I do not know who was X's informant, but certainly the Mother never said to anybody that the Supermind was to descend on the 24th November. Dates cannot be fixed like that. The descent of the supermind is a long process or at least a process with a long preparation and one can only say that the work is going

⁶ *The person referred to here as X was the recipient of the letter of 2 February 1934, published on page 327. — Ed*

on sometimes with a strong pressure for completion, sometimes retarded by the things that rise from below and have to be dealt with before farther progress can be made. The process is a (spiritual) evolutionary process concentrated into a brief period — it could be done otherwise (by what men would regard as a miraculous intervention) only if the human mind were more flexible and less attached to its ignorance than it is. As we envisage it, it must manifest in a few first and then spread, but it is not likely to sweep over the earth in a moment. It is not advisable to discuss too much what it will do and how it will do it, because these are things the Supermind itself will fix, acting out of that Divine Truth in it, and the mind must not try to fix for it grooves in which it will run. Naturally, the release from subconscious ignorance and from disease, duration of life at will, and a change in the functioning of the body must be among the ultimate results of a supramental change; but the details of these things must be left for the supramental Energy to work out according to the truth of its own nature. 18 October 1934

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When I wrote in my letter about the supermind and the obstinate resistance,⁷ I spoke of course of something I had already spoken of before. I did not mean that the resistance was of an unexpected character or had altered anything essential. But in its nature the descent is not something arbitrary and miraculous, but a rapid evolutionary process compressed into a few years which proceeds by taking up the present nature into its Light and pouring its Truth into the inferior planes. That cannot be done in the whole world at a time, but is done like all such processes first through selected Adharas and then on a wider scale. We have to do it through ourselves first and through the circle of sadhakas gathered around us in the terrestrial consciousness as typified here. If a few open, that is sufficient for the process to be possible. On the other hand if there is a general misunderstanding and resistance (not in all, but in many), that makes it difficult and

⁷ See the letter of 17 October 1934 on pages 44–45. — Ed.

the process more laborious, but it does not make it impossible. I was not suggesting that it has become impossible, but that if the circumstances are made unfavourable by our being unable to concentrate enough on this thing of capital importance and having too much work to do of an irrelevant kind, the descent was likely to take longer than it would do otherwise. Certainly, when the supramental does touch earth with a sufficient force to dig itself in into the earth consciousness, there will be no more chance of any success or survival for the Asuric Maya.

The rest that I spoke of about the human and the divine had to do with the intermediate period between before it is down. What I meant was that if the Mother were able to bring out the Divine Personalities and Powers into her body and physical being, as she was doing for several months without break some years ago, the brightest period in the history of the Asram, things would be much more easy and all these dangerous attacks that now take place would be dealt with rapidly and would in fact be impossible. In those days when the Mother was either receiving the sadhaks for meditation or otherwise working and concentrating all night and day without sleep and very irregular food, there was no ill-health and no fatigue in her and things were proceeding with a lightning swiftness. The power used was not that of the Supermind, but of the Overmind, but it was sufficient for what was being done. Afterwards because the lower vital and the physical of the sadhaks could not follow, the Mother had to push the Divine Personalities and Powers through which she was doing the action behind a veil and come down into the physical human level and act according to its conditions and that meant difficulty, struggle, illness, ignorance and inertia. All has been for long slow, difficult, almost sterile in appearance. Nevertheless our work was going on behind that appearance and now it is again becoming possible to go forward. But for the advance to be anything like general or swift in its process, the attitude of the sadhaks, not of a few only, must change. They must cling less to the conditions and feelings of the external physical consciousness and open themselves to the true consciousness of the Yogin and sadhaka. If they did that,

the inner eye would open and they would not be bewildered or alarmed if the Mother again manifested externally something of the Divine Personalities and Powers as she did before. They would not be asking her to be always on their level, but would be glad to be drawn swiftly or gradually up towards hers. The difficulties would be ten times less and a larger easier securer movement possible.

This was what I meant and I suppose I manifested some impatience at the slowness of so many to realise what is after all a logical conclusion from the very principle of our Yoga which is that of a transformation, all that is disharmonious in human nature being enlightened out of existence, all that makes for harmony being changed into its divine equivalent, purer, greater, nobler, more beautiful and much being added which has been lacking to the human evolution. I meant that things could move more swiftly towards this if the sadhaks had a less ignorant attitude, but if they could not yet reach that, we had of course to go on anyhow until the supramental descent came down to the material level.

Finally, you must get rid of this gratuitous tendency to despair. The difficulty for you has been created by the indulgence given to this formation I speak of; that finally dismissed, the difficulty would disappear. Progress might be slow at first, but progress would come; it would quicken afterwards and, with the supramental force here, there would be for you as for others the full speed and certitude.

18 October 1934

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I was reading a book about the Great War, which I found interesting. I hope you don't mind if I read such books. Do not punish me for that. I mean, there seems to be a counterpart of punishment in the supramental, a withdrawing of its protection or help which results in attacks, depressions, illnesses, etc.

But it is not the supramental that is acting at present — the supramental won't act until it is rooted and established in Matter. If it were the supramental, you would not be having these difficulties. It is at most the cosmic Overmind that is able to act now, but

even there there is no idea of punishment; it is a play of forces and when the force of the physical consciousness becomes too prominent it acts according to its dharma and the other forces are covered over for the time. Our own force acts in this play of forces to help the sadhak through till he gets himself into the silence within and the cosmic consciousness as a whole with the Higher Force action to regulate and harmonise the progress — after which it is plainer sailing. There can be no question of our withdrawing protection and help. As for your reading these books, we have no objection at all, so long as you feel the need of it. When the inner life becomes more active again, you can either drop them again or make all mental activity a part of the sadhana according to your condition and inner impulse at the time.

25 October 1934

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I have felt bound to explain so much [*about the behaviour of certain sadhaks*] though I would have preferred not to write about these things. I do hope you will throw all that behind you. I feel a great longing that the sadhaks should be free of all that. For so long as the present state of things continues with fires of this kind raging all around and the atmosphere in a turmoil, the work I am trying to do, certainly not for my own sake or for any personal reason, will always remain under the stroke of jeopardy and I do not know how the descent I am labouring for is to fulfil itself. In fact, the Mother and I have to give nine-tenths of our energy to smoothing down things, to keeping the sadhaks tolerably contented etc. etc. etc. One-tenth and in the Mother's case not even that can alone go to the real work; it is not enough. It is not surprising either that you should feel it difficult to get on in all this. But then why not push these things away from you and keep a clear field in you for the Divine? That, if everybody, or even a sufficient number could do it, would be the greatest help I could receive.

26 October 1934

*

I have already spoken about the bad condition of the world; the usual idea of the occultists about it is that the worse they are, the more is probable the coming of an intervention or a new revelation from above. The ordinary mind cannot know — it has either to believe or disbelieve or wait and see.

As to whether the Divine seriously means something to happen, I believe it is intended. I know with absolute certitude that the supramental is a truth and that its advent is in the very nature of things inevitable. The question is as to the when and the how. That also is decided and predestined from somewhere above; but it is here being fought out amid a rather grim clash of conflicting forces. For in the terrestrial world the predetermined result is hidden and what we see is a whirl of possibilities and forces attempting to achieve something with the destiny of it all concealed from human eyes. This is however certain that a number of souls have been sent to see that it shall be now. That is the situation. My faith and will are for the now. I am speaking of course on the level of the human intelligence — mystically-rationally, as one might put it. To say more would be going beyond that line. You don't want me to start prophesying, I suppose? As a rationalist, you can't. 25 December 1934

*

What did you imply when you wrote to me that I was in the physical consciousness? Did you mean that I am living like an animal or vegetating like a plant and did you suggest that I should come out of the physical consciousness and live on the mental level?

I am myself living in the physical consciousness and have been for several years. At first it was a plunge into the physical — into all its obscurity and inertia, afterwards it was a station in the physical open to a higher and higher consciousness and slowly having fought out in it the struggle of transformation of the physical consciousness with a view to prepare it for the supramental change.

It is possible to go back to the mental level where one receives all the mental realisations readily enough if the mind is

open and bright. But it is not the course that the sadhana usually follows.

29 December 1934

*

When the sadhana is going on in the physical plane, is it necessary for all the sadhaks to come down into the physical consciousness, or only those who have much inertia and impurity in them, as in my case?

It is a little difficult to say whether all have to come down totally into the physical. The Mother and I had to do it because the work could not be otherwise done. We had tried to do it from above through the mind and higher vital, but it could not be because the sadhaks were not ready to follow — their lower vital and physical refused to share in what was coming down or else misused it and became full of exaggerated and violent reactions. Since then the sadhana as a whole has come down along with us into the physical consciousness. Many have followed — some unluckily without sufficient preparation in the mind and vital, some holding on to the vital and mind and living still between the three, some totally but with a prepared mind and vital. The total descent into the physical is a very troublesome affair — it means a long and trying period of difficulty, for the physical is normally obscure, inert, impervious to the Light. It is a thing of habits, very largely a slave of the subconscious and its mechanical reactions. It is less open to violent attacks than the vital except in the way of illness and some other movements, but it is dull and dreary to have these — until the Light, the Peace, the Power, the Joy can come down from above and fix themselves. We would have preferred to do all the hard work ourselves there and called others down only when an easier movement was established, but it did not prove possible.

I don't think it has anything to do with impurity. Only you came down a little too soon. At the moment it happened, the peace and silence of the Atman and the movement upward to realisation of the Self above the head in the higher consciousness were about to establish themselves. If that had been done first, it would have been less difficult. It means a great struggle

against the inertia to get these things done — but you have only to persevere and done they will surely be. Then things will be much more easy for you. 31 December 1934

1935

After November the push for descent stopped and the resistance of material Nature arose — that is always a sign of something that has still to be conquered before the descent can be complete. In the silence the necessary preparation is being done. No doubt, I expect something to be done by the 21st, but I say nothing because I do not want to raise the buzz again — it is not good for the realisation that there should be any buzz about it.

2 February 1935

*

I hear you are having a tough fight with the forces.

Very beastly — these forces. One can't advance a single step without their throwing their shells and stink-bombs. However like General Joffre, I advance. "Nous progressâmes."

1 March 1935

*

This [February] darshan day was not so marvellous as November and I thought that during the interval I had not made much progress.

The period since November has been a general period of difficulty and the resistance of the physical Nature to the change demanded of it. That is the reason why there was not the same movement as before November in you, — it is not due to any cause personal to you. 11 March 1935

*

Why so many illnesses all of a sudden? Is the supramental too near?

No, it is the material which has become too uppish.

People are saying that the supramental has come down into the physical, evidenced by greater peace and calm.

Into whose physical? I shall be very glad to know — for I myself have not got so far, otherwise I would not have a queasy eye. But if you know anybody who has got it (the Supramental in the physical, not the eye) tell me like a shot. I will acclaim him “Grand First Supramental” at once. 17 March 1935

*

It seems to take a lot more effort to free myself from sexual and other problems now than ever before. Even in the very beginning it was easier for me.

The greater difficulty is because the sadhana is now taking place directly on the physical plane, where the force of a habit or habitual movement once formed is very great. When the sadhana is taking place on the mental or vital plane, it is more easy to control or change, because the mind and vital are more plastic than the physical. But on the other hand if something is definitely gained on the physical plane, there is a more lasting and complete fulfilment than when it is on the mental or vital alone. 19 March 1935

*

What does supramentalisation mean exactly? We know by your own statements that you have achieved that. Is it then supramentalisation in parts? You want transformation of everything — mental to physical?

Achieved what? What statement? What are these wild assertions? I spoke of an overmind Force which is getting supramentalised in parts.

Does it mean that some parts of your being are supramental but that the physical is not yet supramentalised?

Overmind in process of supramentalisation, not supramental.

How can it be possible — realisation in parts — in your case?

Why not? Always the idea that there must be an instantaneous absolute miracle or else nothing! What about process in things? You are ignorant of all that is between supreme Spirit and matter, it seems. You know nothing of the occult processes of mind, life and all the rest — so you can think only of miraculous divinity or else law of matter as known to Science. But for supramental Spirit to work itself out in matter it must go through a process of transforming the immediate mental, vital and other connections, must it not — so why should not the process be in parts? Immortality also can come by parts. First the mental being becomes immortal (not shed and dissolved after death), then the vital, while the physical comes only last. That is a possible evolution, recognised by occult science.

27 March 1935

*

Above all, you have the direct Intuition to fall back upon.

I haven't — not just now at any rate. I am too busy handling the confounded difficulties of Matter. The material is subconscious and I would have to be subconscious myself to get its true intuition. I prefer to wait for the supramental.

4 April 1935

*

The way you are hammering the supramental on us in everything, every problem, every difficulty, as the solution to all riddles, panacea for all ills, one almost thinks that its descent will make all of us “big people” overnight.

My insistence on the supramental is of course apo-diaskeptic. Don't search for the word in the dictionary. I am simply imitating the doctors who when they are in a hole protect themselves with impossible Greek. Peace, supramental if possible, but peace anyhow — a peace which will become supramental if it has a chance. The atmosphere is most confoundedly disturbed, that is why I am ingeminating “peace, peace, peace!” like a summer dove or an intellectual under the rule of Hitler. Of course, I am not asking you to become supramental offhand. That is my

business, and I will do it if you fellows give me a chance, which you are not doing just now (you is not personal, but collective and indefinite) and will do less if you go blumming into buzzific intensities. (Please *don't* consult the dictionary, but look into the writings of Joyce and others.) 9 April 1935

*

It is you who will bring down the Supramental but my question was whether that descent is quite independent of the conditions of the sadhaks; whether our impurities, turmoil, crowings for “buzzific intensities”, our social talks, social dinners now and then are going to stand in the way or whether it will come anyhow.

I presume it will come anyhow, but it is badly delayed because, if I am all the time occupied with dramas, hysterics, tragi-comic correspondence (quarrels, chronicles, lamentations), how can I have time for this — the only real work, the one thing needful? It is not one or two, but twenty dramas that are going on.

11 April 1935

*

People say that it will be one century, if not more, before the supramental descends!

One day, one week, one month, one year, one decade, one century, one millennium, one light year — all is possible. Then why do people choose one century? 12 April 1935

*

It seems something very striking and luminous has happened today. Have you achieved some great victory? How many millions of hostile forces have you crushed? At evening meditation the Mother had an appearance sparkling like gold beams. On other days she looks tired, tired of the job, and would like to give it up saying, “Oh, you sadhaks, you are all hopeless!”

It would be very natural if Mother felt like that! Never has there been such an uprush of mud and brimstone as during the past

few months. However the Caravan goes on and today there was some promise of better things. 19 April 1935

*

I was surprised to hear that such a bad time was hanging over our head. But surely it means that the greater the light descending, the greater the velocity, the greater the resistance — law of physics, isn't it?

In a certain sense it is true, but it was not inevitable — if the sadhaks had been a less neurotic company, it could have been done quietly. As it is there is the Revolt of the Subconscient.

In one letter you wrote that you were able to push on; in another that the hostile forces were out of date [*p.* 639]. That was a year ago. When we read this we thought that it would be merry Christmas henceforth. But now I again feel a bit despondent because you speak of the confounded atmosphere, “the uprush of mud” and the attacks.

When I said “out of date”, I did not mean that they are not going on, but they ought not to be going on — they were only kept up by the sadhaks opening themselves to them and so retaining them in the atmosphere. I thought that was clear from what I said — but the sadhaks seem always to put a comfortable interpretation even on uncomfortable statements.

I have heard that even X had a terrible attack recently. He almost left the Asram! Y wanted to commit suicide, and Z is in revolt!

There are only 2 or 3 in the Asram to whom this word “even” would apply. I won't mention their names lest the devil should be tempted to try with them also. A solid mind, a solid nervous system and a steady psychic flame seem to be the only safeguard against “terrible attacks”.

And all this despite your continuous day and night fight!

If such things did not happen, there would be no need of a fight

day and night. You put the thing in an inverse order. (I take no responsibility for the statements you make, of course. They stand on the credit of the reporters.)

Since the descent of the Supermind will quicken up all the processes, why not take an axe of retrenchment . . .

How? I am not Hitler.

and cut off all impeding elements ruthlessly so that among a very few chosen disciples, the whole work may go on most concentratedly and rapidly? When the miracle is achieved, all of us will flock back and achieve everything as by a miracle!

Things cannot be done like that. You might just as well ask the Mother and myself to isolate ourselves in the Himalayas, get down the supramental, then toss everybody up in a blanket into the Supreme. Very neat but it is not practical. 20 April 1935

*

Since yesterday evening there has been a strong uprising of the subconscious inertia.

The subconscious difficulty is *the* difficulty now — because the whole struggle in the general sadhana is now there. It is in the subconscious, no longer in the vital or conscious physical that the resistance is all massed together. 30 April 1935

*

Between last November and February I suffered a good deal on account of my emotional and vital defect. Now the chief difficulty is in the gross physical — weakness, pain, lethargy and sicknesses.

The main difficulty in the general sadhana also is now in the physical. From November last there has been much struggle and obstruction on the most physical plane — the material consciousness. 7 May 1935

*

It seems another victory has been won by you? Some people saw a red-crimson light around the Mother a few days back. What does it signify?

??? Great Heavens! which? who? But there is nothing new in that. It was coming down before Nov. 24, but afterwards all the damned mud arose and it stopped. But there are two red-crimson lights. One is supramental Divine Love. The other is the supramental physical Force. 14 May 1935

*

It seems to me that my sadhana has come to a standstill. Is it because of the physical *tamas*?

It is probable that you have come in contact with a new layer of the physical consciousness which is more material than the rest, perhaps with the subconscious itself (it is with the subconscious that the sadhana is now concerned in the Asram itself). The first result is the purely negative or stand-still condition you describe. You have to call down the Force and the Light here, so that this too may become a part of the Divine Consciousness. If it is the subconscious, then you must be on your guard against all negative feelings such as the sense that all is gone, or the uselessness of life or the frustration or uselessness of sadhana, helplessness, incapacity etc. These things come naturally to one who does not understand. But they are false appearances. Remaining quiet and keeping the faith that there is the Divine Guidance behind, one has to do what is needed till the phase is over. 27 May 1935

*

We hear you are tremendously busy; hot speculations are in the air about near descents.

No, thank you, sir! I have had enough of them — the only result of the last descent was an upsurging of subconscious mud.

In the upshot many crashes and shipwrecks are apprehended.

What an appetite for crashes!

Please tell us something so that we may prepare ourselves in time to bear the pressure of the descent.

No pressure! I am simply busy trying to get out of the mud — in other words to see if the damned subconscious can be persuaded to subside into something less dangerous, less complexful and more manageable. 27 May 1935

*

A number of people have left recently. Is it “sifting”, or is it the “pressure”? But does the pressure work to oust people, or is it a corresponding pressure from other forces which makes them go?

The “Pressure” from above does not work to send people away — it is the pressure of the wrong forces. As for sifting, that is an idea which is very widespread; — but what is meant by sifting? Were the people who have gone out the most unfit for Yoga and are those who remain the ones fit for Yoga — is that the idea? I don’t think anybody could make the facts work out to mean that. Then what is the idea? It is true that this has been a very difficult time, but that is only because the sadhana has proceeded by a descent into a lower and lower plane where the forces of Darkness are more and more at home, and it is now in the subconscious where lies the root of all the difficulties. But on the other hand the Power descending also is greater. If many people have gone and many are having great difficulties, also many have opened to experience and progress who were stagnant for years together. There is a loss account but a gain account also. 8 June 1935

*

They say that you are now handling the lower vital and so the general trouble. True?

Subconscious vital physical — the lower vital is irrational, but not so utterly “without reason” as that. 8 July 1935

*

Some time back you wrote to me: “Never has there been such an uprush of mud and brimstone as during the past few months. However the Caravan goes on and today there was some promise of better things.”⁸ What about the uprush of mud? Has it settled down, and are people now floating in the flood of the Supramental?

It is still there, but personally I have become superior to it and am travelling forward like a flash of lightning, that is to say, zigzag, but fairly fast. Now I have got the hang of the whole hanged thing — like a very Einstein I have got the mathematical formula of the whole affair (unintelligible as in his case to anybody but myself) and am working it out figure by figure.

As for people, no! they are not floating in the supramental — some are floating in the higher mind, others rushing up into it and flopping down into the subconscious alternately, some swinging from heaven into hell and back into heaven, again back into hell ad infinitum, some are sticking fast contentedly or discontentedly in the mud, some are sitting in the mud and dreaming dreams and seeing visions, some have their legs in the mud and their head in the heavens, etc. etc., an infinity of combinations, while many are simply nowhere. But console yourself — these things, it seems, are inevitable in the process of great transformations.

16 August 1935

*

You say, “I have become superior to it and am travelling forward . . . fast,” but you have been always superior and always travelling fast all your life.

[*Underlining “always superior and always travelling fast”:*] Rubbish!

How is it going to affect us?

If my being able to solve the problem of the subconscious in the sadhana is of no importance, then of course it won't affect anybody. Otherwise it may.

⁸ See the letter of 19 April 1935 on pages 339–40. — Ed.

From the condition of the people you enumerate, there is not much hope left nor does it show that your travelling fast has speeded them up.

That is of no importance at present. To get the closed doors open is just now the thing to be done and I am doing it. Speeding people through them can come in its own time when the doors and the people are ready.

What is the mathematical formula that you have all of a sudden found out? Let us have it in a tangible form, if possible.

I told you it was unintelligible to anybody but myself, so how the deuce do you expect me to give it to you in a tangible form?

17 August 1935

*

I beg to be pardoned for one thing. Today I mentioned to somebody what you said about yourself that you are travelling fast. Has it been a great mistake to let it out? Is it absolutely private?

No — only you must not tell it to too many people. It is only because I don't want speculation or gossip about such things as that spoils the atmosphere.

20 August 1935

*

The darshan atmosphere and its influence seem to be waning away so soon! Old friends or foes are stepping in.

There is always an adverse movement after the darshan, the *revanche* of the lower forces. I had a stoppage myself, but I am off again riding on the back of my Einsteinian formula.

23 August 1935

*

Do tell me please if you are getting anything solid from this nebulous supramental. X⁹ tells me you have scaled and winged

⁹ *The recipient of the letters of July and August 1935 on pages 343–45. — Ed.*

like lightning on its pinions. Have you really? Was it something like motion on a sort of marvellous Calm which seems *like* motion through some supramental jugglery of consciousness? Some enlightenment on this bewildering problem would be highly edifying even to the mentals and humans, you may be sure. Also, Y has to be gagged somehow. He talks of nothing but the supramental. And what am I to answer?

You have created your own “bewildering problem” by supplying your own data! There is nothing nebulous about the supramental, its action depends on the utmost precision possible. As for solidity, since I have got many solid things from much lower forces, I do not see why the highest ones should only give nebulosities. But that seems the human mind’s position, only what is earthy is solid, what is high is misty and unreal — the worm is a reality, but the eagle is a vapour!

However, I have not told X that I am scaling and winging — on the contrary I am dealing with very hard practical facts. I only told him I had got the formula of solution for the difficulty that had been holding me up since last November and I am working it out.

To return to the supramental — the supramental is simply the direct self-existent Truth-Consciousness and the direct self-effective Truth-Power. There can therefore be no question of jugglery about it. What is not true is not supramental. As for calm and silence, there is no need of the supramental to get that. One can get it even on the level of Higher Mind which is the next above the human intelligence. I got these things in 1908, twenty-seven years ago and I can assure you they were solid enough and marvellous enough without any need of supramentality to make it more so! Again, a calm that “seems like motion” is a phenomenon of which I know nothing. A calm or silence which can support or produce action — that I know and that is what I have had — the proof is that out of an absolute silence of the mind I edited the *Bande Mataram* for four months and wrote 6½ volumes of the *Arya*, not to speak of all the letters and messages etc. etc. I have written since. If you say that writing is not an action or motion but only something that seems like it, a jugglery

of the consciousness, — well, still out of that calm and silence I conducted a pretty strenuous political activity and have also taken my share in keeping up an Asram which has at least an appearance to the physical senses of being solid and material! If you deny that these things are material or solid (which of course metaphysically you can), then you land yourself plump into Shankara’s illusionism, and there I will leave you.

You will say however that it is not the Supramental but at most the Overmind that helped me to these non-nebulous motions. But the Supermind is by definition a greater dynamic activity than mind or Overmind. I have said that what is not true is not supramental; I will add that what is ineffective is not supramental. And finally I will conclude by saying that I have not told X that I have taken possession of the supramental — I only admit to be very near to it or at least to its tail. But “very near” is — well, after all a relative phrase like all human phrases.

I don’t know how you are to “gag” Y. You might perhaps try my two formulas, but it is doubtful. Or perhaps you might tell him that the supramental is silence — only, it would be untrue! So I leave you in your fix — there is no other go. At least until I have firm physical hold of the tail of the supramental and can come and tell the mentals and humans — no doubt in language which will be unintelligible to them, for they have totally misunderstood even the little I have already written about it.

23 August 1935

*

Are there many sadhaks here who are under the same spell of inertia as I?

Yes — it is a natural result of the consciousness’s descent into the physical and the struggle with the subconscious resistance. Only its form varies with different people. 4 September 1935

*

How curious it is that something prevents my ascension. For everything in the lower nature can best be dealt with from above. So why does it hinder my ascent?

It happened in the same way with myself. I had to come down into the physical to deal with it instead of keeping the station always above. Of course if you can keep the station above so much the better, but as almost everybody is down in the physical, it is a little difficult perhaps. 5 September 1935

*

A suggestion has come to me that you are working directly with the supramental power. That is why the resistance is so stormy and the attacks so violent. Is this true?

I suppose so. Only that must not be accepted as a reason for passive acquiescence. 7 September 1935

*

When will our difficulties be over?

That cannot be said. The difficulties are not likely to cease until the material resistance has been entirely conquered in principle. 11 September 1935

*

X has made the following remark: “The present preparation is going on to bring down the Supermind into the physical of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.” Is it correct?

[*Sri Aurobindo bracketed “The present preparation is going on to bring down the Supermind into the physical”, and wrote:*] Not quite correct in all points. The things to be brought down were in us no doubt — but not all outwardly manifested, from the beginning. Of course X’s statement is altogether true only as far as the bracket goes. 14 September 1935

*

When you wrote “as far as the bracket goes”, did you not notice that you cut off the last part of X’s statement?

Yes, of course. What is being done is meant to prepare the manifestation of the supermind in the earth consciousness down

to Matter itself, so it can't be for the physical of myself or the Mother alone.

Most of us know that the Supermind will be brought down into "the physical". But what X means is that the present preparation is going on to bring down the Supermind not into our physical but into yours and the Mother's.

If it comes down into our physical it would mean that it has come down into matter and so there is no reason why it should not manifest in the sadhaks.

X says further: "The Supermind will not descend into any of the sadhaks. I have read in the *Arya* about the nature of the Supermind. It is so great that no human being can bear it in itself."

I do not know to what passage of the *Arya* the reference is. It is certain that the Supermind is far above the human mind and cannot be grasped by the human mind. That is the reason why this Yoga has to be undertaken—so as to make man grow out of the human mind and prepare him for supermind.

For myself all I have to say is that if you were not already supramentalised you would never have called yourself a superman.

I don't know that I have "called" myself a superman. But certainly I have risen above the ordinary human mind, otherwise I would not think of trying to bring down the supermind into the physical.

I refuse to accept what you wrote yesterday: "The things to be brought down were in us no doubt" [*p.* 348]. Those things were not only *in you* but were created *by you*. If you put it like that it can only be because of the conditions of the earth-nature. From the point of view of the supramental truth, you are the creator of the supramental plane.

That is another matter. The supermind plane is a plane above, its nature is not yet manifested in the material world, which has manifested matter, life and mind, and something of what is between mind and supermind, but not supermind itself.

15 September 1935

*

I don't think X was referring to any particular passage of the *Arya*. But he has the impression that you have said that the supermind is so far above the human mind that the mind cannot grasp it. So he says that it is impossible for the supermind to come down into a human being. Have you spoken to him about this?

No. It was the old idea that human consciousness can reach and merge in the Sun (Supermind) — by Samadhi, I suppose — but cannot redescend from there.

15 September 1935

*

You wrote a few days ago: “The difficulties are not likely to cease until they are conquered in principle” [*cf. p. 348*].¹⁰

I do not remember having written “in principle” or if so, there must have been other words also.

A week earlier you wrote: “as almost everybody is down in the physical, it is a little difficult perhaps” [*p. 348*]. But I was under the impression that some, like X, Y and Z, are always on the intuitive plane.

I am not aware that they or anybody lives constantly on the intuitive plane. All are at grips with the difficulties of the physical consciousness at present — though of course to one like Y the suggestion of revolt cannot come — at least it has never done so up to now.

16 September 1935

*

What you wrote [*on 11 September*] was: “The difficulties

¹⁰ *Quoting from memory, the correspondent omitted several words from Sri Aurobindo's reply of 11 September 1935. — Ed.*

are not likely to cease until the material resistance has been entirely conquered in principle.”

I see, but that was about another matter altogether. I meant that the difficulties in the physical (generally speaking, not in a particular case) could not be entirely absent so long as the material resistance to the supramental descent had not been overcome in principle. In principle means in essence, not in every detail of the coming development. 17 September 1935

*

It seems to me that a direct Supermind Force is working, and that the lower nature is trying to accommodate itself to it.

Direct Supermind Force is not possible at this stage. It is only when the whole being down to the physical has accepted and assimilated the higher consciousness that it can come.

I understand that the transformation of the lower nature is not possible without the Supramental Force coming down and preparing the vessel for the complete perfection.

Complete perfection is another matter. What must first be done is the fullness of the higher consciousness between the mind and supermind. 17 September 1935

*

When I wrote recently about a “direct Supermind Force”, I was thinking about something you wrote a week or two ago. When I asked whether the direct Supermind Force was acting in the Asram, you replied, if I remember correctly, “I suppose so, but it should not be an excuse for a passive acquiescence.”¹¹ Also, when I began to feel a powerful, fiery keen force, I took it to be the Supermind.

Acting in the Asram means only acting in the earth consciousness to prepare its own possibility. The forces above the human

¹¹ See the question and answer of 7 September 1935 on page 348. Quoting from memory, the correspondent made small but significant errors in his question and in Sri Aurobindo’s answer. — Ed.

mind, especially Overmind, Intuition, Illumined Mind can be very intense and fiery. They have divine powers in them.¹²

18 September 1935

*

You wrote that you are “trying to get the supermind down into the material”.¹³ We understand from this that the ascent has been done but the descent remains. It is something like our going up to you at Darshan and getting all the bliss, joy, Ananda, and then trying to bring these things down and not lose them as soon as one leaves your room. Also, you say in another letter that you have seen the supermind and are in contact with it without achieving it, while in your letter to X¹⁴ you write that you are very near the tail of the supermind. Sounds funny, no? Contact and no contact.

But supposing I reached supermind in that way, then under such conditions would it be probable that I should come down again at the risk of losing it? Do you realise that I went upstairs and have not come down again? So it was better to be in contact with it until I had made the path clear between S and M. As for the tail, can't you approach the tail of an animal without achieving the animal? I am in the physical, in matter — there is no doubt of it. If I throw a rope up from Matter, noose or lasso the Supermind and pull it down, the first part of Mr. S that will come near me is his tail dangling down as he descends, and that I can seize first and pull down the rest of him by tail-twists. As for being in contact with it, well I can be in contact with you by correspondence without actually touching you or taking hold even of your tail, can't I? So there is nothing funny about it — perfectly rational, coherent and clear.

15 September 1935

*

You know we are hanging our hopes and aspirations on the invisible tail of the supramental. But do tell us how this

¹² *The preceding replies of 4–18 September were written to one correspondent. Those of 15 and 18 September that follow were written to another. — Ed.*

¹³ *See the letter of 29 August 1935 on pages 270–72. — Ed.*

¹⁴ *See the letter of 23 August 1935 on pages 345–47. — Ed.*

omnipotent Mr. S will make us great sadhaks overnight. Is he going to burn up all our impurities by his blazing flame as Hanuman did Lanka or what?

If you expect to become supramental overnight, you are profoundly mistaken. The tail will keep the H.F. [*hostile forces*] at a respectful distance and flap at you until you consent to do things in a reasonable time instead of taking 200 centuries over each step as you seem to want to do just now. More than that I refuse to say. What is a reasonable time in the supramental view of things I leave you to discover.

Your Overmental Force seems to have utterly failed in cases of idiots like us. Where then is the chance of this Mr. S which is only one step higher?

Overmind is obliged to respect the freedom of the individual — including his freedom to be perverse, stupid, recalcitrant and slow.

Supermind is not merely a step higher than Overmind — it is beyond the line, that is a different consciousness and power beyond the mental limit.

18 September 1935

*

Someone has told me that at present the Mother and you have started to send us down into the depth of the lower nature (for the purpose of transformation). Is it a fact?

We are sending nobody nowhere. The sadhana itself has come down into the depth of the physical and subconscious to make them open to what has to come down from above. That is all.

Is it true that the nearer the supramental descent, the greater the difficulties of those in whom it is to come down?

It is true, unless they are so surrendered to the Mother, so psychic, plastic, free from ego that the difficulties are spared to them.

4 October 1935

*

Why not write something about the Supermind which these people find so difficult to understand?

What's the use? How much would anybody understand? Besides the present business is to bring down and establish the Supermind, not to explain it. If it establishes itself, it will explain itself — if it doesn't, there is no use in explaining it.

I have said some things about it in past writings, but without success in enlightening anybody. So why repeat the endeavour?

9 October 1935

*

To X's comment about "near descents", you replied: "No, thank you, sir! I have had enough of them — the only result of the last descent was an upsurging of subconscious mud."¹⁵ Are our present difficulties, attacks, etc. the result of the descent?

Not of the descent, but of the resistance to it.

What descent did you mean? The descent of what?

The general descent of the Supermind into Matter was the subject on which I was writing.

6 November 1935

*

Yesterday you said that the Supermind descent into Matter is what is being attempted. If that is so, has the Supermind already conquered the mental plane, the vital plane and the subtle physical plane?

There can be no conquest of the other planes by the supermind, but only an influence, so long as the physical is not ready. Besides the Supermind did not attempt — it is we who are attempting.

Unless the mind and the vital are perfectly prepared how is it possible to bring the Supermind down into the physical or into Matter itself?

¹⁵ See the letter of 27 May 1935 on pages 342–43. — Ed.

And how is it possible to perfect the mind and vital unless the physical is prepared — for there is such a thing as the mental and vital physical and mind and vital cannot be said to be perfectly prepared until these are ready. 7 November 1935

*

If the progress of the transformation of the body is so slow that it cannot keep pace with that of the higher parts, it seems that at any given time it would always be behind the higher parts. For example, when the higher parts are overmentalised the body would be just beginning to be intuitivised. In the same way, when the higher parts are supramentalised, the physical consciousness would be just beginning to receive the overmental influence. The body would always be behind unless one stopped at each stage in order to deal with the body at that level, and proceeded only when that work was finished.

That is hardly possible. The body consciousness is there and cannot be ignored, so that one can neither transform the higher parts completely leaving the body for later dealing nor make each stage complete in all its parts before going to the next. I tried that method but it never worked. A predominant overmentalisation of mind and vital is the first step, for instance, when overmentalising, but the body consciousness retains all the lower movements unovermentalised and until these can be pulled up to the overmental standard, there is no overmental perfection, always the body consciousness brings in flaws and limitations. To perfect the overmind one has to call in the supramental force and it is only when the overmind has been partially supramentalised that the body begins to be more and more overmental. I do not see any way of avoiding this process, though it is what makes the thing so long. 18 November 1935

*

Well sir, what about your brand new formula?¹⁶ How has it worked out? Are you still stuck up in the middle? Judging

¹⁶ See the letter of 16 August 1935 on page 344. — Ed.

from my own experience this Darshan [24 November 1935], it is hard to say.

My formula is working out rapidly, but it has nothing to do with any Darshan descent. It is my private and particular descent, if you like, and that's enough for me at present. The tail of the supermind is descending, descending, descending. It is only the tail at present, but where the tail can pass, the rest will follow.

After so much expectation everything seemed so quiet. Already it seems as if the Darshan passed away long ago!

Quiet was all I wanted — there were so many alarms and excursions. Just before that it looked as if the 24th would be a day of mud, whirlpools and tempests (in certain quarters of course). However all quieted down by magic — and everything was peaceful, peaceful.

I hope others felt the Force, the Descent. Some say there was a descent; others say no.

How do they know either of them? Personal experience? Then it was a personal descent or a personal non-descent. No General de Bono yet.

Some say there was so much resistance that Sri Aurobindo could not do much in spite of himself.

Didn't try, sir, so that's bosh. The attempt to bring a great general descent having only produced a great ascent of subconscious mud, I had given up that as I already told you. At present I am only busy with transformation of overmind (down to the subconscious) into supermind; when that is over, I shall see if I can beat everyone with the tail of the supermind or not. At present I am only trying to prevent people from making hysterical subconscious asses of themselves, so that I may not be too much disturbed in my operations — not yet with too much success.

25 November 1935

We are very happy — I believe it is due to the joy and harmony you have brought down in the atmosphere. Are the Mitra and Bhaga powers preparing to come down?

Well, it is what I am trying to bring down into the Asram atmosphere, for it is the condition for anything effective being collectively done.

25 November 1935

*

The descent of the Silence is not usually associated with sadness, though it does bring a feeling of calm detachment, unconcern and wide emptiness, but in this emptiness there is a sense of ease, freedom, peace. The absorption as if something were drawing deep from within is evidently the pull of the inmost being, the psychic. There is a psychic sadness often when this inmost soul opens and feels how far the nature and the world are from what they should be, but this is a sweet and quiet sorrow, not distressing. It must be something in the mind and vital which is not yet awake to what has happened within you and gives this colour of dissatisfied and distressed seeking.

You have certainly made a great progress since you came and there is no reason to fear any setback of the sadhana.

I don't think you need attach any value to what X professes to think about the supramental. The descent of the supramental is an inevitable necessity in the logic of things and is therefore sure. It is because people do not understand what the supermind is or realise the significance of the emergence of consciousness in a world of "inconscious" Matter that they are unable to realise this inevitability. I suppose a matter-of-fact observer if there had been one at the time of the unrelieved reign of inanimate Matter in the earth's beginning would have criticised any promise of the emergence of life in a world of dead earth and rock and mineral as an absurdity and a chimaera; so too afterwards he would have repeated his mistake and regarded the emergence of thought and reason in an animal world as an absurdity and a chimaera. It is the same now with the appearance of supermind in the stumbling mentality of this world of human consciousness and its reasoning ignorance. I do not know that the descent depends

on the readiness of the sadhaks of this Asram. It is likely that these things are determined from above rather than from below. That the descent is preparing and progressing is a fact; it is that which you feel and are justified in feeling. 1 December 1935

1936

A certain inertia, tendency to sleep, indolence, unwillingness or inability to be strong for work or spiritual effort for long at a time, is in the nature of the human physical consciousness. When one goes down into the physical for its change (that has been the general condition here for a long time), this tends to increase. Even sometimes when the pressure of the sadhana in the physical increases or when one has to go much inside, this temporarily increases — the body either needing more rest or turning the inward movement into a tendency to sleep or be at rest. You need not, however, be anxious about that. After a time this rights itself; the physical consciousness gets the true peace and calm in the cells and feels at rest even in full work or in the most concentrated condition and this tendency of inertia goes out of the nature. 9 January 1936

*

Is there any direct Supramental action upon the earth consciousness? Is that the reason why the resistance has increased? The earth consciousness seems to be too inert and obstinate. I gather that you started bringing down the Supramental into it in 1923.

Why not 1623? or since the beginning of the evolution?

7 February 1936

*

I gave 1923 as the year for the bringing down of the Supermind because I read that in 1923 you said that you were bringing it down. How can we presume that you started bringing it down much earlier unless we definitely know you have yourself spoken to this effect?

But who said that I started in 1923? The aim of bringing down the supramental was there long before. The effort to bring it down into the physical is on the contrary quite recent, during the last few years only. 8 February 1936

*

X wrote to you that he saw the Supermind descending into the earth consciousness. You wrote to him in reply that his vision and feeling were justifiable. But before the Supermind descends into the earth consciousness, do not the planes between mind and Overmind have to descend first?

They descended long ago. It does not mean that they are available to everybody or developed anywhere in their full power — only that they can be counted among the things to which one can reach by tapasya. For Supermind, it may be descending, but it may take long before it is available to the race. 7 April 1936

*

A friend wants to know many things:

(1) Descent of the Supra M. Tail — on the slightest news of which he will give a gorilla jump to Pandy to set his nerves right! Is the Tail in view?

Of course. Coming down as fast as you fellows will allow.

(2) He wants your remarks on him which will prove “precious”.

Tell him I have grown chary of remarks. Remarks frighten the Sm. T. 17 May 1936

*

I shall see what can be done [*about a promised piece of writing*]. For some time however it has been difficult for me to put myself to any sustained intellectual work, because I am strongly taken up by a push to finish inwardly in myself what remained to be done in the way of transformation of the consciousness and, though this part of it is terribly difficult and arduous, I was

making so unexpected a progress that the consciousness was unwilling to turn away from it to anything else. So much hangs on this, the decisive victory, the power to remove the difficulties of others as well as my own (those that are still there, physical and other) that I was pushing for it like Mussolini for Addis Ababa before the rains. However, any night when there is a lull, I will see. 19 May 1936

*

No, it is not with the Empyrean that I am busy, I wish it were. It is rather with the opposite end of things — in the Abyss that I have to plunge to build a bridge between the two. But that too is necessary for my work and one has to face it. 29 May 1936

*

Is it true that a greater and vaster Force descended this Darshan [15 August 1936]?

It is not a question of descent. We are nurturing the Force and it grows necessarily stronger and has more effect.

21 August 1936

*

The last Darshan was good on the whole. I am not now trying to bring anything sensational down on these days, but I am watching the progress in the action of the Force and Consciousness that are already there, the infiltration of a greater Light and Power from above, and there was a very satisfactory crossing of a difficult border which promises well for the near future. A thing has been done which had long failed to accomplish itself and which is of great importance. I don't explain now, because it forms part of an arranged whole which is explicable only when it is complete. But it gives a sort of strong practical assurance that the thing will be done. 26 August 1936

*

All in the Asram are not suffering from the sense of dullness

and want of interest, but many are because the Force that is descending is discouraging the old movements of the physical and vital mind which they call life and they are not accustomed to accept the renunciation of these things, or to admit the peace or joy of silence. 9 September 1936

*

We hear your Supermind is very near — not 50 years, we hope! Time to push us up a little, Sir, so that we may give you a proper reception, what?

That's what the Force seems to be trying to do.

Don't forget to make us feel at least the Descent. 30 years' sadhana,¹⁷ by Jove!

30 years too little or too many? What would have satisfied your rational mind — 3 years? 3 months? 3 weeks? Considering that by ordinary evolution it could not have been done even at Nature's express speed in less than 3000 years, and would ordinarily have taken anything from 30,000 to 300,000, the transit of 30 years is perhaps not too slow. 10 September 1936

*

In the evening meditation I saw a white cock in the physical and heard it crowing. I felt it as an indication of the dawn of the Supramental Descent. Was this a right feeling? What does the symbol indicate?

That is of course a symbol of triumph. It is true that a Force came down full of an intense white light which the Mother had never known to come down before and it seemed to have a supramental authority. Your feeling therefore was probably right. 10 September 1936

*

Yesterday after dusk, I felt as if some welcome revolution

¹⁷ See the letter of 4 April 1935 on page 374. — Ed.

had taken place in the Divine order of things. I attended the meditation and felt the whole place filled with calm and silence. . . . Then descended a *virāt mahāpuruṣa*, Himalayan in proportions, in the form of Sri Aurobindo, who, as if finding the earth incapable of bearing his weight, stood behind the Mother and placed his hands on her shoulders. The whole world was surcharged with silence and Ananda. The sight is beyond my powers to describe. An immeasurable force rushed into me, wave upon wave. . . . Was my experience true?

The experience you had was a true one, for something came down at that meditation which had not come down before and your experience was a translation of this descent in your consciousness. That you should have become aware of it in this way shows that your stay here has been very profitable to you and prepared your consciousness for the true realisation. The capacity for it is now there in you. Your future sadhana should be a development from the experience to the realisation.

11 September 1936

*

I hear that you are now trying more for transformation of nature than for experience.

Because without transformation of nature, the blessed experience is something like a gold crown on a pig's head — won't do. Picturesque perhaps, but —

16 September 1936

*

The awakening in the subconscious is now the great and urgent necessity and it is that for which I am pressing most.

24 September 1936

*

If the pressure here has an effect on the outside world in some way, have incidents here any connections with outside happenings? For example, I noted that on the day X and Y went from here the Italians finally conquered Abyssinia. There is a story about an occultist in Ahmedabad (in the 16th century

or so) in which it is related that he was making and unmaking mats and accordingly the wall around the city which had been built during the day fell down during the night — at the time when he was taking away the chips of the mat.

The story of the occultist contains a truth, and it would be a mistake to suppose that there is no connection between the pressure here and outside happenings. But I don't know about particular coincidences. The departure of X and Z does not seem easily relatable to the event in Abyssinia. 10 October 1936

*

I have just received your telegram communicating your disapproval of my proposed visit in November. Is it due to any wrong attitude on my part that you have not sanctioned the visit?

It is due to the fact that there have been for some time much struggle and tense conditions in the forces working in the Asram and your stay here would not be profitable to you at the moment. 3 November 1936

1937

One misgiving is pressing heavily on my soul. I sense and feel that the tone of your letters has suddenly become very grave — the owl-like severity with which you had once threatened me. I don't know what I have done to deserve such a punishment. Or is it because you are getting supramentalised day by day that you are withdrawing yourself so? There must be a reason if my "sense feel" is correct. Well, if you want to press me between two planks and pulverize me . . .

I think your sense feel has been indulging in vain imaginations, perhaps with the idea of increasing your concrete imaginative faculty and fitting you for understanding the unintelligible. Anyhow disburden your soul of the weight. I am not owed yet, and my supramentalisation is going on too slowly to justify such apprehensions. Neither am I withdrawing, rather fitting myself for a new rush in the near or far future. So cheer up and send the

Man of Sorrows with his planks to the devil. 8 January 1937

*

What have you kept in store for us, Sir? Will the sadhaks tumble in this way one by one as your Supramental comes nearer and nearer? Then with whom will you enjoy your Supramental? Night and day you are soaring and soaring.

Romantic one! I am not soaring and soaring — I am digging and digging. “Go to the ant, thou sluggard” sort of affair.

11 March 1937

*

Do you see the great Tail yet?

Tail is there — but no use without the head. 16 March 1937

1938

Since we have to lead a life in a concentrated atmosphere, all the ugly things become at once prominent, and add to it the action of the Force on the subconscious for purging of all dross.

No doubt. Also in this atmosphere pretences and social lies are difficult to maintain. But if things become prominent, it is that people may see and reject them. If instead they cling to them as their most cherished possessions, what is the use? How is the purging to be done with such an attitude? 3 April 1938

*

You need not be afraid of losing anything great by postponing your return to Pondicherry. A general descent of the kind you speak of is not in view at the moment and even if it comes, it can very easily catch you up into itself whenever you come if you are in the right openness; and if you are not, then even its descending would not be of so urgent an importance, since it would take you some time to become aware of it or receive it. So there is no reason why you should not in this matter cleave

to common sense and the sage advice of the doctors.

1 August 1938

*

By the way, you had better hurry up with your Supermind descent, Sir. Otherwise Hitler, Mussolini & Co. will gunfire it like —!

What has Supermind to do with Hitler or Hitler with Supermind? Do you expect the Supermind to aviate to Berchtesgaden? How the devil can they gunfire S; their aeroplanes can't even reach Pondicherry, much less the Supermind. The descent of S depends on S, not on Hitler or no Hitler. 16 September 1938

1944

There is another cause of the general inability to change which at present afflicts the sadhak. It is because the sadhana, as a general fact, has now and for a long time past come down to the Inconscient; the pressure, the call is to change in that part of the nature which depends directly on the Inconscient, the fixed habits, the automatic movements, the mechanical repetitions of the nature, the involuntary reactions to life, all that seems to belong to the fixed character of a man. This has to be done if there is to be any chance of a total spiritual change. The Force (generally and not individually) is working to make that possible, its pressure is for that, — for, on the other levels, the change has already been made possible (not, mind you, assured to everybody). But to open the Inconscient to light is a herculean task; change on the other levels is much easier. As yet this work has only begun and it is not surprising that there seems to be no change in things or people. It will come in time, but not in a hurry.

As for experiences, they are all right but the trouble is that they do not seem to change the nature, they only enrich the consciousness — even the realisation, on the mind level, of the Brahman seems to leave the nature almost where it was, except for a few. That is why we insist on the psychic transformation

as the first necessity — for that does change the nature — and its chief instrument is bhakti, surrender, etc. 27 April 1944

*

I have explained to you why so many people (not by any means all) are in this gloomy condition, dull and despondent. It is the *tamas*, the inertia of the Inconscient, that has got hold of them. But also it is the small physical vital which takes only an interest in the small and trivial things of the ordinary daily and social life and nothing else. When formerly the *sadhana* was going on on higher levels (mind, higher vital etc.), there was plenty of vigour and verve and interest in the details of the *Asram* work and life as well as in an inner life; the physical vital was carried in the stream. But for many this has dropped; they live in the unsatisfied vital physical and find everything desperately dull, gloomy and without interest or issue. In their inner life the *tamas* from the Inconscient has created a block or a bottleneck and they do not find any way out. If one can keep the right condition and attitude, a strong interest in work or a strong interest in *sadhana*, then this becomes quiescent. That is the malady. Its remedy is to keep the right condition and to bring gradually or, if one can, swiftly the light of the higher aspiration into this part of the being also, so that whatever the conditions of the environment, it may keep also the right poise. Then the sunlit path should be less impossible. 16 June 1944

1945

I have no intention, I can assure you, of cutting off connection in the future. What restrictions there have been, were due to unavoidable causes. My retirement itself was indispensable; otherwise I would not now be where I am, that is, personally near the goal. When the goal is reached, things will be different. But as far as you are concerned, I have given to you what I have not given to others; what you have quoted about my connection with you is perfectly true; if it were false, why should I have persistently pressed you to remain with me always? Inwardly,

I have been constant in my desire and my effort to help you, not only from time to time, but daily and always. If you had an unprecedented peace for so long a time, it was due to my persistent inner pressure; I refuse to give up all the credit to my double, Krishna.

14 August 1945

1947

The extreme acuteness of your difficulties is due to the yoga having come down against the bedrock of Inconscience which is the fundamental basis of all resistance in the individual and in the world to the victory of the Spirit and the Divine Work that is leading toward that victory. The difficulties themselves are general in the Ashram as well as in the outside world. Doubt, discouragement, diminution or loss of faith, waning of the vital enthusiasm for the ideal, perplexity and a baffling of the hope for the future are the common features of the difficulty. In the world outside there are much worse symptoms such as the general increase of cynicism, a refusal to believe in anything at all, a decrease of honesty, an immense corruption, a preoccupation with food, money, comfort, pleasure to the exclusion of higher things and a general expectation of worse and worse things awaiting the world. All that, however acute, is a temporary phenomenon for which those who know anything about the workings of the world-energy and the workings of the Spirit were prepared. I myself foresaw that this worst would come, the darkness of night before the dawn; therefore I am not discouraged. I know what is preparing behind the darkness and can see and feel the first signs of its coming. Those who seek for the Divine have to stand firm and persist in their seeking; after a time, the darkness will fade and begin to disappear and the Light will come.

9 April 1947

*

If I had been standing on the Supermind level and acting on the world by the instrumentation of Supermind, that world would have changed or would be changing much more rapidly and in

a different fashion from what is happening now. My present effort is not to stand up on a high and distant Supermind level and change the world from there, but to bring something of it down here and to stand on that and act by that, but at the present stage the progressive supramentalisation of the Overmind is the first immediate preoccupation and a second is the lightening of the heavy resistance of the Inconscient and the support it gives to human ignorance which is always the main obstacle in any attempt to change the world or even to change oneself. I have always said that the spiritual force I have been putting on human affairs such as the War is not the supramental but the overmind force, and that when it acts in the material world it is so inextricably mixed up in the tangle of the lower world forces that its results, however strong or however adequate for the immediate object, must necessarily be partial. That is why I am getting a birthday present of a free India on August 15, but complicated by its being presented in two packets as two free Indias: this is a generosity I could have done without, one free India would have been enough for me if offered as an unbroken whole.

7 July 1947

Section Three

Some Aspects of the Sadhana in Pondicherry

Inner Vicissitudes and Difficulties

Undeterred by Difficulty

I suppose all spiritual or inner experiences can be denounced as merely subjective and delusive. But to the spiritual seeker even the smallest inner experience is a thing of value. I stand for the Truth I hold in me and I would still stand for it even if it had no chance whatever of outward fulfilment in this life. I should go on with it even if all here abandoned and repudiated me and denounced it to the world as a delusion and a folly. I have never disguised from myself the difficulties of what I have undertaken, it is not difficulties or the threat of failure that can deter me.

7 April 1935

Oscillating or Up and Down Movement

My inner condition is not quite a vacancy, but rather a sort of stillness, with some mechanical movement of thought.

That is to say, the Power is still working on the physical consciousness (the mechanical mind and the subconscious) to bring stillness there. Sometimes the stillness comes but not complete, sometimes the mechanical mind reasserts itself. This oscillation usually takes place in a movement of the kind. Even if there is a sudden or rapid transforming shock or downrush, there has to be some working out of this kind afterwards — that at least has always been my experience. For most, however, there comes, first, this slow preparatory process.

29 August 1934

*

The “failure” I speak of is a failure to respond in the right way when there is a particular pressure. This is a clear sign of unfitness. The very first thing you wrote about me was that I was not prepared or ready for the sadhana.

I do not at all agree about the unfitness. When you came here first you were too raw still, but since then you have developed much and, whatever difficulties may remain, it cannot be said that the ground is not there! I do not quite understand what you mean by the pressure, but if you mean the pressure of the universal forces, sex, anger etc., it is always under that pressure that the recurrences occur. There is nothing new or peculiar in that which would justify a conclusion of individual unfitness. These things have also often a periodicity in them which helps them to recur and the up and down movement is characteristic of the course followed by the nature in the sadhana which I myself felt for many years together. It is only after one reaches a certain height that one gets rid of it or rather it changes into an oscillation the reason and utility of which one can understand. Until that happens one has to go on and the one thing one must avoid is this feeling of despondency and self-distrust. If one perseveres, the final success is sure.

24 October 1934

*

I hope that you will soon acquire the faith and patience for which you aspire and that the oscillations cease. For me the path of Yoga has always been a battle as well as a journey, a thing of ups and downs, of light followed by darkness followed by a greater light—but nobody is better pleased than myself when a disciple can arrive out of all that to the smooth and clear path which the human physical mind quite rightly yearns for.

24 December 1935

Stoppage of Sadhana

The worst thing for sadhana is to get into a morbid condition, always thinking of “lower forces, attacks etc.” If the sadhana has stopped for a time, then let it stop, remain quiet, do ordinary things, rest when rest is needed—wait till the physical consciousness is ready. My own sadhana when it was far more advanced than yours used to stop for half a year together. I did not make a fuss about it, but remained quiet till the empty or

dull period was over.

8 March 1935

*

The inertia, physical weakness, endless subconscious recurrences have covered up my sadhana again and made such a confusion that I don't know how to pull myself out of it.

By calling down the Descent, since the Ascent is impossible. At least that is how I dealt with the situation in my own case.

5 October 1935

*

I think the sadhana by itself does not refuse to go farther. It is some part of our being that determines the action of the sadhana.

If so then there is no need of any other force than the sadhak's own. My own experience is different, that the sadhana very often does refuse to go on except under certain conditions or until those conditions are realised. But yours may be different.

16 November 1935

*

No joy, no energy. Don't like to read or write — as if a dead man were walking about. Do you understand the position? Any personal experience?

I quite understand; often had it myself devastatingly. That's why I always advise people who have it to cheer up and buck up.

Since one has to pass the time somehow, what is one to do?
To bear the Cross gloomily, hoping for a resurrection?

To cheer up, buck up and the rest if you can, saying "Rome was not built in a day" — if you can't, gloom it through till the sun rises and the little birds chirp and all is well.

Looks however as if you were going through a training in vairagya. Don't much care for vairagya myself — always avoided the beastly thing, but had to go through it partly, till I

hit on samata as a better trick. But samata is difficult, vairagya is easy, only damnably gloomy and uncomfortable. 3 June 1936

*

Suddenly to drop without doing anything wrong — why such a setback?

Everybody drops. I have dropped myself thousands of times during the sadhana. What roseleaf-princess sadhaks you all are!

2 April 1937

No Resorting to Miracles

How can one train oneself to have a direct intuition?

It can be done, — but I should have to write an essay on the Intuition to make any explanation intelligible.

I thought whatever is necessary will grow of itself through growth of consciousness or something else. Must one train oneself for things one after another? Why should they not open up like your painting vision?¹

It can or it may not. Why did not everything open up in me like the painting vision and some other things? All did not. As I told you I had to plod in many things. Otherwise the affair would not have taken so many years (30). In this Yoga one can't always take a short cut in everything. I had to work on each problem and on each conscious plane to solve or to transform and in each I had to take the blessed conditions as they were and do honest work without resorting to miracles. Of course if the consciousness grows all of itself, it is all right, things will come with the growth, but not even then pell-mell in an easy gallop.

4 April 1935

*

You had Nirvana in three days. Still you say there was no spirituality in you!

¹ See the letter of 29 December 1934 on page 264. — Ed.

None, before I took up Yoga.

You said [*in the preceding letter*] that nothing comes at an “easy gallop”, that one has to plod on and develop faculties.

No, I did not say nothing comes in an easy gallop. Some things do. But one can't count on that as a rule. 5 April 1935

The Censor

I don't find it a noble voice at all, it is the voice of the usual defeatist suggester using any and every reasoning to instil weakness, flight and self-destruction. There is no strong reasoning, either, it is the usual round of sophistries always the same and repeated to every sadhak in turn. “Give up, give up, give up! run, run, run! die, die, say die, say die.” That is always the substance of it, the rest is only skin and shell to give it a good presentation. I don't reason with the creature; you may reason like Socrates and be as convincing as the Buddha, but after a little it will soon come back and sing the same song over again. It pretends to reason, but doesn't care a damn for either truth or reason — I know too well the ways of the fellow — I have paid heavily to know. In my own sadhana I have heard his chant of death a million times and several hundreds of times from this or that sadhak. So I simply refuse to listen to him and I advise you to do the same. February 1935

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There is no reason to think that the movement of strength and purity was a make-believe. No, it was a real thing. But with these strong forward movements the vital enthusiasm often comes in with a triumphant “Now it is finished”, which is not quite justified, for “Now it will soon be finished” would be nearer to it. It is at these moments that the thrice-damned Censor comes in with a jog, raises up a still shaky bit of the nature and produces a result that is out of all proportion to the size of the little bit, just to show that it is not finished. I have had any number of times that experience myself. All this comes from the complexity

and slowness of our evolutionary nature which Yoga quickens but not as a whole at a stroke. But in fact, as I said, these crises are out of all proportion to their cause in the nature. One must therefore not be discouraged, but see the exaggeration in the adversary's successful negation as well as the exaggeration in our own idea of a complete and definitive victory already there.

24 August 1936

Depression and Despair

Fits of despair and darkness are a tradition in the path of sadhana — in all Yogas oriental and occidental they seem to have been the rule. I know all about them myself — but my experience has led me to the perception that they are an unnecessary tradition and could be dispensed with if one chose. That is why whenever they come in you or others I try to lift up before them the gospel of faith. If still they come, one has only to get through them as soon as possible and get back into the sun.

9 April 1930

Exacerbation of Vital Movements

The exacerbation of certain vital movements is a perfectly well-known phenomenon in Yoga and does not mean that one has degenerated, but only that one has come to close grips instead of to a pleasant nodding acquaintance with the basic instincts of the earthly vital nature. I have had myself the experience of this rising to a height, during a certain stage of the spiritual development, of things that before hardly existed and seemed quite absent in the pre-Yogic life. These things rise up like that because they are fighting for their existence — they are not really personal to you and the vehemence of their attack is not due to any “badness” in the personal nature. I dare say seven sadhaks out of ten have a similar experience. Afterwards when they cannot effect their object, which is to drive the sadhak out of his sadhana, the whole thing sinks and there is no longer any vehement trouble. I repeat that the only serious thing about it is the depression created in you and the idea of inability in the

yoga that they take care to impress on the brain when they are at their work. If you can get rid of that, the violence of the vital attacks is only the phenomenon of a stage and does not in the end matter. 24 June 1932

*

God knows when I shall be above all this vital desire, sex, etc.
I heave a sigh thinking of such retrogression.

There is nothing peculiar about retrogression. I was also noted in my earlier time before Yoga for the rareness of anger. At a certain period of the Yoga it rose in me like a volcano, and I had to take a long time eliminating it. As for sex — well. You are always thinking that the things that are happening to you are unique and nobody else ever had such trials or downfalls or misery before. 13 November 1936

*

You surprise me very much by this volcanic anger of yours. People say that they never heard a single harsh, rude, angry word from your mouth here in Pondicherry. But how is it that this “volcano” flared up in Yoga when you were noted for its rareness in pre-Yoga? Subconscient surge?

I was speaking of a past phase. I don't know about subconscient, must have come from universal Nature. 14 November 1936

*

I heard an interesting thing, that you gave X a big shout! Ah, I wish I had heard it! But I thought you had lost your capacity to shout?

The supramental (even its tail) does not take away any capacity, but rather sublimates all and gives those that were not there. So I gave a sublimated supramental shout. I freely admit that (apart from the public platform) I have shouted only four or five times in my life. 23 July 1938

Overcoming Adverse Movements

I cannot believe that the soul in you can be broken to pieces and, so long as that is there, it is always possible to recover. It must be something in the surface consciousness that is feeling like that. But from that it is perfectly possible to arise, even though it may seem difficult or impossible at the time. Nor can I see why there should be this devastating sense of humiliation because of an adverse movement that some of the greatest Yogis have passed through, not to speak of myself in my earlier days or some of the most forceful sadhaks here. One gets caught unawares and thrown down and feels broken—but after a time the shock passes and one gets up and pursues the Way—till one reaches the “straight and thornless path where there is no more wall or obstacle”.

15 September 1934

The Descent into the Physical

What you are experiencing is the condition which comes when the whole consciousness has come down into the physical—with the object of bringing down the higher consciousness into the external nature. At first there seems to be the external nature only with a tendency to more peace and quiet than before, but no new positive experience. The first thing the physical consciousness is worked on to acquire is quiet, peace and equanimity as a basis for other things—but what comes is a tendency to neutral quiet which looks like inertia with occasional peace and silence. What is necessary is to bring down peace and silence and a strong equanimity within into the external nature and the very cells of the body. But the difficulty is that the physical nature has little tendency to aspiration, its habit is to wait for the higher forces to do their work and remain passive. I think it is this difficulty that you are feeling. I felt it myself very often and for long periods at that stage of the sadhana. A steady development of the habit of a very quiet but persistent tapasya in the form of a quiet concentration of will to progress could be very helpful at this stage.

1 July 1934

Was there in me a continuous real sadhana in 1933? Was it not rather only a mental experience without any real solidity in it? Otherwise why should such a fall have come during these two years?

There was certainly a real sadhana then and a very persistent preparation on the mental and vital planes. If there had not been, the descents of peace would not have begun. The fall came because when you descended into the physical consciousness to complete the preparation there, you became too passive, not continuing your will of tapasya, with the result that this sex force took advantage of the inertia of the physical consciousness to assert itself fully. That kind of passivity to the forces comes upon many when there is the descent into the physical; one then feels different forces playing in the consciousness without having the same power of reaction as one had in the mind and the vital — sometimes peace etc. from above, sometimes disturbing forces. I had to pass through the same stage myself and it took me 2 years at least to get out of it. To develop in the physical itself a constant will for the drawing down of the higher consciousness — especially the Peace and Force from above, is the best way out of it.

8 July 1935

Transforming *Tamas* into *Śama*

Either because the silence deepened or because the dullness increased, I felt a little sleepy after work. After waking I found my thoughts were moving about very slowly in a dull way. During meditation the mental lethargy passed away, but something of it remained in the body.

It is sometimes a little difficult to say whether it is silence or the physical's translation of the silence into a kind of inertia. I have experienced that very often in the rather difficult task of turning the *tamas* into *śama*, physical *tamas* into spiritual rest and peace which is its divine counterpart.

11 March 1934

Dizziness or Giddiness

I still feel dizzy sometimes, but I would like to do some work in the evenings.

You can try. I used to feel dizziness at one time for months together, but it never prevented me from walking or doing my work — but for that you must have a consciousness which observes the dizziness and is not lost in it.

*

Giddiness can come from many causes. I used to walk about for hours with my head going round or going up in a most exhilarating way. It gave me a perverse Ananda but did not inconvenience me otherwise. 17 March 1935

Persistence of Dreams from the Subconscious

For the last few days I am having frequent dreams of eating. Does it indicate greed for food or a need in the body, or is it a sign of coming illness as they believe in the villages?

I don't think so — it is probably old impressions from the subconscious material (not vital — therefore a memory rather than a desire) rising up in sleep. I remember a time when I was always seeing dishes of food even though I did not care a hang about food at the time. 2 April 1934

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I do not find any change in the character of my dreams as yet — I get the usual kind of dreams about home life, eating, meeting strange people, moving about, etc. Why has there been no change in this respect in spite of my three years of sadhana here?

Dreams of this kind can last for years and years after the waking consciousness has ceased to interest itself in things of that kind. The subconscious is exceedingly obstinate in the keeping of its old impressions. I find myself even recently having a dream of

revolutionary activities or another in which the Maharaja of Baroda butted in, people and things I have not even thought of passingly for the last twenty years almost. I suppose it is because the very business of the subconscious in the human psychology is to keep all the past inside it and, being without conscious mentality, it clings to its office until the light has fully come down into it, illumining even its corners and crevices.

17 December 1934

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Even though I have stopped corresponding with my relatives, I still get useless memories of them. Others who do correspond with their relatives don't seem to get disturbed by it. How solid these people seem to be.

I suppose it acts differently with different natures. Some benefit greatly by not writing; after a time they lose all contact with the old life. There are others who go on thinking and dreaming of relatives, old places and scenes, old faces etc. etc.; others dream of these things half the night although in the daytime they never think of them. I myself found myself sometimes (not so long ago) dreaming of the Gaekwar and even now sometimes Barin turns up in a most unexpected way. The impressions of the subconscious fade out very slowly. But all the same I think not renewing them does help. I am not so sure about the solidity of the persons you speak of — I know that in some cases it keeps up old attachments and prevents the physical consciousness from being free as it would have been otherwise.

14 June 1935

Sadhana and the Subconscious

I concentrate so much on reading French that no room is left for sadhana-thinking, with the result that as soon as I come out of that concentration anything can enter in my mind. Should I continue to read during work time or not?

The Mother says she has no objection to your reading French during the work time.

I should say however that if you could divide your attention

between the reading and sadhana-thought and concentration more, it might be better from the point of view you mention. I mean that there should be sufficient concentration to create in your mind a sadhana atmosphere which you can bring up to the surface as soon as you leave reading or whenever it is needed to set right an invading movement. Otherwise the subconscious forces have free play and gain power. Besides the condition becomes subconscious, i.e. inert and like a drift. At least that is what I have seen recently in my dealings with my own subconscious, so I pass on the hint to you. 27 May 1935

Unusual Experiences and States of Consciousness

Visions of Unknown People

Yes, of course, I remember about Baroda Babu — I can't say I remember him because I never saw him, at least in the flesh. What he probably means by the Supramental is the Above Mind — what I now call Illumined Mind – Intuition – Overmind. I used to make that confusion myself at the beginning.

There is not enough to go upon to say whether he really sees the Mother or an image of her is reflected in his own mind. But there is nothing extraordinary, much less impossible in seeing a person whom one has never seen — you are thinking as if the inner mind and sense, the inner vision were limited by the outer mind and sense, the outer vision, or were a mere reflection of that. There would be not much use in an inner mind and sense and vision if they were only that and nothing more. This faculty is one of the elementary powers of the inner sense and inner seeing and not only Yogins have it, but ordinary clairvoyants, crystal-gazers etc. The latter can see people they never knew, saw or heard of before, doing certain precise things in certain very precise surroundings, and every detail of the vision is confirmed afterwards by the persons seen — there are many striking and indubitable cases of that kind. The Mother is always seeing people whom she does not know; some afterwards come here or their photographs come here. I myself have these visions, only I don't usually try to remember or verify them. But there were two curious instances which were among the first of their kind and which therefore I remember. Once I was trying to see a recently elected deputy here and saw someone quite different from him, someone who afterwards came here as Governor. I ought never to have met him in the ordinary course, but a curious mistake happened and as a result I went and saw him in his bureau and at once recognised him. The other was a certain V. Ramaswamy

whom I had to meet, but I saw him not as he was when he actually came, but as he became after a year's residence in my house. He became the very image of that vision, a face close-cropped, rough, rude, energetic, the very opposite of the dreamy smooth-faced enthusiastic Vaishnava who came to me. So that was the vision of a man I had never seen, but as he was to be in the future — a prophetic vision. 24 October 1934

The Stone-Throwing Incident

These stone-throwing or stone-producing incidents and similar extraordinary occurrences which go outside the ordinary course of physical Nature happen frequently in India and are not unknown elsewhere; they are akin to what are called poltergeist phenomena in Europe. Scientists don't say or think anything of such supernormal happenings except to pooh-pooh them or to prove that they are simply the tricks of children simulating supernatural manifestations. It was only three or four stones that fell inside a room, the others were thrown from outside and in the last period banged day after day against the closed door of Bijoy Nag who was sheltering inside the servant boy who became the centre of the phenomena. As the boy got wounded by two of the last stones, we sent him away to another house with the idea that then the phenomena would cease and it so happened. As a rule these things need certain conditions to happen — e.g. a house which becomes the field of the action of these supernormal forces and a person (usually psychologically ill-developed) who is very often their victim as well as their centre. If the person is removed elsewhere, the phenomena often stop but sometimes his aura is so strong for these things that the house aura is not needed — they continue wherever he or she goes. As for the other necessary factor it is supposed to be elemental beings who are the agents. Sometimes they act on their own account, sometimes they are controlled and used by a person with occult powers. It was supposed here that some magic must have been used — such magic is common in the Tamil country and indeed in all South India. The stones were material enough, a huge heap of them

were collected and remained at the staircase bottom for two or three days, so they were not thoughts taking a brick form. It was evidently a case of materialisation probably preceded by a previous dematerialisation and “transport” — the bricks became first visible in their flight at a few feet from the place where they fell.

Scientific laws only give a schematic account of material processes of Nature — as a valid scheme they can be used for reproducing or extending at will a material process, but obviously they cannot give an account of the thing itself. Water for instance is not merely so much oxygen and hydrogen put together — the combination is simply a process or device for enabling the materialisation of a new thing called water; what that new thing really is is quite another matter. In fact there are different planes of substance, gross, subtle and more subtle going back to what is called causal (*kāraṇa*) substance. What is more gross can be reduced to the subtle state and the subtle brought into the gross state; that accounts for dematerialisation and materialisation and rematerialisation. These are occult processes and are vulgarly regarded as magic. Ordinarily the magician knows nothing of the why and wherefore of what he is doing, he has simply learned the formula or process or else controls elemental beings of the subtler states (planes or worlds) who do the thing for him. The Tibetans indulge widely in occult processes; if you see the books of Madame David-Neel who has lived in Tibet you will get an idea of their expertness in these things. But also the Tibetan Lamas know something of the laws of occult (mental and vital) energy and how it can be made to act on physical things. That is something which goes beyond mere magic. The direct power of mind-force or life-force upon matter can be extended to an almost illimitable degree — but that has nothing to do with the stone-throwing affair which is of a lower and more external order. In your (2) and (3) different operations seem to be confused together, (1) the creation of mere (subtle) images which the one who sees may mistake for real things, (2) the temporary materialisation of subtle substance into forms capable of cognition not only by the sight but by material

touch or other sense, (3) the handling of material objects by mind-energy or vital force, e.g. making a pencil move and write on paper. All these things are possible and have been done. It must be remembered that Energy is fundamentally one in all the planes, only taking more and more dense forms, so there is nothing *a priori* impossible in mind-energy or life-energy acting directly on material energy and substance; if they do they can make a material object do things or rather can do things with a material object which would be to that object in its ordinary poise or “law” unhabitual and therefore apparently impossible.

I do not see how cosmic rays can explain the origination of matter; it is like Sir Oliver Lodge’s explanation of life on earth that it comes from another planet; it only pushes the problem one step farther back — for how do the cosmic rays come into existence? But it is a fact that Agni is the basis of forms as the Sankhya pointed out long ago, i.e. the fiery principle in its three powers radiant, electric and gaseous (the Vedic trinity of Agni) is the agent in producing liquid and solid forms of what is called matter.

Obviously a layman can’t do these things, unless he has a native “psychic” (that is, occult) faculty and even then he will have to learn the law of the thing before he can use it at will. It is always possible to use spiritual force or mind-power or will-power or a certain kind of vital energy to produce effects in men, things and happenings; but knowledge and much practice is needed before this possibility ceases to be occasional and haphazard and can be used quite consciously, at will or to perfection. Even then to have “a control over the whole material world” is too big a proposition; a local and partial control is more possible or, more widely, certain kinds of control over matter. 24 October 1938

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About the occult phenomenon of the house and the stones etc.
What was it?

I gave this as one instance of actual occult experience and action in accordance with occult law and practice, showing that these

things are not imaginations or delusions or humbug, but can be true phenomena. The stone-throwing began unobtrusively with a few stones thrown at the Guest House kitchen — apparently from the terrace opposite, but there was no one there. The phenomenon began before the fall of dusk and continued at first for half an hour, but daily it increased in frequency, violence and the size of the stones and the duration of the attack till it lasted for several hours until it towards the end became in the hour or half hour before midnight a regular bombardment. It was no longer at the kitchen only, but thrown too in other places, e.g. the outer verandah. At first we took it for a human-made affair and sent for the police, but the investigation lasted only for a very short time; when one of the constables in the verandah got a stone whizzing unaccountably between his legs, the police abandoned the case in a panic. We made our own investigations, but the places whence the stones seemed to be or might be coming were void of human stone-throwers. Finally, as if to put us kindly out of doubt, the stones began falling in closed rooms; one huge one (I saw it immediately after it fell) reposed flat and comfortable on a cane table as if that was its proper place. To wind up, they became murderous. The stones had hitherto been harmless in result except for a daily battering of Bijoy's door which (in the last days) I had watched for half an hour the night before the end. They appeared in mid-air a few feet above the ground, not coming from a distance but suddenly manifesting, and from the direction from which they flew, should have been thrown close in from the compound of the Guest House or the verandah itself, but the whole place was in a clear light and I saw that there was no human being there and could not have been. At last the semi-idiot boy-servant who seemed to be the centre of the attack and was sheltered in Bijoy's room under Bijoy's protection began to be severely hit and was bleeding from a wound by stones thrown from inside the closed room. I went in at Bijoy's call and saw the last stone fall on the boy; Bijoy and he were sitting side by side and the stone was thrown at them from in front, but there was no one visible to throw it — the two were alone in the room. So unless it was Wells's invisible man — ! We had

been only watching or sometimes scouting around till then, but this was a little too much, it was becoming dangerous, and something had to be done. The Mother from her knowledge of the process of these things decided that the process here must depend on a nexus between the boy-servant and the house and if the nexus were broken, the servant and the house separated, the stone-throwing would cease. We sent him away to Hrishikesh's place and immediately the whole phenomenon ceased; not a single stone was thrown after that, peace reigned. That shows that these occult phenomena are real, have a law or process, as definite as that of any scientific operation and a knowledge of these processes can not only bring them about but put an end to or annul or dissolve them.

6 February 1943

Unconsciousness of the Body

When the consciousness merges in the Self very little sense of my body remains. I do not know what it does or holds or even where it lies.

That is usual. I was in that way unconscious of the body for many years.

15 October 1934

Thinking Outside the Body

Owing to much reading I feel a strain and dryness in the head and find it difficult to sleep. But while reading and remembering I feel as if the process goes on somewhere in the chest, not in the head, and yet the strain is felt in the head. Why is this so?

The chest action is rather curious, because it is the vital mind that is there and the Romans always spoke of the mind as if it were in the heart. But memory and reading would rather be in the physical mind. But anyhow the brain is a conveying instrument for all these activities and can feel the strain if there is any. The best relief for the brain is when the thinking takes place outside the body and above the head (or in space or at other levels but still outside the body). At any rate it was so in my case; for as

soon as that happened there was an immense relief; I have felt body strain since then but never any kind of brain-fatigue. I have heard the same thing from others.

19 December 1934

Part Three

The Leader and the Guide

Section One

The Guru and the Avatar

The Guru

The Guru and the Divine

It is not usual to use the word Guru in the supramental yoga, here everything comes from the Divine himself. But if anybody wants it he can use it for the time being. November 1929

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The relation of Guru and disciple is only one of many relations which one can have with the Divine, and in this Yoga which aims at a supramental realisation, it is not usual to give it this name; rather, the Divine is regarded as the Source, the living Sun of Light and Knowledge and Consciousness and spiritual realisation and all that one receives is felt as coming from there and the whole being remoulded by the Divine Hand. This is a greater and more intimate relation than that of the human Guru and disciple, which is more of a limited mental ideal. Nevertheless, if the mind still needs the more familiar mental conception, it can be kept so long as it is needed; only do not let the soul be bound by it and do not let it limit the inflow of other relations with the Divine and larger forms of experience.

12 December 1929

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Those who consciously carry in them ideas about becoming equal in status with the Divine or with their guru may be detained long, if not in the larger planes, at least in the Overmind, so long as the ego is there.

They cannot get beyond unless they lose it. Even in these planes it prevents them from getting the full consciousness and knowledge. For in the Overmind cosmic consciousness too ego is absent, though the true Person may be there. 27 April 1935

Surrender to the Guru

Surrender to the Divine and surrender to the Guru are said to be two different things. Is it really so?

No. In surrendering to the Guru, it is to the Divine in him that one surrenders — if it were only to a human entity it would be ineffective. But it is the consciousness of the Divine Presence that makes the Guru a real Guru, so that even if the disciple surrenders to him thinking of the human being to whom he surrenders, that Presence would still make it effective.

Does surrender to the formless Divine leave the being subject to the gunas and ego to a certain extent?

Yes — because only the static part would be free in formlessness, the active Nature would be still in the play of the gunas. Many think they are free from the ego because they get the sense of the formless Existence, they do not see that the egoistic element remains in their action just as before.

Is not surrender to the Divine in form — as the Guru — higher than the surrender to the formless Divine?

It is more dynamic.

What makes the surrender to the Guru so grand and glorious as to be called the surrender beyond all surrenders?

Because through it you surrender not only to the impersonal but to the personal, not only to the Divine in yourself but to the Divine outside you; you get a chance for the surpassing of ego not only by retreat into the Self where ego does not exist, but in the personal nature where it is the ruler. It is the sign of the will to complete surrender to the total Divine, *samagramāṁ māṁ, mānuṣīṁ tanuṁ āśritam*. Of course it must be a genuine spiritual surrender for all this to be true.

If absolute surrender to the Guru leaves one helpless like a puppet in the hands of forces — what good is it? I think what is harmful is to surrender only to the Divine in the Guru and not to the Divine in one's Self. It is this one-sided surrender which is harmful.

What is harmful is to surrender to something in yourself which flatters your ego and which you call the Divine. It is that which makes you a puppet in the hands of Forces. 20 November 1933

Need of the Guru's Help

An old man of sixty began practising Yoga by reading your books. Eventually he developed signs of insanity. His son describes his condition and asks for advice. I am sending his letter.

As for the letter, I suppose you will have to tell the writer that his father committed a mistake when he took up Yoga without a Guru — for the mental idea about a Guru cannot take the place of the actual living influence. This Yoga especially, as I have written in my books, needs the help of the Guru and cannot be done without it. The condition into which his father got was a breakdown, not a state of siddhi. He passed out of the normal mental consciousness into a contact with some intermediate zone of consciousness (not the spiritual) where one can be subjected to all sorts of voices, suggestions, ideas, so-called aspirations which are not genuine. I have warned against the dangers of this intermediate zone in one of my books. The sadhak can avoid entering into this zone — if he enters, he has to look with indifference on all these things and observe them without lending any credence, by so doing he can safely pass into the true spiritual light. If he takes them all as true or real without discrimination, he is likely to land himself in a great mental confusion and, if there is in addition a lesion or weakness of the brain — the latter is quite possible in one who has been subject to apoplexy — it may have serious consequences and even lead to a disturbance of the reason. If there is ambition, or other motive of the kind

mixed up in the spiritual seeking, it may lead to a fall in the Yoga and the growth of an exaggerated egoism or megalomania — of this there are several symptoms in the utterances of his father during the crisis. In fact one cannot or ought not to plunge into the experiences of this sadhana without a fairly long period of preparation and purification (unless one has already a great spiritual strength and elevation). Sri Aurobindo himself does not care to accept many into his path and rejects many more than he accepts. It would be well if he can get his father to pursue the sadhana no farther — for what he is doing is not really Sri Aurobindo's Yoga but something he has constructed in his own mind and once there has been an upset of this kind the wisest course is discontinuance.

21 April 1937

A Reluctant Guru

I have prayed a lot today. Some comfort to dwell on that, though Krishnaprem advocates the Upanishadic attitude — “Awake! Arise!” — and not to trust too much to Divine Grace.

Krishnaprem's objection to Grace would be valid if the religionists mattered, but in spiritual things they don't. Their action naturally is to make a formula and dry shell of everything, not Grace alone. Even “Awake, Arise” leads to the swelled head or the formula — can't be avoided when Mr. Everyman deals with things divine. I had the same kind of violent objection to Gurugiri, but you see I was obliged by the irony of things or rather by the inexorable truth behind them to become a Guru and preach the Guruvada. Such is Fate.

16 January 1936

The Question of Avatarhood

The Guru and the Avatar

About the question of the Avatar, I do not think it is useful to press in the matter. It has become very much the tendency, especially in Bengal, to regard the Guru as the Avatar. To every disciple the Guru is the Divine, but in a special sense — for the Guru is supposed to live in the divine consciousness, to have attained union and when he gives to the disciple, it is the Divine that gives and what he gives is the consciousness of the Divine who is within the Guru. But that and Avatarhood are two different things. It is mostly in East Bengal recently that those have come who were acclaimed as Avatars; those who came had each of them the idea of a work to be done for the world and the sense of a Divine Power working through them, which shows that there was a pressure for manifestation there and something came in each case, for something of the Divine Power always comes when it is called, but it does not look as if there was anywhere the complete descent. It is this that may have created the idea that the Avatar was born there. It has always been said of the Advent that is to come now that there would be many in whom it would seem that it had come, but the real Avatar would work behind a veil until the destined hour came.

I do not gather from what is quoted as said by your Guru that he claimed to be the Avatar. It seems to me that he claimed to be a Power preparing the way for the work of the Divine Mother and even to indicate that all that he meant would be manifested not only by his own followers but by other groups (সম্প্রদায়), consisting evidently of those who had not had him for Guru but had some other Head and Teacher. This is also confirmed by the saying that some other one than his disciples might be the means of his প্রকাশ — that is to say, would be the means of carrying on his work and aiding the manifestation of

the Mother. If this meant proclaiming him as the Avatar, I do not see how it can agree with the other saying that after his leaving his body the Avatar would come to the Ashram he had created.

I do not quite know what is meant by *ayoni-sambhava*. An incarnation is always through a human mother, though there have been one or two cases in which a virgin birth has been proclaimed (Christ, Buddha). The only other meaning — unless we suppose an unprecedented miracle — might be a descent such as sometimes happens, the Godhead manifesting in somebody who at birth was a Vibhuti, not at once the full incarnation. But in the absence of a clear statement from your Guru himself, these are only speculations.

I have written this much as an answer to your question, but I doubt whether it is necessary or advisable to write anything of it to your friends. They have their own feeling about the matter; it seems to me better not to challenge or disturb it.

25 August 1935

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Elsewhere people try to find out various qualities in their Guru to prove him an Avatar; here some try to find out reasons to disprove even the possibility.

It is a modern Ashram, that's why!

14 November 1935

The Avatar and Human Ideas of Space

How can the Divine, who is the All or Omnipresent, containing the Infinite, incarnate in the small space of a human body? I believe it is because this seems impossible to the mind that the Arya Samajists do not accept the possibility of incarnation.

The objection is founded on human three-dimensional ideas of Space and division in spaces, which are again founded upon the limited nature of the human senses. To some beings space is one-dimensional, to others two-dimensional, to others three-dimensional — but there are other dimensions also. It is well recognised in metaphysics that the Infinite can be in a point and not only in extension of space — just as there is an eternity of

extension in Time but also an Eternity which is independent of Time so that it can be felt in the moment — one has not to think of millions and millions of years in order to realise it. So too the rigid distinction of One against Many, a One that cannot be many or of an All that is made up by addition and not self-existent are crude mental notions of the outer finite mind that cannot be applied to the Infinite. If the All were of this material and unspiritual character, tied down to a primary arithmetic and geometry, the realisation of the universe in oneself, of the all in each and each in all, of the universe in the Bindu would be impossible. Your Arya Samajists are evidently innocent of the elements of metaphysical thinking or they would not make such objections.

1 April 1936

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When the Divine descends here as an incarnation, does not that very act mould his infinity into a limited finite? How then does he still continue to rule over the universe?

Do you imagine that the Divine is at any time not everywhere in the universe or beyond it? or that he is living at one point in space and governing the rest from it, as Mussolini governs the Italian Empire from Rome?

11 May 1937

The Avatar and the Vibhuti

Is it true that the Avatar is the full manifestation of the Divine Vibhuti?

If you consider it from the earth's point of view. But it may be truer to say that the Avatar holds himself back and manifests as a Vibhuti in many lives till the time comes for his manifesting as the Avatar.

27 September 1933

The Avatar and Human Birth

Does an Avatar create a new mind, life and body from the cosmos for himself, or take hold of some liberated human being and use his outer personality for his manifestation?

That would be a possession, not an Avatar. An Avatar is supposed to be from birth. Each soul at its birth takes from the cosmic mind, life and matter to shape a new external personality for himself. What prevents the Divine from doing the same? What is continued from birth to birth is the inner being.

18 December 1935

The Avatar and the Earth Consciousness

We are a little puzzled when you give your own example to prove your arguments and defend your views, because that really proves nothing. I need not explain why: what Avatars can achieve is not possible for ordinary mortals like us. So if you had a sudden “opening” to the appreciation of painting, or if you freed your mind from all thoughts in three days, or transformed your nature, it is a very poor consolation for us. Then again, when you state that you developed something that was not originally there in your nature, can it not be said that it was already there in your *divya amśa*?

I do not know what the devil you mean. My sadhana is not a freak or a monstrosity or a miracle done outside the laws of Nature and the conditions of life and consciousness on earth. If I could do these things or if they could happen in my Yoga, it means that they can be done and that therefore these developments and transformations are possible in the terrestrial consciousness.

There are many who admit that faculties which are latent can be developed, but they maintain that things which are not there in latency cannot be made manifest. My belief is that even that could be done. Still, I don't think that I could be turned into, say, an artist or a musician!

How do you know that you can't?

As for your statement, “All is possible” — e.g. “an ass may be changed into an elephant, but it is not done”¹ — people say it is a pointless statement.

¹ See the letter of 7 February 1935 on page 488. — Ed.

[Underlining “but it is not done”:] You had said it can’t be done or somebody had said it.

About your changing “cowards into heroes” [p. 488], they put forward the same latency theory.

How do they prove their theory — when they don’t know what is or what is not latent? In such conditions the theory can neither be proved nor refuted. To say “O, it was latent” when a thing apparently impossible is done, is a mere *post factum* explanation which amounts to an evasion of the difficulty.

They state very strongly that a paid Ashram worker, like Muthu, for example, cannot be changed into a Ramakrishna . . .

Well, Ramakrishna himself was an ignorant, unlettered rustic according to the story.

or into a Yogi for that matter, even by the Divine.

If he were, they would say “O, it was latent in him.”

One can’t say categorically and absolutely that the Divine is omnipotent, because there are different planes from which he works. It is when he acts from the supramental level that his Power is omnipotent.

If the Divine were not in essence omnipotent, he could not be omnipotent anywhere — whether in the supramental or anywhere else. Because he chooses to limit or determine his action by conditions, it does not make him less omnipotent. His self-limitation is itself an act of omnipotence.

The fact that X was not changed by the mental-spiritual force put on him proves that.

It does not prove it for a moment. It simply proves that the omnipotent unconditioned supramental force was not put out there — any more than it was when Christ was put on the cross

or when after healing thousands he failed to heal in a certain district (I forget the name) because people had no faith (faith being one of the conditions imposed on his work) or when Krishna after fighting eighteen battles with Jarasandha failed to prevail against him and had to run away from Mathura.

Why the immortal Hell should the Divine be tied down to succeed in all his operations? What if failure suits him better and serves better the ultimate purpose? What if the gentleman in question had to be given his chance as Duryodhan was given his chance when Krishna went to him as ambassador in a last effort to avoid the massacre of Kurukshetra? What rigid primitive notions are these about the Divine! And what about my explanation of how the Divine acts through the Avatar?² It seems all to have gone into water.

By the way about the ass becoming an elephant — what I meant to say was that the only reason why it can't be done is because there is no recognizable process for it. But if a process can be discovered whether by a scientist (let us say transformation or redistribution of the said ass's atoms or molecules — or what not) or by an occultist or by a Yogi, then there is no reason why it should not be done. In other words certain conditions have been established for the game and so long as those conditions remain unchanged certain things are not done — so we say they are impossible, can't be done. If the conditions are changed, then the same things are done or at least become licit — allowable, legal, according to the so-called laws of Nature, — and then we say they can be done. The Divine also acts according to the conditions of the game. He may change them, but he has to change them first, not proceed while maintaining the conditions to act by a series of miracles.

9 February 1935

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You say that since “these things” have been possible in you, they are possible in the terrestrial consciousness [p. 402]. Quite true; but have they been done?

² The “explanation” Sri Aurobindo refers to here is probably the one presented in *Essays on the Gita, First Series, Chapters XV to XVII.* — Ed.

The question was not whether it had been done but whether it could be done.

Has any sweeper or street-beggar been changed into a Buddha or a Chaitanya?

The street-beggar is a side issue. The question was whether new faculties not at all manifested in the personality up to now in this life could appear, even suddenly appear, by force of Yoga. I say they can and I gave my own case as proof.³ I could have given others also. The question involved is also this — is a man bound to the character and qualities he has come with into this life — can he not become a new man by Yoga? That also I have proved in my sadhana, it can be done. When you say that I could do this only in my case because I am an Avatar (!) and it is impossible in any other case, you reduce my sadhana to an absurdity and Avatarhood also to an absurdity. For my Yoga is done not for myself who need nothing and do not need salvation or anything else, but precisely for the earth consciousness, to open a way to the earth consciousness to change. Has the Divine need to come down to prove that he can do this or that or has he any personal need of doing it? Your argument proves that I am not an Avatar but only a big human person. It may well be so as a matter of fact, but you start your argument from the other basis. Besides, even if I am only a big human person, what I achieve shows that that achievement is possible for humanity. Whether any street-beggar can do it or has done it, is a side issue. It is sufficient if others who have not the economic misfortune of being street-beggars can do it.

We see in the whole history of humanity only one Christ, one Buddha, one Krishna, one Sri Aurobindo and one Mother. Has there been any breaking of this rule? Since it has not been done, it can't be done.

What a wonderful argument! Since it has not been done, it

³ See the letter of 7 February 1935 on page 488. — Ed.

cannot be done! At that rate the whole history of the earth must have stopped long before the protoplasm. When it was a mass of gases, no life had been born, ergo life could not be born — when only life was there, mind was not born, so mind could not be born. Since mind is there but nothing beyond, as there is no supermind manifested in anybody, so supermind can never be born. Sobhanallah! Glory, glory, glory to the human reason!! Luckily the Divine or the Cosmic Spirit or Nature or whoever is there cares a damn for the human reason. He or she or it does what he or she or it has to do, whether it can or cannot be done.

Can a Muthu or a sadhak ever be a Sri Aurobindo, even if he is supramentalised?

What need has he to be a Sri Aurobindo? He can be a supramentalised Muthu!

If anybody comes and says “Why not?” I would answer, “You had better rub some Madhyam Narayan oil⁴ on your head.”

I have no objection to that. Plenty of the middle Narayan is needed in this Asram. This part of your argument is perfectly correct — but it is also perfectly irrelevant.

You are looked on by us here, and by many outside, as a full manifestation of the Divine. The sadhaks here at best are misty sparks of the Divine.

The psychic being is more than a spark at this stage of its evolution. It is a flame. Even if the flame is covered by mist or smoke, the mist or smoke can be dissipated. To do that and to open to the higher consciousness is what is wanted, not to become a Sri Aurobindo or equal to the Mother.

So to say that parts can be equal to the whole is geometrically and logically impossible.

⁴ *An Ayurvedic oil used in the treatment of insanity. The literal meaning of madhyam is “middle”. — Ed.*

But if we are the Divine, what is the harm of evolving into a portion of the Divine, living in the divine Consciousness even if in a lesser degree? No middle Narayan will then be needed for anybody's head.

Once when X had said she wanted to be like the Mother you thundered saying, "How can it be? That is an ambition!" Do you say now it's possible?

Certainly not, it is not intended and I never said that she could as a practical matter.

All this is really too much for me. Please give a more direct answer — is it possible or not? Can a Muthu be changed into a being as great as an Avatar? If he can be, I have nothing further to say; if not, there is a limit to the omnipotence of the Divine.

Not at all. You are always making the same elementary baby stumble. It is not because the Divine cannot manifest his greatness anywhere, but because it is not in the conditions of the game, because he has chosen to manifest his centrality in a particular line that it is practically impossible.

Next point: it is hoped that the sadhaks will be supramentalised. Since it is a state surpassing the Overmind, am I to deduce that the sadhaks would be greater than Krishna, who was the Avatar of the Overmind level? Logically it follows, but looking at others and at myself, I wonder if such a theory will be practically realised.

What is all this obsession of greater or less? In our Yoga we do not strive after greatness.

Past history does not seem to prove it. In Krishna's time no disciple of his was a greater spiritual figure than the preceding Avatar Rama, even though Krishna was an Avatar of a higher plane.

It is not a question of Sri Krishna's disciples, but of the earth

consciousness — Rama was a mental man, there is no touch of the overmind consciousness (direct) in anything he said or did, but what he did was done with the greatness of the Avatar. But there have since been men who did live in touch with the planes above mind — higher mind, illumined mind, Intuition. There is no question of asking whether they were “greater” than Rama; they might have been less “great”, but they were able to live from a new plane of consciousness. And Krishna’s opening the overmind certainly made it possible for the attempt at bringing Supermind to the earth to be made.

I would not mind your fury in revenge if only you would crush me with a convincing assault. I hoped to close the chapter on “Divine Omnipotence” with this last letter, but you keep me hoping with that promise of yours to write at length some day.

“Peace, peace, O fiery furious spirit! calm thyself and be at rest.” Your fury or furiousness is wasted because your point is perfectly irrelevant to the central question on which all this breath (or rather ink) is being spent. Muthu and the sadhaks who want to equal or distance or replace the Mother and myself and so need very badly Middle Narayan oil — there have been several — have appeared only as meaningless foam and froth on the excited crest of the dispute. I fear you have not grasped the internalities and modalities and causalities of my high and subtle reasoning. It is not surprising as you are down down in the troughs of the rigidly logically illogical human reason while I am floating on the heights amid the infinite plasticities of the overmind and the lightninglike subtleties and swiftnesses of the intuition. There! what do you think of that? However!!

More seriously, I have not stated that any Muthu has equalled Ramakrishna and I quite admit that Muthu here *in ipsa persona* has no chance of performing that feat. I have not said that anyone here can be Sri Aurobindo or the Mother — I have explained what I meant when I objected to your explaining away my sadhana as a perfectly useless piece of Avatarian fireworks. So in my comment on the Muthu logic, I simply pointed out that it was bad logic — that someone

quite ignorant and low in the social scale can manifest a great spirituality and even a great spiritual knowledge. I hope you are not bourgeois enough to deny that or to contend that the Divine or the spiritual can only manifest in somebody who has some money in his pockets or some University education in his pate? For the rest as I myself have been pointing out all the time there is a difference between essential truth and conditional truth, *paramārtha* and *vyāvahārika*, the latter being relative and conditional and mutable. In mathematics one works out problems in infinite and in unreal numbers which exist nowhere on earth and yet are extremely important and can help scientific reasoning and scientific discovery and achievement. The question of a Muthu becoming a Ramakrishna, i.e. a great spiritual man may look to you like being an exercise in unreal numbers or magnitudes because it exceeds the actual observable facts in the case of *this* Muthu who very evidently is not going to be a great spiritual man — but we were arguing the matter of essential principle. I was pointing out that in the essentiality all things are possible — so you ought not to say the Divine *can* not do this or that. But at the same time I was pointing out too that the Divine is not bound to show his omnipotence without rhyme or reason when he is working by his own will under conditions. For by arguing that the Divine cannot, that he is impotent, that he cannot do what has never yet been done etc., you deny the possibility of changing conditions, of evolution, of the realisation of the unrealised, of the action of the Divine Power, of Divine Grace, and reduce all to a matter of rigid and unalterable *status quo*, which is an insolent defiance to both fact and reason (!) and suprarreason. See now?

About myself and the Mother, — there are people who say, “If the supramental is to come down, it can come down in everyone, why then in them first? Why should we not get it before they do? Why through them, not direct?” It sounds very rational, very logical, very arguable. The difficulty is that this reasoning ignores the conditions, foolishly assumes that one can get the supramental down into oneself without having the least knowledge of what the supramental is and so supposes an

upside-down miracle — everybody who tries it is bound to land himself in a most horrible cropper — as all have done hitherto who tried it. It is like thinking one need not follow the Guide, but can reach up to the top of the mountain from the narrow path one is following on the edge of a precipice by simply leaping into the air. The result is inevitable.

About greater and less, one point. Is Captain John Higgins of S.S. Mauretania a greater man than Christopher Columbus because he can reach America without trouble in a few days? Is a university graduate in philosophy greater than Plato because he can reason about problems and systems which had never even occurred to Plato? No, only humanity has acquired greater scientific power which any good navigator can use or a wider intellectual knowledge which anyone with a philosophic training can use. You will say greater scientific power and wider knowledge is not a change of consciousness. Very well, but there are Rama and Ramakrishna. Rama spoke always from the thinking intelligence, the common property of developed men; Ramakrishna spoke constantly from a swift and luminous spiritual intuition. Can you tell me which is the greater? the Avatar recognised by all India? or the saint and Yogi recognised as an Avatar only by his disciples and some others who follow them?

10 February 1935

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I did not mean that anyone here could replace or equal myself and the Mother, much less the persons you name — or the actual Muthu equal the actual Ramakrishna. But certainly it is possible for X and Y and Z (I won't repeat the names) to change, to throw off their present perversities or limitations and come nearer to us than they are now — if they have the sincere will and make the endeavour. I have explained my meaning to X⁵ — so I do not repeat it here. Of course in my writing to X, there is a certain note of persiflage and humorous insistence of which you

⁵ *The disciple to whom the letters of 9 and 10 February 1935 on pages 402–10 were written. — Ed.*

must take account if you want to get the exact measure of my reasoning and its significance. 10 February 1935

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I would like to know something about my “bad logic” [p. 408] before I write anything further to you.

Helps to finding out your bad logic. I give instances expressed or implied in your reasonings.

Bad logic No 1. Because things have not been, therefore they can never be.

” ” ” 2. Because Sri Aurobindo is an Avatar, his sadhana can have no meaning for humanity.

” ” ” 3. What happens in Sri Aurobindo’s sadhana cannot happen in anybody else’s sadhana (i.e. neither descent, nor realisation, nor transformation, nor any intuitions, nor budding of new powers or faculties) — because Sri Aurobindo is an Avatar and the sadhaks are not.

” ” ” 4. A street-beggar cannot have any spirituality or at least not so much as, let us say, a University graduate — because, well, one does not know why the hell not.

” ” ” 5. (and last because of want of space) Because I [*the recipient*] am a doctor, I can’t see a joke when it is there.

11 February 1935

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About your personal example. You speak of the evolution theory to prove that “it can be done”, though the domain I touched upon was only the spiritual. If the scientists say that man has not been able to create living things up to now, and therefore he will not be able to do so in the future — that it “can’t be done”, what will be your answer?

I have brought in the evolution theory or rather fact of evolution, to disprove your argument that because a thing has not been done, it is thereby proved that it could not be done. I don’t understand your argument. If a scientist says that, he is using bad logic. I have never said it can’t be done. I dare say some day

in the right conditions the creation of life will become possible.

And if similarly I say that a Tom, Dick or Harry cannot be a Ram, Krishna or Sri Aurobindo, what reply will you give? My point is that Avatars are born not made.

They may not be Ram or Krishna or Sri Aurobindo, but they may become a spiritualised super-Tom, super-Dick or super-Harry. I have answered about the Avatar.

I have never said that you are only a big human person. On the contrary, you are not, and hence nobody can be like you. Nevertheless, I don't quite follow what you mean when you state that whatever you achieve is possible for humanity to achieve, your attainments opening the way for others to follow.

It is singular that you cannot understand such a simple thing. I had no urge towards spirituality in me, I developed spirituality. I was incapable of understanding metaphysics, I developed into a philosopher. I had no eye for painting—I developed it by Yoga. I transformed my nature from what it was to what it was not. I did it by a special manner, not by a miracle and I did it to show what could be done and how it could be done. I did not do it out of any personal necessity of my own or by a miracle without any process. I say that if it is not so, then my Yoga is useless and my life was a mistake—a mere absurd freak of Nature without meaning or consequence. You all seem to think it a great compliment to me to say that what I have done has no validity for anybody except myself—it is the most damaging criticism on my work that could be made.

If a man has transformed his nature, he couldn't have done it all by himself, as you have done.

I also did not do it all by myself, if you mean by myself the Aurobindo that was. He did it by the help of Krishna and the Divine Shakti. I had help from human sources also.

I should say that Avatars are like well-fitted, well-equipped Rolls-Royce machines.

All sufficient to themselves — perfect and complete from the beginning, hey? Just roll, royce and ripple!

They do have plenty of difficulties on their journey, but just because they are like Rolls-Royces they can surmount them — whilst the rest of humanity are either like loose and disjointed machines or else wagons to be dragged along by Avatars and great spiritual personages.

Great Scott! What a penal servitude for the great personages and the Avatars! And where are they leading them? All that rubbish into Paradise? How is that any more possible than creating a capacity where there was none? If the disjointed machines cannot be jointed, isn't it more economical to leave them where they are, in the lumber-shed?

I don't know about Avatars. Practically what I know is that I had not all the powers necessary when I started, I had to develop them by yoga, at least many of them which were not in existence in me when I began, and those which were I had to train to a higher degree. My own idea of the matter is that the Avatar's life and action are not miracles and if they were, his existence would be perfectly useless, a mere superfluous freak of Nature. He accepts the terrestrial conditions, he uses means, he shows the way to humanity as well as helps it. Otherwise what is the use of him and why is he here?

I was not always in the overmind, if you please. I had to climb there from the mental and vital level.

Really, Sir, you have put into my mouth what I never mentioned or even intended to.

You may not have mentioned it but it was implied in your logic without your knowing that it was implied. Logic has its own consequences which are not apparent to the logiciser. It is like a move in chess by which you intend to overcome the opponent but it leads, logically, to consequences which you didn't

intend and ends in your own checkmate. You can't invalidate the consequences by saying that you didn't intend them.

Let me remind you of what I wrote about the Avatar. There are two sides of the phenomenon of Avatarhood, the Divine Consciousness behind and the instrumental personality. The Divine Consciousness is omnipotent but it has put forth the instrumental personality in Nature, under the conditions of Nature, and it uses it according to the rules of the game — though also sometimes to change the rules of the game. If Avatarhood is only a flashing miracle, then I have no use for it. If it is a coherent part of the arrangement of the omnipotent Divine in Nature, then I can understand and accept it.

As for the Muthu affair, that was only a joke as ought to have been clear to you at once. Nobody has any intention of making Muthu a saint or an Avatar. But that is only because the Divine is not going to play the fool, not because he is impotent. Muthu's only business in life is to prepare himself for something better hereafter and exhaust some of his lowest tendencies in the meantime. That is not the question — the question is whether as a general rule rigid and unalterable man is bound down to his outward nature as it appears to be built at the moment and the Divine cannot or will not under any circumstances change it or develop something new in it, something not yet "evident", not yet manifested, or is there a chance for human beings becoming more like the Divine, *sādṛśyamukti*, *sādharmyam āgatāḥ*? If not, there is no use in anybody doing this Yoga; let the Krishnas and Ramakrishnas rocket about gloriously and uselessly in the empty Inane and the rest wriggle about for ever in the clutch of the eternal Devil. For that is the logical conclusion of the whole matter.

13 February 1935

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I am afraid you are making me admit something I never wrote, neither implied nor intended in what I wrote. However, I shall consult your *Essays on the Gita* to see what your Avatar says about the Avatar.

Can you not understand that it was the natural logical result of the statements made on either side about the unbridgeable distance between the Man Divine and the human being moving in the darkness towards the Divine? If you admit the utility of my sadhana, the controversy ceases. But so long as you declare that what I have done in my sadhana has no connection with what can be done, I shall go on beating you. (What the Avatar says in the *Essays* is only an explanation of the Gita; it is not a full statement of the issue. But still if you read three or four chapters there, you will get some idea of the general principles.) For the rest I propose that all discussion be postponed till after the 21st (not immediately after). This will give time for you to clear your ideas and for me to pursue my “Avataric” sadhana (not for myself, but for this confounded and too confounded earth race).

14 February 1935

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You say, if I understand you right, that since the inner being is open to the universal, anything can manifest through it even if it is not there latent; you further add that it is impossible to say what will or will not manifest once the universal acts upon it. But is this impossible for Yogis also? For example, can't you say whether a man has a capacity for Yoga or for something else? Do you simply gamble when you accept someone?

I have never said anything about how I choose people. I was answering the argument that what has not been or is not in manifestation, cannot be. That was very clearly put in the discussion — that the Divine cannot manifest what is not yet there — even He is impotent to do that. He can only manifest what is either already manifest or else latent in the field (person) he is working on. I say no — he can bring in new things. He can bring it in from the universal or he can bring it down from the transcendent. For in the Divine cosmic and transcendent all things are. Whether He will do so or not in a particular case is quite another matter. My argument was directed towards dissipating this “can't, can't” with which people try to stop all possibility of progress.

15 February 1935

The Avatar and Terrestrial Conditions

I am sending with this note a typewritten MS on the Avatar.
Please write an exhaustive reply, but in ink.

On the back the rational and logical result of your arguments. I shall write certain irrational answers on your MS — in ink.⁶

You have won all along the line. Who could resist such a lava-torrent of logic? Slightly mixed, but still! You have convinced me (1st) that there never was nor could be an Avatar, (2) that all the so-called Avatars were chimerical fools and failures, (3) that there is no Divinity or divine element in man, (4) that I have never had any true difficulties or struggles, and that if I had any, it was all my fun (as K. S. said of my new metres that they were only Mr. Ghose's fun), (5) that if ever there was or will be a real Avatar, I am not he — but that I knew before, (6) that all I have done or the Mother has done is a mere sham — sufferings, struggles, conquests, defeats, the Way found, the Way followed, the call to others to follow, everything — it was all make-believe since I was the Divine and nothing could touch me and none follow me. That is truly a discovery, a downright knock-out which leaves me convinced, convicted, amazed, gasping. I won't go on, there is no space; but there are a score of other luminous convictions that your logic has forced on me. But what to do next? You have put me in a terrible fix and I see no way out of it. For if the Way, the Yoga is merely sham, fun and chimera — then? 6 March 1935

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When did I say that you are not an Avatar? On the contrary I wrote to you that you are an Avatar.

⁶ Sri Aurobindo wrote these two sentences on the front side of a small sheet of paper sent by the correspondent, above the correspondent's comments. On the back of the same sheet Sri Aurobindo wrote the paragraph that follows. This paragraph is a brief reply to questions posed by the correspondent in his "typewritten MS". Sri Aurobindo returned the small sheet containing his paragraph-long reply to the correspondent on 6 March 1935. This became the basis of the questions and answers of 7 March that are reproduced on pages 416–19. Sri Aurobindo also wrote long and detailed replies to the questions on the "typewritten MS"; they are reproduced on pages 420–29. — Ed.

You don't say, but if your theory or description of the Avatar is right, I am not one. I am proceeding on the necessary consequences of your logic.

I did say that the difficulties and struggles of the Avatar are all shams, put on, so to say.

If they are shams, they have no value for others or for any true effect. If they have no value for others or for any true effect, they are perfectly irrational and unreal and meaningless. The Divine does not need to suffer or struggle for himself; if he takes on these things it is in order to bear the world-burden and help the world and men; and if these sufferings and struggles are to be of any help, they must be real. A sham or falsehood cannot help. They must be as real as the struggles and sufferings of men themselves — the Divine bears them and at the same time shows the way out of them. Otherwise his assumption of human nature has no meaning and no utility and no value. It is strange that you cannot understand or refuse to admit so simple and crucial a point. What is the use of admitting Avatarhood if you take all the meaning out of it?

I never said that there could be no Avatars nor that they are failures.

Good Lord! You said most emphatically that they were all failures and that is why the Divine had to come back again and again — to “atone for his failures”.

If your argument is that the life, actions, struggles of the Avatar (e.g. Rama's, Krishna's) are unreal because the Divine is there and knows it is all a Maya, in man also there is a self, a spirit that is immortal, untouched, divine, you can say that man's sufferings and ignorance are only put on, shams, unreal. But if man feels them as real and if the Avatar feels his work and difficulties to be serious and real?

I don't think I said that there is no divinity in man. In the quotation I gave from the Gita it is said that man is made out

of the divine substance but has a thick coating on him.

If the existence of the Divinity is of no practical effect, what is the use of a theoretical admission? The manifestation of the Divinity in the Avatar is of help to man because it helps him to discover his own divinity, find the way to realise it. If the difference is so great that the humanity by its very nature prevents all possibility of following the way opened by the Avatar, it merely means that there is no divinity in man that can respond to the divinity in the Avatar.

You make a flourish of reasonings and do not see the consequence of your reasonings. It is no use saying “I believe this or that” and then reasoning in a way which leads logically to the very negation of what you believe.

I admitted that Avatars have many difficulties, but because they know, as Mother did, that they are Avatars, because the “real substance” shines through the alloy in all that they do, they have a fixed faith and conviction that they will never fail.

You think then that in me (I do not bring in the Mother) there was never any doubt or despair, no attacks of that kind. I have borne every attack which human beings have borne, otherwise I would be unable to assure anybody “This too can be conquered.” At least I would have no right to say so. Your psychology is terribly rigid. I repeat, the Divine when he takes on the burden of terrestrial nature, takes it fully, sincerely and without any conjuring tricks or pretence. If he has something behind him which emerges always out of the coverings, it is the same thing in essence, even if greater in degree, that there is behind others — and it is to awaken that that he is there.

The psychic being does the same for all who are intended for the spiritual way — men need not be extraordinary beings to follow Yoga. That is the mistake you are making — to harp on greatness as if only the great can be spiritual.

Regarding the divinity in man — what is the use of this divinity if it is coated layer after layer with Maya? How many can

really become conscious of it?

Exactly! Why admit any divinity then at all, if their humanity is an insuperable bar to any following in the Way pointed out by the Avatar? That was your contention that humanity and divinity are irreconcilable opposite things, that it is no use the Avatar asking others (except Arjuna) to follow in his Path — they, being human, cannot do it.

You had defeats, struggles, but had at the same time the spirit of absolute surrender, faith which we find shining through Mother's prayers as well. Did you not leave your great work for the country at one word of Krishna?

Lots of people leave things at the word of a human being like Gandhi, they do not need the word of Krishna.

Does the average man have this faith, etc.? If he has not, but has instead struggles, sufferings etc., picture what his condition would be!

If *absolute* surrender, faith etc. from the beginning were essential for Yoga then nobody could do it. I myself could not have done it if such a condition had been demanded of me.

This is only to refute the points you found implied or explicit in my letters.

Let me make it clear that in all I wrote I was not writing to prove that I am an Avatar! You are busy in your reasonings with the personal question, I am busy in mine with the general one. I am seeking to manifest something of the Divine that I am conscious of and feel — I care a damn whether that constitutes me an Avatar or something else. That is not a question which concerns me. By manifestation of course I mean the bringing out and spreading of that Consciousness so that others also may feel and enter into it and live in it.

7 March 1935

I am eagerly waiting to see what you say in reply to X's questions of tonight.⁷ Often I have wondered why you made your cases equal to ours. Did you ever suffer from desires, passions, ignorance, attachment etc. as we do?

We have had sufferings and struggles to which yours are mere child's play, — I have not made our cases equal to yours. I have said that the Avatar is one who comes to open the Way for humanity to a higher consciousness — if nobody can follow the Way, then either our conception of the thing, which is that of Christ and Krishna and Buddha also, is all wrong or the whole life and action of the Avatar is quite futile. X seems to say that there is no Way and no possibility of following, that the struggles and sufferings of the Avatar are unreal and all humbug, — there is no possibility of struggle for one who represents the Divine. Such an idea makes nonsense of the whole idea of Avatarhood — there is no reason in it, no necessity for it, no meaning in it. The Divine being all-powerful can lift people up without bothering to come down on earth. It is only if it is part of the world-arrangement that he should take upon himself the burden of humanity and open the Way that Avatarhood has any meaning.

7 March 1935

Following the Leader and Guide

At last I reopen the controversy.⁸ I have read your *Essays on the Gita, Synthesis of Yoga*, letters on Rama, and though I am wiser, my original and fundamental difficulty remains as unsolved as ever. What is so simple to you, as everything is, appears mighty complex and abstruse to my dense intellect. So no alternative but to submit to a fresh beating. . . .

What your view comes to, put in a syllogism, is this:
Since I have done it and I am an Avatar, so every other blessed creature can do it.

⁷ The reference is to the series of questions in the letter of 7 March 1935 on pages 416–19. — Ed.

⁸ This is the beginning of the correspondent's "typewritten MS", which he submitted to Sri Aurobindo on 6 March 1935. Sri Aurobindo wrote detailed answers to the questions on the manuscript but never returned it. It was discovered among his papers after his passing. — Ed.

This is idiotic. I have said “Follow my path, the way I have discovered for you through my own efforts and example. Transform your nature from the animal to the spiritual, grow into a higher divine consciousness. All this you can do by your own aspiration and by the force of the Divine Shakti.” That, if you please, is not the utterance of a madman or an imbecile. I have said, “I have opened the Way; now you with the Divine help can follow it.” I have not said “Find the way for yourself as I did.”

In the *Essays on the Gita* you say man “is ignorant because there is upon the eyes of his soul and all its organs the seal of . . . Nature, Prakriti, Maya . . . ; she has minted him like a coin out of the precious metal of the divine substance, but overlaid with a strong coating of the alloy of her phenomenal qualities, stamped with her own stamp and mark of animal humanity, and although the secret sign of the Godhead is there, it is at first indistinguishable. . . .”⁹

Does it follow that the coating cannot be dissolved nor the mark effaced? Then stamp the stamp of the chimaera on all efforts at spirituality and catalogue as asses and fools all who have attempted to rise beyond the human animal — all who have tried to follow the path of the Christ, the Buddha; stigmatise as folly Vedanta, Tantra, Yoga, the way of the Jinas, Christ himself and Buddha, Pythagoras, Plato, and any other pathfinder and seeker.

On the other hand you write that in “the Avatar, the divinely-born Man, the real substance shines through the coating; the mark of the seal is there only for form, the vision is that of the secret Godhead, the power of the life is that of the secret Godhead, and it breaks through the seals of the assumed human nature . . .” [*Essays on the Gita*, pp. 158–59].

Does it follow that the breaking through had not to be done or was a mere trifling impediment? The power of the form can be

⁹ *Essays on the Gita*, volume 19 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 158.

exceedingly great as every thinker and observer of life can tell you.

After this you say that the object of the Avatar's descent is "precisely to show that the human birth with all its limitations can be made such a means and instrument of the divine birth and divine works. . . . Even human sorrow and physical suffering he must assume and use so as to show . . . how that suffering may be a means of redemption . . ." [*Essays*, pp. 164–65]. Well, Sir, it will have no go with me, my heart won't leap up at such a divine possibility, such a dream of Paradise!

Your heart not leaping up does not make my statement a falsehood, a non sequitur or a chimaera.

My fellow-brothers may venture to reach there through such a thin hanging bridge but if they do, I am afraid, it will be into a fool's Paradise.

The fool being myself, eh? For it is my Paradise and it is I who call them to it.

The difficulties you face, the dangers you overcome, the struggles you embrace would seem to be mere shams.

[*Underlining "mere shams":*] Truly then what a humbug and charlatan I have been, making much of sham struggles and dangers — or, in the alternative, since I took them for realities, what a self-blinded imbecile!

Mother knew she was an Avatar at a very early age.

At what age? But I shall say nothing about the Mother — I cannot bring her into such arguments, only myself.

She was thus able to follow the path of travails through volcanoes and earthquakes. But if she says to me, "You can also do it," I will cry out, "Forbear, Mother, forbear."

Nobody asks you to go through volcanoes and earthquakes or

to proceed unhelped. You are simply asked to follow the Leader and Guide with the Divine help and with courage, in the face of whatever difficulties come.

If I knew I were an Avatar (pardon my bold hypothesis) do you think I would cry or wail for fear of any amount of crashes and collisions or would it matter if I began with a nature with not a grain of spirituality in me? I would jump from peak to peak in somersaults, go down the abysses, rise up the steepes without fear of mortal consequences since I would know that I was the Divine.

Would you? I wish you had been in my place then! You would have been a hundred times more fit than myself, if you could really have done that. And how easily things would have been done! While I did them and am still doing them with enormous difficulty because I lead and have to make the path so that others may follow with less difficulty.

There could be no death or failure for me.

The Divine in the body is not subject to death or failure? Yet all those claimed to be Avatars have died — some by violence, some by cancer, some of indigestion etc. etc. You yourself say that they were all failures. How do you reconcile these self-contradictory arguments?

You say, “A physical and mental body is prepared fit for the divine incarnation by a pure or great heredity and the descending Godhead takes possession of it” [*Essays*, p. 166].

Like my heredity? It was “pure”? But of course I am not a divine incarnation. Only why put all that upon one whom it does not fit?

To his beloved children created in his own image he says with gusto, I send you through this hell of a cycle of rebirths. Don't lose heart, poor boys, if you groan under the weight of your sins and those of your ancestors to boot. I will come down

and take hold of a pure heredity with no coating around me and say unto you — come and follow my example.

Who gave this message? It is your own invention. The Divine does not come down in that way. It is a silly imagination of yours that you are trying to foist on the truth of things. The Divine also comes down into the cycle of rebirths, makes the great holocaust, endures shame and obloquy, torture and crucifixion, the burden of human nature, sex and passion and sorrow and suffering, manifests many births before he reveals the Avatar. And when he does reveal it? Well, read the lives of the Avatars and try to understand and see.

Nobody ever said there was no coating — that is your invention.

Not a very inspiring message, Sir!

No, of course not — but it is yours, not any Avatar's.

Jatakas tell us that in every life small or great, Buddha's frontal consciousness was always above the level of others.

Jatakas are legends.

Ramakrishna and Chaitanya began yoga in their cradle, it seems.

Did they? I know nothing about it; but if they told you that! Anyhow one died by drowning and the other of a cancer.

I don't know if Avatars ever play the part of the rogue or the eternal sinner in any life.

[*Underlining "rogue or the eternal sinner":*] Krishna was a rogue and a sinner even in his Avatar life, if tales are true! Don't you think so?

Now about your absence of urge towards spirituality. Even though that sounds like a story, pray tell us how you could

free your mind from all thoughts in 7 days or be established in Brahmic consciousness in a few days.

3 if you please. You are terribly inaccurate in your statements. It was simply through the Divine Grace, because it had been done by thousands before me throughout the centuries and millenniums, and the Divine did not want me to waste time over that; other things in the Yoga were not so damned easy!

And even apart from spirituality, what of your waiting for the gallows for your country's sake with perfect equanimity?

[*Underlining "perfect equanimity":*] Who told you that? I was perfectly sure of release. But even so plenty of ordinary men did it before me.

What of your profoundly bold assertion that you would free the country by a Force that was under your feet?

Never said that, surely. Under my feet?

What of your brilliant career? If one has the essential principle, what does it matter if one has no urge towards spirituality?

My career was much less brilliant than many others'. They ought to have progressed then farther in Yoga than myself, e.g. Mus-solini, Lenin, Tilak, Brajendranath Seal, the admirable Crichton, Gandhi, Tagore, Roosevelt, Lloyd George etc. etc. All Avatars or all full of the essential principle!

The inner consciousness is there.

All that does not apply to me alone. There are hundreds of others. The inner consciousness is not so rare a phenomenon as all that.

There are some people, I hear, who are to all external appearance debauchees or moral insolvents but whose psychic is much developed or "can be touched".

That gives away the whole case. For mark that I have never asked the whole human race to follow me to the supramental — that is your invention, not mine.

Still you go on saying that what you have done is possible for me and not for Arjunas only to whom alone Krishna seems to have addressed the Gita.

What a waste of words and energy! Yet Krishna said “even Chandalas can follow my way.”

I prophesy that your message will reverberate in the rarefied atmosphere evoking a loud rebellious echo from human hearts.

I admit that you have successfully proved that I am an imbecile.

But if you say, “I come to raise you bodily by my divine Omnipotence, not by my example,” I shake hands. If you insist that I follow your example, it would be as well to insist on my leaving you bag and baggage at once.

All this is a purely personal argument concerning yourself. Up to now you were making general assertions — so was I. I was concerned with the possibility of people following the Path I had opened, as Christ, Krishna, Buddha, Chaitanya etc. opened theirs. You were declaring that no human being could follow and that my life was perfectly useless as an example — like the lives of the Avatars. Path, life, example all useless — even Power useless because all have been failures. These are general questions. Whether X or Y is able or willing to follow the path or depends on divine Omnipotence only is a personal question. Even if X or Y does so, he has no right to pass a general decree of impossibility against others.

There are some who claim that they are here and remain here by their soul’s call. But I am not one of those fortunate ones. Where they hear the soul’s call, I hear the calls of a thousand devils and if it were not for your love — well, no, — for your Power (which I firmly believe in), I would end up myself by

being one of those devils. I hope you will believe that this is not a conceited statement.

It is very conceited. To be a devil needs a considerable personal capacity or else a great openness to the Beyond. If you had said, I can only be an ordinary human being, that might be modest.

We don't mean to give you a compliment when we say these things.

Of course not. It is the reverse of complimentary, since you prove me to be an ignorant and mistaken fellow of an Avatar, who merely wastes his time doing things which are of no earthly use to any human being — except perhaps Arjuna who is not here.

No, we say that the Sun is a thing apart, not to be measured by any human standards.

The Sun's rays are of use to somebody — you say all my acts and life and laborious opening of the Way I thought I had made for spiritual realisation, are of no use to anybody — since nobody is strong enough to follow the path, only the Avatar can do it. Poor lonely ineffective fellow of an Avatar!

We respect him, adore him, lay ourselves bare to his Light, but we do not follow him.

Who is this we? Editorial “we”?

Let me point out one or two facts, in a perfectly serious spirit.

(1) It has always been supposed by spiritual people that divine perfection, similitude to the Divine, *sādrśya*, *sādharmya*, is part of the Mukti. Christ said “Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect” — the very Divine himself, mind you, not a mere Avatar or luminous projection from him. His followers strive to be Christlike. Thomas à Kempis, meditating and striving, wrote a book on the Imitation of Christ. Francis of Assisi and many

others arrived at Christlikeness. [Krishna in] the Gita insists on *sādharmya*, gives himself as an example, and tells Arjuna that many before him from ancient times reached to it. Buddha in teaching *karuṇā*, the eightfold path, the rejection of sanskaras, gave it as an ideal to all true followers of his path, thus placing before them not only his own path but his own example. All this is trash and humbug? Christ and Buddha were fools? Myself even a bigger fool? It is not a question of greatness — it is a question of acquiring a certain consciousness to which the way is laid open. It is not a question of acquiring cosmic omniscience and omnipotence, but of reaching the essential divine consciousness with all its *spiritual* consequences, peace, light, equality, strength, Ananda etc. etc. If you say that that cannot be done, you deny all possibility of spiritual perfection, transformation or any true Yoga. All that anyone can do is to be helpless and wait for the divine Omnipotence to do something or other. The whole spiritual past of man becomes a fantastic insanity, with the Avatars as the chief lunatics. That is the materialist point of view, but I am unable to envisage it as a basis for sadhana. That example is not all, is true; I have not said it is; there is Influence, there is spiritual help — but the truth of the Way and the Example cannot be belittled in this scornful fashion.

(2) You make nothing of the Divine in man. If there is no divinity in man, then there is no possibility of Avatarhood; also spirituality can just as well pass away into silence — it has no foundation here. If the divinity is there in man, it can break through its coatings. You admit that it can do it in debauchees and moral insolvents — that it can manifest in ignorant and uncultured men and women is a proved fact; the Gita itself declares that all *kinds* of men and women can follow its path. Whether X or Y does or does not do so does not depend then on these things and it is no use trying to bar the path to people because of either their ignorance or their immorality. To do so is to betray a bottomless ignorance of spiritual things. As to the possibility of awakening the psychic being, on what intellectual grounds or by what fixed ethical or rational rules are you going to fix that and declare “No entry here for you”? You cannot

generalise in the way you try to do by an intellectual reasoning.
The mystery of the Spirit is too great for such a puny endeavour.

after 6 March 1935

Fallibility of Avatars

How is it that later Avatars often find fault with the actions
and movements of their predecessors?

Who finds fault with whom? I have not found fault with any
Avatar. To discern what they expressed and what they did not
express, is not to find fault.

Avatars are supposed to be infallible, they are supposed to
have Knowledge directly from Above!

What is infallible? I invite your attention again to Rama and the
Golden Deer. The Avatar need have no theoretical “Knowledge”
from above — he acts and thinks whatever the Divine within
him intends that he should act and think for the work. Was
everything that Ramakrishna said or thought infallible?

22 April 1935

The Avatar and Humanity

Every Avatar descended to relieve the world from falsehood,
darkness, vice, etc. Also, everyone preached against them.

I am not concerned with what the Avatars did or are supposed to
have done (though in that case Krishna seems to have done some
very queer and undivine things). My business is with rising above
the human consciousness and not with fulfilling limited human
ideals; and I look at things from that standpoint. 20 April 1936

*

Avatars, unlike Vibhutis, do not need to satisfy their vital.

Why should they not?

For the Avatar's vital has no cravings and desires as our vital has. He is above them. And if he seems to be satisfying them, it is only to acquire experience and knowledge of the vital world.

All that is wrong. The Avatar takes upon himself the nature of humanity in his instrumental parts, though the consciousness acting behind is divine.

When the Divine descends here (as the Avatar), he has to veil himself and deal with the world and its movements like an ordinary man of the cosmic product.

Exactly.

But behind he is perfectly conscious of what happens. The universal forces cannot make him their tool as they make us.

That does not prevent the Avatar from acting as men act and using the movements of Nature for his life and work.

23 July 1936

*

Avatars can of course be married and satisfy their vital movements. But do they really indulge them as ordinary people? Don't they even before they begin the practice of Yoga, remain conscious of their union with the Divine above even while satisfying their outer being?

There is not necessarily any union above before the practice of Yoga. There is a connection of the consciousness with the veiled Divinity and an action out of that, but this is not dependent on the practice of Yoga.

25 July 1936

The Purpose of Past Avatars

What could be the Divine's purpose in leaving Arjuna in such a helpless condition after his withdrawal from the world?

It is said that it was done to break Arjuna's pride so that he might see his strength was not his, but the Divine's alone.

Throughout the history of human evolution we see that the Avatar brings light into the world. But when he retires, very little of this light remains. There is no substantial change. Does the Divine will it to be so?

You have only to consider what the state of humanity would have been if Krishna and others had not come. They would have been still near to the beast with no openings on the heights of the spirit.

20 October 1933

Recognition of Past Avatars

Were the Avatars — the ten that have already come — known as Avatars in their own times?

Only to a few, according to the accounts.

14 November 1935

Sri Krishna and Sri Aurobindo

I thought I had already told you that your turn towards Krishna was not an obstacle. In any case I affirm that positively in answer to your question. If we consider the large and indeed predominant part he played in my own sadhana, it would be strange if the part he has in your sadhana could be considered objectionable. Sectarianism is a matter of dogma, ritual etc., not of spiritual experience; the concentration on Krishna is a self-offering to the *iṣṭa-deva*. If you reach Krishna you reach the Divine; if you can give yourself to him, you give yourself to me. Your inability to identify may be because you are laying too much stress on the physical aspects, consciously or unconsciously.

18 June 1943

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You can't expect me to argue about my own spiritual greatness in comparison with Krishna's. The question itself would be relevant only if there were two sectarian religions in opposition, Aurobindoism and Vaishnavism, each insisting on its own God's greatness. That is not the case. And then what Krishna must I challenge, — the Krishna of the Gita who is the transcendent

Godhead, Paramatma, Parabrahma, Purushottama, the cosmic Deity, master of the universe, Vasudeva who is all, the immanent in the heart of all creatures, or the Godhead who was incarnate at Brindavan and Dwarka and Kurukshetra and who was the guide of my Yoga and with whom I realised identity? All that is not to me something philosophical or mental but a matter of daily and hourly realisation and intimate to the stuff of my consciousness. Then from what position can I adjudicate this dispute? X thinks I am superior in greatness, you think there can be nothing greater than Krishna; each is entitled to have his own view or feeling, whether it is itself right or not. It can be left there; it can be no reason for your leaving the Asram.

25 February 1945

Recognising Divinity

After reading your answers, one part of me tries to justify itself and attribute to you the ordinary humanity.

Of course. Whatever does not say ditto to the human mind cannot be divine. That is the usual maxim of judgment. “The Divine must do what I want and think as I think, judge as I judge and support my ideas, interests or feelings against others, otherwise how can he be Divine? For whatever I think, feel or want must be the TRUTH.” At least that seems to be the attitude of most sadhaks in the Asram.

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Shall man know of your divinity only after the supermind has descended?¹⁰

There is no necessity of the supermind for that. It is the inner consciousness that has to recognise — it is impossible for the outer mind to know it by its own reasonings.

¹⁰ *It is not clear from the context whether the correspondent's “your” refers to Sri Aurobindo or the Mother or both. The same is true of “you” in the next letter. — Ed.*

The Divine Incarnate?

I have a strong faith that you are the Divine Incarnate in *bhāgavatī tanu*. Am I right?

Follow your faith — it is not likely to mislead you.

12 August 1935

Reticence about the Question of Divinity

One thing. There is coming here in a day or two (perhaps tomorrow) a lady from Switzerland named Madame X who is a friend or acquaintance of Y's mother; she will put up in Boudie House, perhaps for a month, perhaps for a shorter or longer time. We know nothing of her and it is not yet sure whether her profession of seeking the spiritual Truth is really deep or genuine. Therefore till we are fixed about her, Mother wishes that she should not be taken in intimately into the Asram life or told anything about inner matters of the Asram or spoken to about questions such as the divinity of the Mother or myself (for her we are simply spiritual Teachers) or shown freely messages or letters. A certain reserve is necessary until she has been thoroughly tested. I write this in view of the possibility of your and other sadhaks meeting her and an acquaintance forming, so as to put you on your guard. It is not a case like Z or even the A's. 9 December 1936

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Do you really think it necessary or advisable to publish an exegesis of this kind?¹¹ The last paragraphs are about things that concern only disciples or even only sadhaks of the Asram, it is not desirable to discuss them and publish to outsiders or the general public. What you write about my books would be considered as extravagant by most readers. Also we do not usually encourage sadhaks of the Asram to write about us as divine, though one or another may have done it — there is a certain reticence in this matter which is desirable in writing for the general public.

¹¹ *This is Sri Aurobindo's comment on an article that was submitted to him for approval. — Ed.*

Section Two

Help and Guidance

Help from the Guide

Satsanga

It is a traditional belief that satsanga has great effect — the nearness or the personal contact of a spiritual person is supposed to produce great benefit to those who are in his company. How is it then that your earliest companions here did not derive any benefit from your company?

I don't know that the theory of satsanga can be taken so rigorously as that. Company always has an effect, but it may be less or more or even for the most part nullified by things in the person's own consciousness or nature or by other atmospheres. X and the others were greatly influenced by company with me in the old days but it was more in the direction of mental and vital development than spiritually, for at that time I was doing my own sadhana and not putting out any spiritual influence on others — only if anybody asked me, I told him what to do, the result of his effort was his own affair.

17 August 1936

Giving Mental Silence

I wrote something on the subject of peace, which I showed to X. He said there were many errors in it, particularly where I wrote about philosophers and the silence.

There was no error. Ordinary human minds, Europeans especially, are accustomed to regard thought as indispensable and as the highest thing — so they are alarmed at silence. V. V. S. Aiyar when he was here asked for Yoga. I told him how to make his mind silent and it became silent. He immediately got frightened and said “I am becoming a fool, I can't think”, — so I took what I had given away from him. That is how the average mind regards silence.

11 December 1935

Non-Intervention

Certainly, it is your full right to believe that I am not infallible. But I must also say that when you are convinced that you know the truth of things and can judge better than myself and are more eager for right and justice, that creates an attitude which makes it difficult for me to help you or for you to receive my help. If you have no reliance on me as guide but rather on your own enlightened consciousness, then surely it is the dictates of your enlightened consciousness that you should follow. As long as there is this, I am drawn back from intervening in any personal way in your life or sadhana. I hope that by following your inner light or by whatever guidance you will attain the realisation you desire. circa 1928

*

I do not believe in human judgments because I have always found them fallible — also perhaps because I have myself been so blackened by human judgments that I do not care to be guided by them with regard to others. All this however I write to explain my own point of view; I am not insisting on it as a law for others. I have never been in the habit of insisting that everybody must think as I do — any more than I insist on everybody following me and my yoga. December 1934

*

You hardly take the initiative and ask people to do this or not to do that. It is your principle to give them a long rope either to hang themselves or have a taste of the bitter cup.

I am to put everybody into leading strings and walk about with them — or should it be the rope in their nose? Supermen cannot be made like that — the long rope is needed. 5 January 1935

*

Why do you never write to me about my problems — unless I specifically ask?

I never do that to anybody unless he gives me the occasion. A sadhak must become conscious and lay himself before the light, see and reject and change. It is not the right method for us to interfere and lecture and point out this and point out that. That is the schoolmaster method — it does not work in the spiritual change.

10 May 1936

The Nature of His Help

I do not know what kind of help you want from me. There are two kinds of help in the spiritual field; the invisible help (which you can get for yourself if you know how to do it) and that which a spiritual guide gives to his disciples. The latter I give only to those whom I have accepted for my own path of Yoga.

15 November 1928

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The doubt about the possibility of help is hardly a rational one, since all the evidence of life and of spiritual experience in the past and of the special experience of those, numerous enough, who have received help from the Mother and myself, is against the idea that no internal or spiritual help from one to another or from a Guru to his disciples or from myself to my disciples is possible. It is therefore not really a doubt arising from the reason but one that comes from the vital and physical mind that is troubling you. The physical mind doubts all that it has not itself experienced and even it doubts what it has itself experienced if that experience is no longer there or immediately palpable to it — the vital brings in the suggestions of despondency and despair to reinforce the doubt and prevent clear seeing. It is therefore a difficulty that cannot be effectively combated by the logical reason alone, but best by the clear perception that it is a self-created difficulty — a self-formed *sanskara* or mental formation which has become habitual and has to be broken up so that you may have a free mind and vital, free for experience.

As for the help, you expect a divine intervention to destroy the doubt, and the divine intervention is possible, but it comes

usually only when the being is ready. You have indulged to a great extreme this habit of the recurrence of doubt, this mental formation or *sanskara*, and so the adverse force finds it easy to throw it upon you, to bring back the suggestion. You must have a steady working will to repel it whenever it comes and to refuse the tyranny of the *sanskara* of doubt — to annul the force of its recurrence. I think you have hardly done that in the past, you have rather supported the doubts when they came. So for some time at least you must do some hard work in the opposite direction. The help (I am not speaking of a divine intervention from above but of my help and the Mother's) will be there. It can be effective in spite of your physical mind, but it will be more effective if this steady working will of which I speak is there as its instrument. There are always two elements in spiritual success — one's own steady will and endeavour and the Power that in one way or another helps and gives the result of the endeavour.

I will do what is necessary to give the help you must receive. To say you cannot would not be true, for you have received times without number and it has helped you to recover.

26 January 1934

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I am not aware of refusing help; but to receive the help is also necessary. When you are in this condition, you seem at once to shut yourself up against those from whom you seek help by a spirit of bitterness and anger. That is not an attitude which makes it easy to receive or be conscious and it is not easy either for the help to be effective. All I can do is to send you the Force that if received would help you to change your condition; it is what I have always done. But it cannot act effectively — or at least not at once — if the doors are shut against it.

23 May 1936

*

But is it really impossible to give X some experience of peace, silence or meditation? That would mean that the Divine is not omnipotent.

My dear sir, what has the omnipotence of the Divine to do with it? In this world there are conditions for everything — if a man refuses to fulfil the conditions for Yoga, what is the use of appealing to the Divine's omnipotence? He does not believe that the Divine is here. He regards us as Gurus. Yes, but he begins by disputing all my way of Yoga. He does not understand and does not care to understand my processes. He has ideas of his own, does not want peace or equality or surrender or anything else, wants only Krishna and bhakti. He has read things in Ramakrishna and elsewhere as to how to do it, insists on following that. Rejects all suggestions I can make as unpracticable. Erects a sadhana of violent meditation, japa, prayer — for these are the traditional things, has no idea that there are conditions without which they cannot be effective. Meditates, japs, prays himself into pits of dullness and disappears. Also tries in spite of my objections a wrestling tapasya which puts his vital into revolt. Then by a stroke of good luck I succeed unexpectedly in making a sort of psychic opening. Decides to try surrender, purification of the heart, rejection of ego, true humility etc. — tries a little of it and is really progressing. After two months finds that Krishna is not appearing — gets disgusted and drops the beastly thing. And after all that he is always telling me “What an impotent Guru you are! You are evidently able to do nothing for me.” Evidently! That's X.

28 May 1936

Special Relation with Disciples: Two Examples

(1)

But after all, without putting forth eighteen visible arms (perhaps, since it is a symbol, by putting them forth internally) I hope to become one day so divine even in the body consciousness that I shall be able to satisfy everybody! But you can't hurry a transformation like that. I must ask for time.

Why do you always insist on cherishing the idea that I refuse all human love? I have surely written to you to the contrary. I don't reject it, neither human nor vital love. But I want that

behind the vital there shall be the constant support of the psychic *human* love (not all at once the divine), because that alone can prevent the movements which make you restless, obscured and miserable. In asking this I am surely not asking anything excessive or beyond your power. circa 1931

*

I meant that even before I met you for the first time, I knew of you and felt at once the contact of one with whom I had that relation which declares itself constantly through many lives and followed your career (all that I could hear about it) with a close sympathy and interest. It is a feeling which is never mistaken and gives the impression of one not only close to one but part of one's existence. The Mother had not heard of you before you came here for the first time, but even on that occasion on seeing you — though without any actual meeting — she had a sympathetic contact. The relation that is so indicated always turns out to be that of those who have been together in the past and were predestined to join again (though the past circumstances may not be known) drawn together by old ties. It was the same inward recognition in you (apart even from the deepest spiritual connection) that brought you. If the outer consciousness does not yet fully realise, it is the crust always created by a new physical birth that prevents it. But the soul knows all the while.

Your poem is very beautiful.

I am aware of the terribly trying period that is upon you as upon us just now, but you must try to stand firmly until we may come through into the sunshine hereafter. 27 February 1935

*

I have not time to write a long letter. I can write only this. You are not to leave Pondicherry by this morning's train or at all. You have to come and see the Mother at 9.30 and speak to her heart to heart. Both the Mother and myself have lavished much love and care on you and you are certainly not going to make a return like this — it is impossible. Do not believe all you hear or allow yourself to be driven off your balance by falsehoods of

the kind that have been retailed to you. You do not belong to yourself and have not the right to do what you propose to do: you belong to the Divine and to myself and the Mother. I have cherished you like a friend and a son and have poured on you my force to develop your powers — until the time should come for you to make an equal development in the Yoga. We claim the right to keep you as our own here with us. Throw away this despair — rise above the provocations of others — turn back to the Mother.

16 May 1937

(2)

I want to love and love completely and lose myself in love. If one can think of losing oneself for mortal love, why not for the love of the Divine?

Well, why not? But it must be done in the divine way, not in the mortal. Otherwise —

Let me then say definitely that I love you and you love me a little and let us meet somewhere in this matter. You may remark, “This man has gone mad, otherwise why all these asthmatic gaspings?” Yes, I am mad, Sir, and impatient too.

Ummm! don’t you think there are enough people in that condition already here without the Asram doctor adding himself to the collection?

Who can be and remain otherwise unless and until one is divine oneself?

Unfortunately, experience seems to show that one must be divine oneself before one can bear the pressure of divine love.

8 April 1935

*

The Divine loves all equally but there seem to be some who are dearer to Him. You seem to say some such thing in *Essays on the Gita* — that Arjuna was dearer to Krishna because he

came nearer to the Divine and those who do that will always be dearer to Him.

I don't say; it is the Gita that says it — or rather there are two separate slokas; one says that the Divine makes no difference, the other says that Arjuna is specially dear to him.

It seems to me that if X and myself, for example, were to transgress some vital rules of the Asram, I would get a thunderbolt from you while he would get nothing. In my saner moments I have tried to look at it more rationally.

That does not stand. Sometimes you might get nothing except perhaps an invisible stare; sometimes I might say “Now look here, Y, don't make an immortal ass of yourself — *that* is not the transformation wanted.” Still another time I might shout “Now! now! What the hell! what the blazes!” So it would depend on the occasion, not only on the person.

There are many instances to show that some persons are dearer to the Divine than others. Besides Krishna and Arjuna, we have the instance of Buddha and Ananda.

There is also St. John, the beloved disciple.

Then again, Vivekananda was dearer to Ramakrishna than other disciples. Chaitanya showered his grace on Madhai and Jagai, but were they closer to him than Nitai?

But he had love for them (তাই বলে কি প্রেম দিব না?).

Some say that because through one person, chances of manifestation are greater, or because he is more open, or is a Vibhuti, he will be nearer to the Divine. That, I think, can be swept aside since degrees of manifestation can never be a criterion. What is it that determines this? I really don't know.

Of course you don't — nor does anybody. Is love a creation of the reason? or dealt out by this or that scale? Or does the Divine calculate “This fellow has so much of this or that quality. I will give him just so much more love than to that other”?

This question is not only of theoretical interest to us, but also of practical importance, since in our stumblings and gropings the Divine here may have a soft corner for some, and not perhaps for others to the same extent.

All that is rather beside the point. There is a universal divine love that is given equally to all — but also there is a *special relation* with each man — it is not a question of more or less, though it may appear so. But even that less or more cannot be judged by human standards. The man who gets a blow may, if he has a certain relation, feel it as a divine caress; he may even say, erecting his own standard, “She loves me more than others, because to others she would not give that blow, to me she felt she could give it,” and it would be quite as good a standard as the kind treatment one — as standards go. But no standards apply. For in each case it is according to the relation. The cause of the relation? It differs in each case. Cast your plummet into the deep and perhaps you shall find it — or perhaps you will hit something that has nothing at all to do with it. 9 June 1935

No Partiality

The worst suggestion of the hostile forces is that you are partial in your dealings. When this is accepted a wall comes between you and the sadhak and there is a revolt and then there may be an end of the sadhana!

Yes, that is their aim — for it is their one short cut to success, to separate the sadhak from his soul. 3 May 1935

Sri Aurobindo’s Compassion

Why is the flower symbolising your compassion so delicate and why does it wither away so soon?

No, the compassion does not wither with its symbol — flowers are the moment’s representations of things that are in themselves eternal. 9 August 1936

Outward and Inward Guidance

The outward touch is helpful; but the inward is still more helpful when one is accustomed to receive it with a certain concreteness — and the outward touch is not always fully possible, while the inward can be there all the time.

*

The outer guidance is meant only as an aid to the inner working, especially for the correction of any erroneous movement and sometimes in order to point out the right road. It is not meant except at a very early stage to satisfy mental questionings or to stimulate a mental activity.

26 March 1935

*

Once I asked you to give some advice as regards the treatment of a patient. You replied: “I have no medico in me, not even a latent medico.”¹

Of course not. If it were there, I would develop it and run the Dispensary myself. What would be the need of X or Y or Z?

The other day, in regard to that baby, you wrote that Mother has no intuition for infants.

No intuition for stuffing infants with heterogeneous medicines.

Well then, if you have no latent medico and Mother has no intuition for infants, can you tell me how by the force of devotion, faith, surrender, etc., is one going to get guidance from you?

What logic! Because Mother and myself are not engineers, therefore A can't develop the right intuition in engineering? or because neither I nor Mother are experts in Gujarati prosody, therefore B can't develop the inspiration for his poems?

¹ See the letter of 1 April 1935 on page 505. — Ed.

If the divine can't guide me externally, which is much easier,
how can he guide me internally?

Oh Lord! what a question! To guide internally is a million times easier than to guide externally. Let us suppose I want General Miaja to beat Franco's fellows back at Guadalajara (please pronounce properly), I put the right force on him and he wakes up and, with his military knowledge and capacity, does the right thing and it's done. But if I, having no latent or patent military genius or knowledge in me, write to him saying "do this, do that", he won't do it and I would not be able to do it either. It is operations of two quite different spheres of consciousness. You absolutely refuse to make the necessary distinction between the two fields and their processes and then you jumble the two together and call it logic.

If the medico can be revealed from within, why could it not be revealed from without and tell me what to do?

Damn it, man! Intuition and revelation are inner things — they don't belong to the outer mind.

If you or Mother can't guide me concretely, how will the guidance come later on, I wonder?

Do you imagine that I tell you inwardly or outwardly what expressions to use in your Bengali poems when you are writing? Still you write from an inspiration which I have set going.

6 April 1937

Help through Writing and through Other Means

I must point out to you that the value of your staying here does not depend on my writing to you or not, but on whether you have the true inner relation with us, whether you are able to receive anything from us and whether you can profit spiritually

by what you receive. All that depends in the last resort on you.

12 September 1932

*

My touch is always there; but you must learn to feel it not only with the outward contact as a medium — a touch of the pen — but in its direct action on the mind and heart and vital and body. There would then be very much less difficulty — or no difficulty at all.

27 March 1933

*

Letters and answering of letters are not indispensable for the sadhana; the sadhak's reception of silent help is much more important; the written word is only a minor means, and to expect answers because others have them is quite a wrong idea. The only necessity in this sadhana is to open yourself to the Divine Force; if one is open the necessary understanding or knowledge will come of itself through spiritual experience.

23 May 1933

*

Sometimes I think it would be better not to ask you questions about my difficulties, but simply to state them. But I find that if I can't put things in the form of questions, I hardly write anything.

Out of one thousand mental questions and answers there are only one or two here and there that are really of any dynamic assistance — while a single inner response or a little growth of consciousness will do what those thousand questions and answers could not do. The Yoga does not proceed by *upadeśa* but by inner influence. To state your condition, experiences etc. and open to the help is far more important than question-asking — especially the questions about why and how which your physical mind so persistently puts.

I have realised that if we surrender ourselves to you once and open inwardly, you pour into us as much knowledge as we can hold.

What I write usually helps only the mind and that too very little, for people do not really understand what I write — they put their own constructions on it. The inner help is quite different and there can be no comparison with it, for it recreates the substance of the consciousness, not the mind only. 4 June 1936

*

You said, “What I write usually helps only the mind and that too very little, for people do not really understand what I write.” Is this because you are writing from too high a plane for us to understand?

It is because the mind by itself cannot understand things that are beyond it. It constructs its own idea out of something that it catches or thinks it has caught and puts that down as the whole meaning of what has been written. Each mind puts its own ideas in place of the Truth. 6 June 1936

*

For some time I have not written to you, but whether you think of this child or not, every minute I think of you.

No, I don't forget you if you don't write. I think of you and concentrate for you every day.

Guidance through Correspondence

Utility of Correspondence

It would be a great mistake for you to stop writing in the book;¹ it is a means of direct and concrete contact with me and the help I can give you — apart from that which I always send you at all times. It is an adverse suggestion and influence which wants you to stop writing, because it wishes to cut the connection established through the book so that you might find it more difficult to feel my help coming to you.

It is absurd to break off because you are for the time being unsuccessful in keeping up an uninterrupted progress; the interruptions come, they have to be passed through and then the progress begins again. The difficulties will be got rid of, but they cannot be got rid of in a moment.

Keep the book and write in it whenever you can.

12 March 1932

*

There is no reason why you should stop writing letters — it is only one kind of letter that is in question and that is not a very good means of contact; you yourself felt the reaction was not favourable. I asked you to write because your need of unburdening the perilous matter in you was very great at the time and, although it did not relieve you at once, it kept me exactly informed of the turns of the fight and helped me to put a certain pressure on the attacking forces at a critical moment. But I do not believe any of these necessities now exists. It is rather a discouragement from within yourself of the source of these movements that is now the need; putting them into words would rather, as I have said, give them more body and substance.

¹ *The notebook in which the correspondent recorded her activities and experiences and asked questions, which she submitted periodically to Sri Aurobindo. — Ed.*

It is an undoubted fact proved by hundreds of instances that for many the exact statement of their difficulties to us is the best and often, though not always, an immediate, even an instantaneous means of release. This has often been seen by sadhaks not only here, but far away, and not only for inner difficulties, but for illness and outer pressure of unfavourable circumstances. But for that a certain attitude is necessary — either a strong faith in the mind and vital or a habit of reception and response in the inner being. Where this habit has been established, I have seen it to be almost unfailingly effective, even when the faith was uncertain or the outer expression in the mind vague, ignorant or in its form mistaken or inaccurate. Moreover, this method succeeds most when the writer can write as a witness of his own movements and state them with an exact and almost impartial precision as a phenomenon of his nature or the movement of a force affecting him from which he seeks release. On the other hand if in writing his vital gets seized by the thing he is writing of, and takes up the pen for him, — expressing and often supporting doubt, revolt, depression, despair, it becomes a very different matter. Even here sometimes the expression acts as a purge; but also the statement of the condition may lend energy to the attack at least for the moment and may seem to enhance and prolong it, exhausting it by its own violence perhaps for the time and so bringing in the end a relief, but at a heavy cost of upheaval and turmoil — and at the risk of the recurring decimal movement, because the release has come by temporary exhaustion of the attacking force, not by rejection and purification through the intervention of the Divine Force with the unquestioning assent and support of the sadhak. There has been a confused fight, an intervention in a hurly-burly, not a clear alignment of forces — and the intervention of the helping force is not felt in the confusion and the whirl. This is what used to happen in your crises; the vital in you was deeply affected and began supporting and expressing the reasonings of the attacking force — in place of a clear observation and expression of the difficulty by the vigilant mind laying the state of things in the light for the higher Light and Force to act upon it, there was a vehement statement of the case for the Opposition.

Many sadhaks (even “advanced”) had made a habit of this kind of expression of their difficulties and some still do it; they cannot even yet understand that it is not the way. At one time it was a sort of gospel in the Ashram that this was the thing to be done, — I don’t know on what ground, for it was never part of my teaching about the Yoga, — but experience has shown that it does not work; it lands one in the recurring decimal notation, an unending round of struggle. It is quite different from the movement of self-opening that succeeds, (here too not in a moment, but still sensibly and progressively) and of which those are thinking who insist on everything being opened to the Guru so that the help may be more effectively there. 17 December 1932

*

About the correspondence, I would be indeed a brainless fool if I made it the central aim of my life to con an absurd mountain of letters and leave all higher aims aside! If I have given importance to the correspondence, it is because it was an effective instrument towards my central purpose — there are a large number of sadhaks whom it has helped to awake from lethargy and begin to tread the way of spiritual experience, others whom it has carried from a small round of experience to a flood of realisations, some who have been absolutely hopeless for years who have undergone a conversion and entered from darkness into an opening of light. Others no doubt have not profited or profited only a little. Also there were some who wrote at random and wasted our time. But I think we can say that for the majority of those who wrote, there has been a real progress. No doubt also it was not the correspondence in itself but the Force that was increasing in its pressure on the physical nature which was able to do all this, but a canalisation was needed, and this served the purpose. There were many for whom it was not necessary, others for whom it was not suitable. If it had been a mere intellectual asking of questions it would have been useless, but the substantial part was about sadhana and experience and it was that that proved to be of great use.

But as time went on the correspondence began to grow too

much and reached impossible proportions — yet it was difficult to stop the flood or to make distinctions which would not have been understood — so we have to seek a way out and as yet have only found palliatives. The easy way would be if those who have opened would now rely mainly on the inner communication with only a necessary word now and then — some have begun to do so. I suppose in the end we shall be able to reduce the thing to manageable proportions.

12 January 1933

*

Sometimes I feel I should not write about my experiences, etc. to you because you know everything. But at times something in me insists on writing. What should I do? Does writing in detail about everything help? In what way?

You need not write every day but from time to time — first, that there may be a direct control on your experiences and, secondly, a more precise help from us not only in general but in particulars.

31 March 1933

*

For some time I have been thinking about ceasing to write to you. Today I was overcome by vital problems. Finally at 4.30 I sent the letter I had written earlier. Why should the idea of not writing or not sending the letter cause so much difficulty?

It is because the idea came from a wrong source and was an attempt of the wrong forces to enter and disturb. It was not so much the idea in itself, but the idea as an expression of dissatisfaction and impatience. Immediately the hostiles took hold of it as a line of entry for all the old movements once associated with this kind of dissatisfaction and impatience. Moreover these letters of yours and my answers have been a strong means of canalising our help and making it habitually available to you and effective — not by the words themselves alone but by the forces behind them.

17 April 1933

*

Is it not true that the letters we receive from you are full of power?

Yes, power is put into them.

8 June 1933

*

Before reading your answers to my letters I feel as if I would never be able to read or understand them. What is this activity in me?

A useless activity of the vital mind. You should keep it quiet and receive with a silent mind waiting for light. In the silent mind one can receive an answer even if I write nothing. 9 June 1933

*

I have the idea that since we can communicate everything to you by prayer, why do we need to write? Is there any fallacy in my reasoning?

It is always well to write what goes on in you — but it need not be done every day. The essential is to keep nothing concealed.

4 August 1933

*

I have now made it a rule to write to you every evening. I will not, however, expect any replies — I will be quite satisfied with the writing, because I have experienced that the writing itself is sufficient to dissolve 95 percent of the struggle or the difficulty.

This I quite approve. You should certainly do so and stick to the rule. I shall answer at least once a day, twice whenever I find it necessary or an answer occurs to me. 8 September 1933

*

Someone told me that those who write to you do not or are not able to receive more help than they would otherwise get, and that therefore there is not much use in writing. Do not such ideas hamper your work?

Of course they do. It is a useless activity of the mind always

trying to pass judgment on things because it does not understand them. If the sadhaks' writing to me about their sadhana were useless would I spend half the day and more in reading and answering, putting aside much other work? — if it were useless I would ask them to stop, not encourage them to write.

12 September 1933

*

It seems as if those who are not writing to you daily are not worse off for it. What is this due to?

Either they have not that same push for the sadhana or they feel less need to lay open their difficulties because they have some line of positive experience which they confidently follow.

24 September 1933

*

Even for those who confidently follow a line of positive experience, and do not write to you often, is there not the danger of wrong suggestions and constructions coming to them and also of an absence of variety or integrality of experience?

Yes, there are both these dangers. Those even who are not visited by serious difficulties, are exposed to the latter danger of remaining always on the same plane of experience. But again many do not write because they are not yet prepared for the pressure on them to progress rapidly which that would mean.

25 September 1933

*

I keep writing one and the same thing. Why? Because some part of me pushes me to do so. What is this part?

It may be the inner mental, it may be the psychic.

28 November 1933

*

Writing is needed by some, it is not needed or only a little by others. On the whole those who write get a more steady incentive to progress than if they did not write — some could hardly go

on without this tangible support. It seems to me that writing is very necessary for you still.

31 January 1934

*

Is the asking of questions a help to Yoga?

Questions are meant for getting light on the things that are going on in one. It is the statement of what is going on that helps to surrender.

3 April 1934

*

No letter in the evening also, nor did Mother see you at the meditation. Whatever depression or other disturbing attack may come, do not absent yourself from pranam or evening meditation or stop writing. All attacks can be met and overcome, but it is by taking our help close and tangible that they can go quickly. I hope that you will not fail to write tomorrow (Sunday) and let us know all.

5 May 1934

*

What is your purpose in encouraging the sadhaks to write to you? Why did you create this channel?

It was created in order that they may have some direct connection and help. It depends on how they use their opportunity.

12 May 1934

*

If I have to answer fully all the points in your long letter, I fear it will take me until Doomsday — though that, according to some calculations, is not far off. I will try to do it in a comparatively brief and unsatisfactory way, I have indeed written a good deal already. But as it may take me time to finish, I send an interim note.

I do not know why you should be suddenly bewildered by what I wrote — it is nothing new and we have been saying it since a whole eternity. I wrote this short answer in reference to a question which supposed that certain “perfections” must be

demanding of the Divine Manifestation which seemed to me quite irrelevant to the reality. I put forward two propositions which appear to me indisputable unless we are to revise all spiritual knowledge in favour of modern European ideas about things.

First, the Divine Manifestation even when it manifests in mental and human ways has behind it a consciousness greater than the mind and not bound by the petty mental and moral conventions of this very ignorant human race — so that to impose these standards on the Divine is to try to do what is irrational and impossible. Secondly, this Divine Consciousness behind the apparent personality is concerned with only two things in a fundamental way — the Truth above and here below the Lila and the purpose of the incarnation or manifestation and it does what is necessary for that in the way its greater than human consciousness sees to be the necessary and intended way. I shall try if I can develop that when I write about it — perhaps I shall take your remarks about Rama and Krishna as the starting-point — but that I shall see hereafter.

But I do not understand how all that can prevent me from answering mental questions. On my own showing, if it is necessary for the divine purpose, it has to be done. Ramakrishna himself whom you quote for the futility of asking questions answered thousands of questions, I believe. But the answers must be such as Ramakrishna gave and such as I try to give, answers from a higher spiritual experience, from a deeper source of knowledge and not lucubrations of the logical intellect trying to coordinate its ignorance; still less can they be a placing of the Divine or the Divine Truth before the judgment of the intellect to be condemned or acquitted by that authority — for the authority here has no sufficient jurisdiction or competence. This also I shall try to explain — it is what I have started to do in a longer letter.

20 May 1934

*

Someone asked me if it would be possible to have direct communication with you and dispense with writing letters to get your guidance. I replied that it would not be possible unless

one had developed the power of telepathy and was able to receive your replies inwardly. But even then there would be the possibility of obscuration and distortion in reception, unless there was a complete psychisation of the consciousness. Even with complete psychisation it would not be possible to know all from within, for example about the experiences of higher stages like Overmind and Supermind, because the psychic has no instrumentality to know about them. Communication through letters would, therefore, still be necessary. But if a person had a perfect *rapport* with the Mother, he might be able to dispense with the need of communicating through letters. But would even a person who had realised the Overmind have such a perfect *rapport*?

I think it would need the Supermind itself to establish such a complete *rapport*. The psychic can do much in that direction but on condition it has a complete control. Overmind and Intuition could do it on their own plane, but here they have to descend into the physical consciousness and that interferes with its immense obscurity in addition to the distortions of mind and vital.

27 May 1934

*

I am sorry I could not write to you all these days. The fact is that something prevented me from approaching you. I have not been able to make out what it was. Will you kindly enlighten me?

It may be some indolence in the physical consciousness. It is always best to write at least thrice a week, even if there is nothing very special to say, so as to maintain the physical as well as the inner contact.

19 June 1934

*

Everyone thinks that as soon as you read our letters we get the necessary help. In my own case I get relief only after Mother's touch at Pranam. Prayers are not heard then?

It depends on how far the inner being is awake — otherwise one needs a physical *avalambana*. There are some people who get

the relief only after we read a letter, others get it immediately they write or before it has reached us or after it has reached but before we have read. Others get it simply by referring the whole matter to us mentally. Idiosyncracies! 20 March 1935

*

I cannot undertake to be telling you all the time all that is not perfectly Yogic in the details of your action from morning to night. These are things to see to yourself. It is the movements of your sadhana that you place before me and it is these that I have to see whether they are the right thing or not. 7 May 1936

*

When I wrote that while reading your answers I experienced something coming out of my heart, you replied, "It depends on the nature of the movement. Something from the psychic?" I think it was something from the psychic. But how did it get connected with my reading your answers?

The psychic can be connected with anything that gives room for love or bhakti.

When I was reading these answers with love and joy, I felt some sort of psychic opening which was the most important part of my reaction. Could you explain this?

You have explained it yourself — it is the psychic contact with what is in or behind the answers — what comes out into them from myself. 26 June 1936

*

No need to cut down your letters — I am a quick reader (at least of English, provided the handwriting is not on my own model) — it is only writing that takes time. So you must not mind short or at least comparatively short answers. It is quite the best to let the pen run and say everything. 26 June 1936

*

I do not understand your point about raising up a new race by writing trivial letters. Of course not — nor by writing important letters either; even if I were to spend my time writing fine poems it would not build up a new race. Each activity is important in its own place — an electron or a molecule or a grain may be small things in themselves, but in their place they are indispensable to the building up of a world, — it cannot be made up only of mountains and sunsets and streamings of the aurora borealis — though these have their place there. All depends on the force behind these things and the purpose in their action — and that is known to the Cosmic Spirit which is at work, — and it works, I may add, not by the mind or according to human standards but by a greater consciousness which, starting from an electron, can build up a world and, using “a tangle of ganglia”, can make them the base here for the works of the Mind and Spirit in Matter, produce a Ramakrishna, or a Napoleon, or a Shakespeare. Is the life of a great poet, either, made up only of magnificent and important things? How many “trivial” things had to be dealt with and done before there could be produced a *King Lear* or a *Hamlet*! Again, according to your own reasoning, would not people be justified in mocking at your pother — so they would call it, I do not — about metre and scansion and how many ways a syllable can be read? Why, they might say, is X [*the recipient of this letter*] wasting his time in trivial prosaic things like this when he might have been spending it in producing a beautiful lyric or fine music? But the worker knows and respects the material with which he must work and he knows why he is busy with “trifles” and small details and what is their place in the fullness of his labour.

December 1936

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You say certain things that human nature does not find so easy or natural.

If I said only things that human nature finds easy and natural, that would certainly be very comfortable for the disciples, but there would be no room for any spiritual aim or endeavour.

Spiritual aims and methods are not easy or natural (e.g. as quarrelling, sex-indulgence, greed, indolence, acquiescence in all imperfections are easy and natural) and if people become disciples, they are supposed to follow spiritual aims and endeavours, however hard and above ordinary nature, and not the things that are easy and natural.

3 May 1937

*

Why do you lay so much stress on our writing everything to you? Can't we pray to you and ask for help? Isn't it as good as writing?

Not writing means trying to conceal. That is a suggestion of the vital.

2 August 1937

*

The Mother is positively opposed to your suspending all correspondence with me, she thinks it is very dangerous at this stage and juncture of your sadhana. I am not, myself also, at ease about it. You have entered into a phase and adopted a method which may be very effective, — solitude, direct pressure for immediate realisation etc. but which can involve also serious risks. We consider it necessary at this time that you should keep me informed of what is going on in you and what you are doing. A general support and protection may not be sufficient at such a time or in such a passage. It is not indispensable to write every day, but some report of these things is necessary so that I may intervene at once if that is needed or give an immediate help or an indication or direction when that is advisable. Since you have turned to me as your guru, and that quite apart from the question of identity with the Divine, and since you acknowledge your inability to go to the end unaided — very few have been able to do that, — it would be illogical and perilous to attempt to take the kingdom of heaven by violence alone and in the dark. I am always after you with my force, even though you don't feel it, but that may not be sufficient at this time.

Suitable Subjects for Correspondence

Is it possible for you to give a private reply to questions on political matters?

It depends on the circumstances. I have for a long time past eschewed politics entirely and I could not answer questions of a political character. Apart from that I avoid usually racial and religious questions, especially if they are controversial, confining myself to things of a spiritual or cultural character (literature, art etc.). There too I write almost entirely to disciples or seekers of the Yoga.

1 February 1936

Useful and Useless Letters

What is meant by vital nature?

These are questions that anybody in the Asram could answer. This and questions such as “what is meant by faithfulness”. It is much better if you get these things explained to you by someone in Gujarati so that you can understand and be able to apply your own understanding whenever needed. If I have to answer philosophically, it would take ten pages for each question and you would understand nothing. Otherwise I have to answer off-hand and such an answer also will be of no use to you. You can ask practical questions about your own experiences and I will try to answer.

19 June 1933

*

Would it be all right if I asked questions pertaining to the *Arya*?

It is not possible for me to write answers to such questions as they would have to be very long — the *Arya* was written so that people might get the answers there. I can't write them all over again.

31 January 1934

*

It is better to write what is in one's mind. Some people simply write about their experiences (dreams, visions, descents of force),

but nothing precise about the movements of their mind and vital with the result that these remain pretty much as they were and there is no harmony between the inner and the outer being and as a result the inner also does not get its full or proper development.

17 June 1934

*

I feel no interest in sadhana or even in the outer work. Whatever help or protection you send stops before it can enter me. What is the reason for all that?

The reason is quite clear from what you write in the next para. There is something in the consciousness that wanted the letters and answers not simply for help in sadhana but as a personal satisfaction with egoistic elements in it — pride, jealousy of others (X, Y), desire to be equal with them, demand for special consideration etc. Also it wanted nice, pleasing and elaborate answers. All that is the usual wrong attitude of the vital which is the stumbling-block for so many sadhaks and prevents true psychic love from developing, replacing it by the vital kind full of demand, ego, jealousy, revolt etc. — and it has been the ruin of some. All that you had thrown out of the higher parts, and quieted it elsewhere, but it remained sticking somewhere and when correspondence was suspended, the hostile forces took advantage of the fact that you were not allowed to write every day as before to raise up these feelings and you did not repel them with sufficient force to put an end to the attack. Hence they continue.

25 February 1935

*

I find great difficulty in understanding what is the difference between the inner mind and the vital, physical and outer minds. Also I want to know what is the physical consciousness and what are the different places of these things. If these things have forms but are not material, how am I to get the idea of them?

An answer would mean writing several essays for which I have no time.

You [*Sri Aurobindo's secretary*] can tell him that it would be a waste of time to think of these things now — it is only when experience comes that it would be possible to distinguish the different parts.

Quietness and calm cannot come all at once — always at the beginning thoughts come and the mind interferes with its activity. One has to persevere, to detach oneself from the mental activity till one feels oneself as separate from it. 29 July 1936

*

You can write whatever is in your mind — but these are outward things and you should not allow outward things to interfere with your inner opening.

Not Always Possible to Answer

I answer letters whenever I consider it necessary; I cannot bind myself to answer every letter I receive. If I did, I would have to be writing all the 24 hours without time for rest or meals or anything else! 28 April 1932

*

You can write whenever you like. But I told you at the beginning I cannot answer all letters — if I did that I would have to work all the 24 hours at nothing else. 15 April 1933

*

Many times questions come to the mind like: “What is the Divine?” Is it not better to write them to you?

Provided you do not expect me to answer always. People write to me not for getting mental information or answering questions but to lay before me their experiences and difficulties and get my help. When it is necessary, I answer questions, but I cannot be doing it all the time. 26 June 1933

*

Continue to write letters giving your experiences and your condition from time to time. Do not however expect an answer always. When it is needed, I will answer. 22 August 1933

*

If an answer is very necessary, I give it even if there is no time. If there is time, I give an answer often even if it is not indispensable.

19 October 1933

*

I told you at the beginning that I will not be able to answer everything you write. You are quite mistaken in thinking that I answer everything other people write in their books. Out of the fifty or more books I get and the sixty or more letters I pass over more than half without any answer and even so it takes me 11 hours to deal with all that correspondence. The other sadhaks do not stop writing on that account — they know that it brings help to them to write. 22 November 1933

*

For the past six years I have not sent you any communications. I would now like to do so once or twice a week: sadhana, experiences, etc.

It is just the time when I am trying to diminish letters and books, so that the Mother has some time to rest at night and myself some time to do the real work instead of passing day and night in sending and answering correspondence. This is not the time to add fresh correspondence.

Moreover it is not worthwhile sending experiences merely to ask whether they are true. The truth has to be found out by their effect in liberating the consciousness and changing the nature, ridding you of ego etc. Observe that in yourself and it will be sufficient. 5 December 1935

*

When what you write is correct, I say nothing — when it is your

physical mind that brings in wrong ideas, I correct.

10 May 1936

*

Sir, you say you keep no files, throw none of my regal documents into the waste paper basket; where then is the last dream-hewn epistle flown?

You do not make the necessary distinctions. I said I don't have any file of your immortal poems, I said nothing about your more mortal epistles.

18 June 1938

*

How is it, Lord, that even the mortal epistles have joyously returned without one blemish? I take it that there was nothing in them to comment upon?

Yes? I was under the impression that I had decorated them with my indecipherable lotus handwriting.

20 June 1938

Time and Correspondence

You do not realise that I have to spend 12 hours over the ordinary correspondence, numerous reports, etc. I work 3 hours in the afternoon and the whole night up to 6 in the morning over this. So if I get a long letter with many questions I may not be able to answer it all at once. To get into such a disturbance over it and want to throw off the Yoga is quite unreasonable.

17 June 1933

*

It is true that the flow of notebooks and letters is becoming so heavy that time is insufficient to deal with them. Mother favoured the movement, but it is becoming excessive in proportions. The best thing would be for you to write *briefly* each thing you have to say — then you can write every day — otherwise it is better to write from time to time, say twice a week. But the first way would be best; if things are briefly and clearly said,

then there will be time.

25 June 1933

*

The books and letters are not going to be discontinued — but I shall have to take one day off in the week (Sunday). The volume of the correspondence is becoming enormous and it takes me all the night and a good part of the day — apart from the work done separately by the Mother who has also to work the greater part of the night in addition to her day's work. It is this that makes the pranam later and later, for we do not finish till 7.30 or after. Also much work falls in arrears and piles up and many things that have their importance have had to be discontinued. Some relief is necessary. If all the sadhaks were more discreet, it would be better. But this does not apply to you, for you keep always within the limits.

19 December 1933

*

I have no time for anything just now—I have become a correspondence-reading and answering machine. I hope to make up when things are a little easier.

19 August 1934

*

Absolutely no time tonight. I have been dealing with correspondence since 9.30 p.m. (to say nothing of the afternoon) and am likely to have to go on till 7.00 a.m. or longer.

5 January 1935

*

Someone told me that X is translating Saratchandra's novel into English, half of which is corrected by you. It amounts to this: that X is making you translate somebody's novel instead of himself translating *Arya*, which would be more reasonable. What ordeals for you to pass through! Perhaps the person who remarked in a London paper that you had written five hundred books was not quite wrong; by this time your letters to sadhaks would make three or four books for each of them and if to these are added your poems, translations and other writings the total would not be less than five hundred.

The idea of X translating *Arya* makes the hair stand on end! It would be much easier for me to write 500 books. Perhaps I have done so — if all I have scribbled is to be taken into account against me. But as most of it will not see the light of day — at least of public day, I may still escape establishing the record in book-production.

3 February 1935

*

About my essay, you could read the first two pages one day, another pair of pages the next, and so on — if you believe that reading it at a stretch would interfere with your daily work.

I have had to suppress all extra work for the last 2 or 3 days and there is a mountain of arrears awaiting me. If my eye is all right tomorrow, I shall see if anything can be done, but it is not very likely.

9 March 1935

*

I am surprised and sad to hear that you can still be affected by these physical ailments!

What I am surprised at is that I have any eye left at all after the last two or three years of half-day and all night work. The difficulty for resting is that the sadhaks have begun pouring paper again without waiting for the withdrawal of the notice — not all of course, but many. And there is a stack of outside correspondence still unanswered! I am persuading my eye, but it is still red and sulky and reproachful. Revolted, what? Thinks too much is imposed on it and no attention paid to its needs, desires, preferences etc. Will have to reason with it for a day or two longer.

How I wish, as a medical man, I mean, I could enforce absolute rest to the eyes and issue a bulletin.

[*Underlining* “*absolute rest*”:] It does not exist in this world — not even in the Himalayas — except of course for the inner being which can always be in absolute rest.

9 March 1935

*

I have today fifty letters each 2000 pages long — of course this is not a mathematically accurate statement, but it expresses the impression they make on me — so excuse brevity in my answer to your length. 20 July 1935

*

I couldn't finish copying the poem I want to send to you. Perhaps I will send it tomorrow morning. Since you "sleep" up to 12 a.m., I hear, you will in any case see it after 3 p.m.

It depends on the time I go to sleep. If it is at 9 or 10 a.m. I may sleep beyond 12. As for poetry, I see it only at night. There is no time in the afternoon except for the letters. 31 August 1935

*

No time, no time! It is going to be an eternal problem with you, it seems! After the reduction of correspondence — cutting of the evening mail — it leaves you absolutely free for other things. I suppose you are working at your *Savitri*.

Where is the reduction of correspondence? I have to be occupied with correspondence from 8.0 to 12 p.m. (minus one hour), again after bath and meal from 2.30 to 7 a.m. All that apart from afternoon work. And still much is left undone. And you think I can write *Savitri*? You evidently believe in miracles!

23 January 1936

*

Do you really mean that till 7 a.m. your pen goes on at an aeroplanic speed? Then it must be due more to outside correspondence. I don't see many books or envelopes now on the staircase. Is the supramental freedom from these things not in view?

Your not seeing unfortunately does not dematerialise them. Books are mainly for the Mother and there is sometimes a mountain, but letters galore. On some days only there is a lull and then I can do something. 24 January 1936

*

What has happened to my typescript?² Hibernating?

My dear sir, if you saw me nowadays with my nose to paper from afternoon to morning, deciphering, deciphering, writing, writing, writing, even the rocky heart of a disciple would be touched and you would not talk about typescripts and hibernation. I have given up (for the present at least) the attempt to minimise the cataract of correspondence; I accept my fate like Ramana Maharshi with the plague of Prasads and admirers, but at least don't add anguish to annihilation by talking about typescripts!

11 March 1936

*

But concentration on "real work"? Good Lord, you do that from 9 or 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. God alone knows what you do then.

What is this transcendental rubbish?

Perhaps you send Force to Germany, Abyssinia, etc., or make a leap to the Supramental?

That is not my real work. Who except the devil is going to give force to Germany? Do you think I am in league with Hitler and his howling tribe of Nazis?

We speculate and speculate. Next you concentrate from 6 p.m. to 11 or 12. Still not enough?

Who gave you this wonderful programme? Invented it all by your ingenious self? From 4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. afternoon correspondence, meal, newspapers. Evening correspondence from 7 or 7.30 to 9. From 9 to 10 p.m. concentration. 10 to 12 correspondence, 12 to 2.30 bath, meal, rest. 2.30 to 5 or 6 a.m. correspondence unless I am lucky. Where is the sufficient time for concentration?

4 April 1936

*

² See page 416, footnote 6 and page 420, footnote 8.—Ed.

I fear my answers are scrappy as well as illegible, but this has been also a fell day (one letter 36 pages vernacular, 2 others each 8 pages of foolscap, others less in size (4, 2, 1 etc.) but ample in number — and this is no-correspondence period!) I have had to race against the old man Time. 19 August 1936

*

I request you to clarify certain points in your letter if you have the time tonight. If not, I shall have to disturb your Sunday slumber.

Excuse me. I don't sleep on Sundays; I climb mountains of outside letters which have accumulated for want of weekday time. 30 August 1936

*

God knows what you are busy with now, with the correspondence also reduced.

Who says it is reduced? For a few days, it was — now it has increased to half again its former size and every morning I have to race to get it done in time — and don't get it done in time. Thousand things are accumulating; inner work delayed. 17 September 1936

*

I had to be careful to view this case from all aspects. A considerable drain on the mind might affect the cerebro-spinal system, besides affecting the secretions in consequence. And if one heats up the brain-box in order to reach the Creators or connect up with them, a certain amount of steam has to be let off.

Good Lord! then we shall all “have to be very careful”. Myself for instance am putting a terrible drain on the mind by answering tons of correspondence which can't be good for my spine or for the other things either. But it gives me a great idea — why shouldn't I take a medical stop-work from you and declare a six months' holiday? But I am afraid, if I did, I would misuse it

in writing poetry myself, not to speak of trying to connect up with the supramental creators for the benefit of an unprepared humanity. So it is no use. 21 October 1936

*

Got your typescript, but so much overwhelmed by correspondence that no time to answer at any length — so kept. This only to remove any apprehension of disappearance on the stairs. Excuse semi-telegraphic style; when Time presses, verbs and pronouns disappear. 4 April 1937

*

Have you stopped the correspondence because of your eye-trouble or for concentration? You will understand that I don't write for the sake of writing, but for a support from you. Please give me a line in reply, after which I won't bother you any more.

Apart from the eye-question, I have stopped because there are certain things I have positively to get done before I can take up any regular correspondence work again. If I start now, I shall probably have to stop again soon for a long long time. Better get things finished now — that's the idea. You must hold on somehow for the present. 23 November 1937

*

It is time to put up a notice stopping the sending in of correspondence up to the end of August. The Mother must be free during this time at least and, for myself, there is no least chance of a book for the A.P.H. [*Arya Publishing House*] if some measure of that kind is not taken. 29 July 1938

The Importance of Brevity

You have done well to write more briefly. When you wrote ten times over the same thing, it wasted your time in writing and mine in reading. I had to glance through hastily and try to catch the meaning. Now I can read carefully and see clearly what you

mean — it has much more force like that.

*

In future when you have long letters to write, you should write not in pencil but in ink — as I find it difficult to read 10 or 12 pages so closely written in pencil in Gujarati; it has taken me 2 or 3 days to manage to read your letter. If it is only a short letter, then you can write in pencil, though ink is always the best. Also, you should write in separate letters about sadhana and about other ordinary matters to which you want an immediate answer — such as this question about X and your studies. You can read with X since he is willing.

11 December 1932

*

I don't mind your correspondence. It is a relief. But when people write four letters a day in small hand closely running to some 10 pages without a gap anywhere and one gets 20 letters in the afternoon and forty at night (of course not all like that, but still!) it becomes a little too too.

5 February 1935

Answers Not Meant Equally for All

I should like to say, in passing, that it is not always safe to apply practically to oneself what has been written for another. Each sadhak is a case by himself and one cannot always or often take a mental rule and apply it rigidly to all who are practising the Yoga. What I wrote to X was meant for X and fits his case; but supposing a sadhak with a different (coarse) vital nature unlike X's were in question, I might say to him something that might seem the very opposite, "Sit tight on your lower vital propensities, throw out your greed for food, — it is standing as a serious obstacle in your way: it would be better for you to be ascetic in your habits than vulgarly animal in this part as you are now." To one who is not taking enough food or sleep and rest in the eagerness of his spirit, I might say "Eat more, sleep more, rest more; do not overstrain yourself or bring an ascetic spirit into your tapasya." To another with the opposite excess I

might speak a contrary language. Each sadhak has a nature or turn of nature of his own and the movement of the Yoga of two sadhaks, even when there are some resemblances between them, is seldom exactly the same.

Again in applying some truth that is laid down it is necessary to give it its precise meaning. It is quite true that “in our path the attitude is not one of forceful suppression, *nigraha*”; it is not coercion according to a mental rule or principle on an unpersuaded vital being. But that does not mean either that the vital has to go its own way and do according to its fancy. It is not coercion that is the way, but an inner change, in which the lower vital is led, enlightened and transformed by a higher consciousness which is detached from the objects of vital desire. But in order to let this grow an attitude has to be taken in which a decreasing importance has to be attached to the satisfaction of the claims of the lower vital, a certain mastery, *samyama*, being above any clamour of these things, limiting such things as food to their proper place. The lower vital has its place, it is not to be crushed or killed, but it has to be changed, “caught hold of by both ends”, at the upper end a mastery and control, at the lower end a right use. The main thing is to get rid of attachment and desire; it is then that an entirely right use becomes possible. By what actual steps, in what order, through what processus this mastery of the lower vital shall come depends on the nature, the stress of development, the actual movement of the Yoga.

It is not the eating or the not eating of *mohan bhoga* that is the important point — (actually when I gave X what you call his permit, I was thinking of X and not of anybody else). What is important is how that or any of these food matters affects you, what is your inner condition and how any such indulgence, cooking or eating, stands or does not stand in the way of its progress and change, what is best for you as a Yogic discipline. One rule for you I can lay down, “Do not do, say or think anything which you would want to conceal from the Mother.” And that answers the objections that rose within you — from your vital, is it not? — against bringing “these petty things” to the Mother’s notice. Why should you think that the Mother

would be bothered by these things or regard them as petty? If *all* the life is to be Yoga, what is there that can be called petty or of no importance? Even if the Mother does not answer, to have brought any matter of your action and self-development before her in the right spirit means to have put it under her protection, in the light of the Truth, under the rays of the Power that is working for the transformation — for immediately those rays begin to play and to act on the thing brought to her notice. Anything within that advises you not to do it when the spirit in you moves you to do it, may very well be a device of the vital to avoid the ray of the Light and the working of the Force. It may also be observed that if you open yourself to the Mother by putting the movements of any part of you under her observation, that of itself creates a relation, a personal closeness with her other than that which her general, silent or not directly invited action maintains with all the sadhaks.

All this, of course, if you feel ready for this openness, if the spirit moves you to lay what is in you bare before her. For it is then that it is fruitful — when it comes from within and is spontaneous and true.

18 May 1932

*

It is not a fact that all I write is meant equally for everybody. That assumes that everybody is alike and there is no difference between sadhak and sadhak. If it were so everybody would advance alike and have the same experiences and take the same time to progress by the same steps and stages. It is not so at all. In this case the general rules were laid down for one who had made no progress — but everything depends on how the Yoga comes to each person.

26 July 1934

Showing Letters to Others

Occasionally I show a letter from you to some sympathetic friend. Perhaps there may be a little egoistic sense of display, so I want your order on this.

It is better not to show. Apart from the possibility of display

it dissipates the force of the thing and brings in other currents from outside.

13 February 1933

*

It is always a mistake to let another know what we have written privately to you on personal things, for it is likely, as you see, for it to be misinterpreted. It is because we have had so much experience of that that we prefer that personal things should be kept private. Formerly we used to allow people to show if they wanted to, but we found that even the simplest and clearest things were liable to mental constructions and misconceptions, so we have become more prudent. But of course what you quote from what I said was in itself quite harmless.

9 November 1935

Circulation of Letters

It does not at all concern the sadhaks to know to whom the messages are addressed,³ and it is inadmissible to base upon them reflections against the character of the addressee or to assume that he has gone wrong in his sadhana. I write often to confirm and encourage and not only to correct or reprove. In fact, I do not quite know why these communications should be called “messages”; for they are answers to questions or to letters, and only so much is circulated as is considered apposite or of general interest or use from the point of view of sadhana.

Obviously, curiosity and gossip and wrong imaginations cannot be “helpful to sadhana”. The messages are not meant as food for gossip, but to give the sadhaks indications that can be of use to them in their sadhana. If they misuse them in this way, it is their own loss.

8 March 1932

*

I would like to have your permission to give the typed copy of your messages that I got from X to a binder in the town.

³ *Before Sri Aurobindo's letters began to be published, typed copies of some of them were circulated among members of the Ashram. These were sometimes referred to as “messages”. — Ed.*

As for the typed copy, I must defer sanction till I have gone through a copy of the same which is with me. I may say at once, however, that such copies ought first to be verified by comparison with the original in Nolini's possession, for I find that the one with me is full of gross errors. 19 September 1932

*

We are asked to take our files of "Communications of Sri Aurobindo" to the library for revision. Should we also take letters that are personal?

You are not asked to take any letters written to you.

It is the collections that were asked for of messages etc. — as it is found that things unauthorised, inaccurate, not mine are often included and afterwards they get copied and end by being circulated even outside the Asram. Also things that are quite private or are not intended to circulate leak out in this way, since some people are unscrupulous in copying (like X who took things he was asked not to take). A control and sifting is necessary therefore, so that we may know what there is in these collections. 9 March 1933

*

[*Sri Aurobindo's secretary:*] Many have the "Bhowanipore File" — letters written to people connected with the Bhowanipore circle.⁴ Is it to be withdrawn? There are also collections of letters before 1925 — genuine, but with names and other things of a personal character — though containing useful instructions on Yoga. It would be safe, I think, to withdraw them — one cannot guarantee the correctness of the copies.

It is not necessary to withdraw anything. But those who want to keep these things must keep for themselves and not lend to visitors or newcomers — except by special permission for the messages not exportable. There will be three categories:

⁴ See *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO*, pp. 332–81.

(1) Letters prior to 1927 and personal letters (not circulated as messages) of any date.

(2) Messages authorised for circulation here or outside. (These can be freely shown to all newcomers or visitors with a proviso that permission must be given for copying or possession of copies to outsiders interested in this Yoga. Copies cannot be given to outsiders not interested in this Yoga.)

(3) Messages not authorised for circulation outside. (These can be shown or lent to all resident sadhaks but to visitors only with permission. Copies cannot be issued to outsiders.)

Therefore all who want to have permission to lend their copies must keep separate files for these categories.

11 March 1933

*

Can “messages authorised for circulation here or outside”⁵ be shown to people living outside the Asram?

Only disciples — those practising Yoga.

10 August 1933

*

A visitor writes on behalf of a professor living outside, who requests permission to see a copy of the messages that outsiders are allowed to see. The professor is known to X.

I do not quite understand — we do not supply copies of messages. If people want to take copies of the messages that are allowed to be sent outside, they ask for permission. Is it that X has to take the copy for which we gave permission? If so, you might speak to him about it.

27 August 1935

⁵ See the preceding letter, point (2). — Ed.

Sri Aurobindo's Force

Concreteness of the Force

The invisible Force producing tangible results both inward and outward is the whole meaning of the Yogic consciousness. Your question about Yoga bringing merely a feeling of Power without any result was really very strange. Who would be satisfied with such a meaningless hallucination and call it Power? If we had not had thousands of experiences showing that the Power within could alter the mind, develop its powers, add new ones, bring in new ranges of knowledge, master the vital movements, change the character, influence men and things, control the conditions and functionings of the body, work as a concrete dynamic Force on other forces, modify events etc. etc., we would not speak of it as we do. Moreover, it is not only in its results but in its movements that the Force is tangible and concrete. When I speak of feeling Force or Power, I do not mean simply having a vague sense of it, but feeling it concretely and consequently being able to direct it, manipulate it, watch its movement, be conscious of its mass and intensity and in the same way of that of other perhaps opposing forces; all these things are possible and usual by the development of Yoga.

It is not, unless it is supramental Force, a Power that acts without conditions and limits. The conditions and limits under which Yoga or sadhana has to be worked out are not arbitrary or capricious; they arise from the nature of things. These including the will, receptivity, assent, self-opening and surrender of the sadhak have to be respected by the Yoga-force — unless it receives a sanction from the Supreme to override everything and get something done — but that sanction is sparingly given. It is only if the supramental Power came fully down, not merely sent its influences through the Overmind, that things could be very radically altered in this respect — and that is why my main

effort is directed towards that object — for then the sanction would not be rare! For the Law of the Truth would be at work not constantly balanced by the law of the Ignorance.

Still the Yoga-force is always tangible and concrete in the way I have described and has tangible results. But it is invisible — not like a blow given or the rush of a motor car knocking somebody down which the physical senses can at once perceive. How is the mere physical mind to know that it is there and working? By its results? but how can it know that the results were that of the Yoga-force and not of something else? One of two things it must do. Either it must allow the consciousness to go inside, to become aware of inner things, to believe in and experience the invisible and the supraphysical, and then by experience, by the opening of new capacities it becomes conscious of these forces and can see, follow and use their workings just as the scientist uses the unseen forces of Nature. Or one must have faith and watch and open oneself and then it will begin to see how things happen; it will notice that when the Force was called in, there began after a time to be a result, — then repetitions, more repetitions, more clear and tangible results, increasing frequency, increasing consistency of results, a feeling and awareness of the Force at work — until the experience becomes daily, regular, normal, complete. These are the two main methods, one internal, working from in outward, the other external, working from outside and calling the inner Force out till it penetrates and is sensible in the exterior consciousness. But neither can be done if one insists always on the extrovert attitude, the external concrete only and refuses to join to it the internal concrete — or if the physical Mind at every step raises a dance of doubts which refuses to allow the nascent experience to develop. Even the scientist carrying out a new experiment would never succeed if he allowed his mind to behave in that way.

When the Mother said it was just a trick of reversing the consciousness, she meant that — that instead of allowing always the external mind to interfere and assert its own ordinary customary point of view, it should turn itself round, admit that things may work from in outwards, and keep itself sufficiently

quiet to see that developing and being done. For then an inner mind shows itself which is capable of following and being the instrument of the invisible Forces.

It is not that you are incapable of it, for it was several times on the point of being done. But your external mind has interfered always, questioning, doubting, asking for something more external, not waiting for the movement to continue, for the inward to externalise itself and make itself concrete. That is why I object to this worship of Doubt. It is not that I used not to have doubts myself more formidable than any you have ever thought of—but I did not allow them to interfere with the development of my experience. I let it continue until it had sufficient body for me to know what it was and what it could bring me.

2 August 1932

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Highly delighted (unyogically though) to learn you had put so much force for the sale of my gramophone records! But highly intrigued too. What is this force? A sweet blessing that all should be smooth in this rough world? Or is it a conscious way of directing a control, as one controls the organisation of a music choir? I mean does this force mean concrete business, as the scheming of a schemer does? I ask this naïve question since your force always puzzles me.

Well, I made the mistake of “thinking aloud with my pen” when I wrote that unfortunate sentence about the force I had put for the success of the gramophone records. As my whole action consists of the use of force or forces—except of course my writing answers to correspondence which is concrete; but even that I am made to do by and with a force, otherwise I can assure you I would not and could not do it—I sometimes am imprudent enough to make this mistake. It is foolish to do so because a spiritual force or any other is obviously something invisible and its action is invisible, so how can anyone believe in it? Only the results are seen and how is one to know that the results are the result of the Force? It is not concrete.

But I am myself rather puzzled by your instances of the

concrete. How are the schemes of a schemer concrete? Something happens and you tell me it was the result of a schemer's scheme. But the schemer's scheme was a product of his consciousness and not at all concrete; it was in his mind and another fellow's mind is not concrete to me unless I am a Yogi or a thought-reader. I can only infer from some things he said or did that he had a scheme, things which I have not myself seen or heard and which are therefore not to me concrete. So how can I accept or believe in the scheme of the schemer? And even if I saw or heard, I am not bound to believe that it was a scheme or that which happened was the result of a scheme. He may have acted on a chain of impulses and what happened may have been the result of something quite different or itself purely accidental. Again how do you control the music choir? By words and signs etc., which are of course concrete? But what made you use those words and signs and why did they produce a control? and why did the other fellows do what you told them? what made them do that? It was something in your and their consciousness, I suppose; but that is not concrete. Again, scientists talk about electricity which is, it seems, an energy, a force in action and it seems that everything has been done by this energy, my own physical being is constituted by it and it is at the base of all my mental and life energies. But that is not concrete to me. I never felt my being constituted by electricity, I cannot feel it working out my thoughts and life-processes — so how can I believe in it or accept it? The force I use is not a sweet blessing — a blessing (silent) certainly is not concrete, like a stone or a kick or other things seizable by the senses; it is not even a mere will saying within me “let it be so” — that also is not concrete. It is a force of consciousness directed towards or on persons and things and happenings — but obviously a force of consciousness is not seizable by the physical senses, so not concrete. I may feel it and the person acted on may feel it or may not feel it, but as the feeling is internal and not external and perceivable by others, it cannot be called concrete and nobody is bound to accept or believe in it. For instance, if I cure someone (without medicines) of a fever and send him fresh and full of strength to his work,

all in the course of a single night, still why should any third person believe or accept that it was my force that did it? It may have been Nature or his imagination that made him cure (three cheers for those concrete things, imagination and Nature!) — or the whole thing happened of itself. So, you see the case is hopeless, it can't be proved at all — at all. 6 December 1935

*

Is the force you “put on me” concrete?

Concrete? what do you mean by “concrete”? It has its own concreteness; it can take a form (like a stream for instance) of which one is aware and can send it quite concretely in whatever “direction” or on whatever object one chooses.

In one of your letters to me you wrote: “A Yoga consciousness or spiritual consciousness which has no power or force in it, may not be dead or unreal but it is evidently something inert and without effect or consequence. Equally a man who sets out to be a Yogi or Guru and has no spiritual consciousness or no power in his spiritual consciousness — a Yoga force or spiritual force — is making a false claim and is either a charlatan or a self-deluded imbecile; still more is he so if having no spiritual force he claims to have made a path others can follow. If Yoga is a reality, if spirituality is anything better than a delusion, there must be such a thing as Yoga force or spiritual force.”

That is a general statement about the inherent power of spirituality. What I was speaking of was a willed use of subtle force (it may be spiritual or mental or vital) to secure a particular result at some point in the world. Just as there are waves of unseen physical forces (cosmic waves etc.) or currents of electricity, so there are mind waves, thought currents, waves of emotion, e.g. anger, sorrow etc. which go out and affect others without their knowing whence they come or that they come at all — they only feel the result. One who has the occult or inner senses awake can feel them coming and invading him; influences good or bad can propagate themselves in that way; that can happen without

intention, automatically, but also a deliberate use can be made of them. There can also be a purposeful generation of force, spiritual or other. There can be too the use of the effective will or idea, which is not concrete in that sense, but is all the same effective.

6 February 1943

No Miraculous Force

I tried to convince X that it was your force that cured Y. But X said, “What about instances in which the Divine Force has failed? Why does it succeed in some cases and not in others?”

The mistake is to think that it must be either a miraculous force or else none. There is no miraculous force and I do not deal in miracles. The word Divine here is out of place, if it is taken as an always omnipotently acting Power. Yogic Force is then better; it simply means a higher Consciousness using its power, a spiritual and supraphysical force acting on the physical world directly. One has to train the instrument to be a channel of this force; it works also according to a certain law and under certain conditions. The Divine does not work arbitrarily or as a thaumaturge; He acts upon the world along the lines that have been fixed by the nature and purpose of the world we live in — by an increasing action of the thing that has to manifest, not by a sudden change or disregard of all the conditions of the work to be done. If it were not so, there would be no need of Yoga or time or human action or instruments or of a Master and disciples or of a Descent or anything else. It could simply be a matter for the तथास्तु [*tathāstu*] and nothing more. But that would be irrational if you like and worse than irrational, — childish. This does not mean that interventions, things apparently miraculous, do not happen — they do. But all cannot be like that.

I told X, “I don’t see how you can deny the reality of this Force. Were you able to work with such vigour before you came here?” He said, “Yes, I could work a lot, so much so that people were astounded. Was that Sri Aurobindo’s Force?”

What is Sri Aurobindo's force? It is not a personal property of this body or mind. It is a higher Force used by me or acting through me.

“And Tagore, Lenin and other greats. Is the Divine Force working in them too?”

Of course it is a Divine Force, for there is only one force acting in the world, but it acts according to the nature of the instrument. Yogic Force is different from others because it is a special power of the spiritual consciousness.

I continued, “It may not be Sri Aurobindo's Force, but how can I exclude the possibility of a Divine Force behind? Because one is an atheist, it doesn't mean the Divine is undivine against him!”

There was an obvious intervention in the case he speaks of — but the agent or process could only be determined if one knew all the circumstances. Such interventions are frequent; e.g. my uncle's daughter was at her last gasp, the doctors had gone away telling him there was no more to be done. He simply sat down to pray — as soon as he had finished, the death symptoms were suspended, the girl recovered without farther treatment (it was a case of typhoid fever). Several cases of that kind have come within my personal observation.

X concluded, “Oh, if you say everything is being done at the divine impulsion, I have nothing to say. But you can't say that I am working because Sri Aurobindo is constantly at my back!”
What can I say against this?

I am not very particular about that. It is a personal question and depends on X's feeling. I certainly put force on him for the development and success of his poetry — about the rest I don't want to say anything.

I have marginalised on the Force¹ — to write more com-

¹ *Sri Aurobindo wrote the above answers in the margins of the correspondent's notebook. — Ed.*

pletely would need more time than I have tonight. Of course, if it depended on a few cases of illness, it would be a thing of no certitude or importance. If the “Force” were a mere freak or miracle, it would be equally trivial and unimportant, even if well-attested. It is only of importance if it is part of the consciousness and the life used at all times, not only for illness but for whatever one has to do. It manifests in various ways — as a strength of the consciousness evenly supporting the life and action, as a power put forth for this or that object of the outward life, as a special Force from above drawn down to raise and increase the scope of the Consciousness and its height and transform it not by a miraculous, but by a serious, steady, organised action following certain definite lines. Its effectiveness as well as its action is determined first by its own height and intensity or that of the plane from which it comes (it may be from any plane ranging from the Higher Mind upward to the Overmind), partly by the condition of the objects or the field in which it acts, partly by the movement which it has to effect, general or particular. It is neither a magician’s wand nor a child’s bauble, but something one has to observe, understand, develop, master before one can use it aright or else — for few can use it except in a limited manner — be its instrument. This is only a preface.

6 February 1935

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Our idea was that the Divine is always omnipotent, independent of all conditions and not limited by the particular plane from which he acts. But you give so many clauses under which the Force can operate successfully! X then seems to be right when he says that if one has not got a particular possibility in him the Divine cannot make him develop in that direction. Pushing this a little farther, I would say that one must have a talent or capacity as a nucleus in him for the spiritual development he is going to have later. One must have it, the Divine cannot make anything out of शून्यम् [*śūnyam*].

What is शून्यम्? It is out of the silence that all things originated. All is contained in what you call Shunyam.

But then how is it that you wasted so much Force on Y to no avail? Is it that you did not use the supramental Force, which alone can work irresistibly without the necessity of adapting itself to existing conditions?

Certainly, supramental Force was not the force used in that case, it was mental-spiritual. In such cases the object of the Force has always the right to say No. I put the force on him because he said he wanted to change, but his vital refused — as it had the right to do. If nothing in him had asked for the change, I would not have tried it, but simply put another force on him for another purpose.

You make a distinction between the Yogic Force and the Divine Force; but is not the former an outcome of the latter?

Of course, but all force is the Divine Force. It is only the egoism of the individual which takes it as his own. He uses it, but it is not his.

By the way, Z did not question the reality of your Force for his poetry or other literary activities, but he said he could not admit that all his activities were permeated by your Force, because he used to work with great vigour and energy even before he came here.

Of course not — all the activities cannot be that. It is only in the Yoga realisation that one feels all one's activities to be from the one source — something from above or the Yogashakti or the Guru Shakti or the Cosmic Force or whatever it may be (all names for the same thing in different formations) driving the whole consciousness and being.

Success in life outside is dependent on different things, on one's own energy and the environmental stimulus.

What is one's own energy after all? You mean Nature's energy in you? It may, in new conditions, remain extant in some things, develop in others, fail or change in others. One can't make a rule.

Looking at myself, I wonder how a vitalistic man like me can pass his days in cellular imprisonment without any suffocation!

That kind of change happens.

One may say that a tamasic, indolent man can't be activated by the Divine to that extent.

Of course he can.

Am I really wrong?

No, but there are many sides or aspects to a question.

After the "preface" [p. 486] is any chapter likely to follow?

Perhaps in some weeks or some months or some centuries the chapter may follow! But I used the word preface to characterise the nature of what I had written, not in a prophetic sense.

There are two things — Yoga-Force in its original totality which is that of the Divine spiritual force, always potentially all-powerful, and Yoga-Force doing its work under the conditions of the evolutionary world here.

It is not a question of "can" or "cannot" at all. All is possible, but all is not licit — except by a recognisable process; the Divine Power itself imposes on its action limits, processes, obstacles, vicissitudes. It is possible that an ass may be changed into an elephant, but it is not done, at least physically, because of the lack of a process. Psychologically such changes do take place. I have myself in my time changed cowards into heroes and that can be done even without Yogashakti, merely by an inner force. How can you say what is latent in man or what is incurably absent? I have developed many things by Yoga, often even without any will or effort to do so, which were not in my original nature, I may even say that I have transformed my whole nature and it is in many respects the opposite of what I began with. There can be no question about the power to change, to develop, to awaken faculties that were not there before; this

power exists already, but it can be raised to an acme by being lifted to the spiritual plane.

The force put on the gentleman you speak of at least made it necessary for him to change if he remained here. He had no will in the vital to change and so did not remain here but went to his fate.

The rest is for the indefinable future. One day I shall certainly try to explain methodically and by examples what the spiritual force is; how it has worked on the earth-plane, how it acts and under what conditions — conditions not rigidly fixed, but plastic and mutable.

7 February 1935

Receptivity to the Force

In one of your letters you have written about being “sufficiently open” to receive the Force. What did you mean by this?

I mean simply a certain receptivity in the consciousness — mind, vital, physical, whichever is needed. The Mother or myself send a force. If there is no openness, the force may be thrown back or return (unless we put a great force which it is not always advisable to do) as from an obstruction or resistance: if there is some openness, the result may be partial or slow; if there is the full openness or receptivity, then the result may be immediate. Of course there are things that cannot be removed all at once, being an old part of the nature, but with receptivity these also can be more effectively and rapidly dealt with. Some people are so open that even by writing they get free before the book or letter reaches us.

8 June 1933

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You said, in regard to that Spanish General, “I put the right force on him and he wakes up and, with his military knowledge and capacity, does the right thing” [p. 447]. Exactly, if he has these things, he can receive your *right* force.

It does not follow. Another man may have the knowledge but

receive nothing. If he receives, his knowledge and capacity help the Force to work out the details.

It seems that though you have no patent or latent military capacity . . .

Not in this life.

your Force has, and it wakes up in the man the right judgments etc. This is all a mystery beyond my ken.

May I ask why? Your idea is that either I must inspire him specifically in every detail, making a mere automaton of him, or, if I don't do that, I can do nothing with him? What is this stupid mechanical notion of things?

The Force having military knowledge, poetic power, healing virtues, etc., the embodiment of the Force also must have the latent general, poet, medico, etc. — sounds strange to me otherwise.

Because you have the damnably false idea that nothing can be done in the world except by mental means — that Force must necessarily be a mental Force and can't be anything else.

The strangest thing of all is that if the Divine wills, why can't an effective drug in a case be revealed to him, medico or no medico?

Why the devil should He will like that in all cases? . . .

As to Force let me point out a few elementary notions which you ignore.

(1) The Force is a divine Force, so obviously it can apply itself in any direction; it can inspire the poet, set in motion the soldier, doctor, scientist, everybody.

(2) The Force is not a mental Force — it is not bound to go out from the Communicator with every detail mentally arranged, precise in its place, and communicate it mentally to the Recipient. It can go out as a global Force containing in itself the

thing to be done, but working out the details in the Recipient and the action as the action progresses. It is not necessary for the Communicant to accompany mentally the Force, plant himself mentally in the mind of the Recipient and work out mentally there the details. He can send the Force or put on the Force, leave it to do its work and attend himself to other matters. In the world most things are worked out by such a global Force containing the results in itself, but involved, concealed and working them out in a subsequent operation. The seed contains the whole potentiality of the tree, the gene contains the potentiality of the living form that it initiates, etc. etc., but if you examine the seed and gene ad infinitum, still you will not find there either the tree or the living being. All the same the Force has put all these potentialities there in a certain evolution which works itself out automatically.

(3) In the case of a man acting as an instrument of the Force the action is more complicated, because consciously or unconsciously the man must receive, also he must be able to work out what the Force puts through him. He is a living complex instrument, not a simple machine. So if he has responsiveness, capacity, etc. he can work out the Force perfectly, if not he does it imperfectly or frustrates it. That is why we speak of and insist on the perfecting of the instrument. Otherwise there would be no need of sadhana or anything else — any fellow would do for any blessed work and one would simply have to ram things into him and see them coming out in action.

(4) The Communicant need not be an all-round many-sided Encyclopaedia in order to communicate the Force for various purposes. If we want to help a lawyer to succeed in a case, we need not be perfect lawyers ourselves knowing all law, Roman, English or Indian and supply him all his arguments, questions, etc., doing consciously and mentally through him his whole examinations, cross-examinations and pleading. Such a process would be absurdly cumbrous, incompetent and wasteful. The prearrangement of the eventual result and the capacity for making him work his instruments in the right way and for arranging events also so as to aid towards the result are put into the Force

when it goes to him, they are therefore inherent in its action and the rest is a question of his own receptivity, experience etc. Naturally the best instrument even is imperfect (unless he is a perfected Adhar) and mistakes may be committed, other suggestions accepted etc. etc., but if the instrument is sufficiently open, the Force can set the thing to rights and the result still comes. In some or many cases the Force has to be renewed from time to time or supported by fresh Force. In some directions particular details have to be consciously attended to by the Communicant. All that depends on circumstances too multitudinous and variable to be reduced to rule. There are general lines, in these matters, but no rules, the working of a non-mental Force has necessarily to be plastic, not rigid and tied to formulas. If you want to reduce things to patterns and formulas, you will necessarily fail to understand the workings of a spiritual (non-mental) Force.

(5) All that I say here refers to spiritual Force. I am not speaking of the Supramental.

(6) Also please note that this is all about the working of Force on or through people: it has nothing to do with intuition which is quite another matter. Also it does not preclude always and altogether a plenary and detailed inspiration from a Communicant to a recipient — such things happen, but it is not necessary to proceed in that way, nor below the Supermind or supramentalised Overmind can it be the ordinary process.

10 April 1937

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You said, in regard to the Spanish General, “Let us suppose . . . I put the right force on him” [p. 447]. Why did you say “right”? Is there also a wrong Force?

Don't remember what exactly I wrote — so can't say very well. But of course there can be a wrong Force. There are Asuric Forces, rajasic Forces, all sorts of Forces. Apart from that one can use a mental or vital Force which may not be the right thing. Or one may use the Force in such a way that it does not succeed or does not hit the General on the head or is not commensurate with the opposing Forces — (opposing Forces need not be

Asuric, they may be quite gentlemanly Forces thinking they are in the right. Or two Divine Forces might knock at each other for the fun of the thing. Infinite possibilities, sir, in the play of the Forces.)

What I want to know is whether the Force applied or directed is always the right Force. Can there be any mistake in the Force, either in its application or in any other way, resulting in its failure to get the desired result?

What is a mistake? Eventually the Force used is always the Force that was destined to be used. If it succeeds, it does its work in the whole and if it fails, it has also done its work in the whole.

ন তত্র শোচতে বুদ্ধঃ।

My main point is the intuition. The Force has evidently a close connection with the intuition or any other faculties which are awakened by the action of the Force.

In what way? A Force may be applied without any intuition — an intuition can come without any close connection with a Force, except the force of intuition itself which is another matter. Moreover a Force may be applied from a higher plane than that of any Intuition.

17 April 1937

Response of the Divine

You can send your Force to whomever you like — Lenin, Kemal, Gandhi, but how people calling Shiva or Krishna for their Ishta Devata get responses from you, I don't understand.

Again who is Shiva? and who is Krishna? and what is an Ishta Devata? There is only one Divine, not a thousand Divines.

It would mean that wherever a sincere heart is aspiring for the Divine, his aspiration reaches your ears.

Why my ears? Ears are not necessary for the purpose. You might just as well say, reaches me by the post.

And you send your responses, because you want to manifest the Divine Rule on earth.

That has nothing to do with it. Besides it is not the Divine Rule on earth that I am after, but the supramental rule. This however has nothing to do with any supramental or Divine Rule on earth. It is only a general question of the response of the Divine and to the Divine.

5 February 1936

Power to Help

I do not ask you to believe that the Divine Grace comes to all or that all can succeed in the sadhana or that I personally have succeeded or will succeed in the case of all who come to me. I have asked you if you cannot develop the faith that the Divine is — you seemed often to doubt it, — that the Divine Grace is and has manifested both elsewhere and here, that the sadhana by which so many profit is not a falsehood or a chimaera and that I have helped many and am not utterly powerless — otherwise how could so many progress under our influence? If this is first established, then the doubt and denial, the refusal of faith boils itself down to a refusal of faith in your own spiritual destiny and that of X and some others — does it not? I have never told you that the power that works here is absolute at present; I have on the contrary told you that I am trying to make it absolute and it is for that that I want the Supermind to intervene. But to say that because it is not absolute therefore it does not exist, seems to me a logical inconsequence.

There remains your personal case and you may very well tell me “What does it matter to me if these things are true when they are not true to me, true in my own experience?” But it does make a difference that they are true in themselves. For if your personal want of experience is held as proving that it is all moonshine, then all is finished — there is no hope for you or me or anybody. If on the other hand these things are true but not yet realised by you, then there is hope, a possibility at least. From the point of view of reason you may be right in thinking that because you

have not realised yet, you can never realise — though it does not seem to me an inevitable conclusion. From the same point of view I also may be right in concluding from my experience and that of other Yogis that there is no such inevitability and that with the persistent aspiration in you and the vairagya we have the conditions for a realisation that must come — sooner, for there are sudden liberations, or later. 28 August 1934

Variations in the Action of the Force

Do you think if you put the Force at an exact time, say 9 p.m., it would have a greater chance of immediate success?

One can't make a rule like that. There is nothing more variable than the way the Force acts. 11 July 1936

The Force and Will

I feel a great Force above my head. But it is not coming down. Do you want me to draw it down by my will-force?

The Force must come down, though probably it will do so by stages. The will has to invite it if not draw it. Also the Force has to be used, that is, something of it directed by the will against the obstacles. This training of the will to act in the Yogic way is very important as a stage in the sadhana. 28 July 1935

Sri Aurobindo's Force and World Events

Somebody told X that Sri Aurobindo brought about the Russian revolution through Lenin. X told Y that people here were over-credulous to believe such things. Y insisted that such things were possible, but X seems to be unable to understand the working of occult forces. As far as I can see, if it is possible to cure dangerous diseases of the body by Yogic power, why should it not be possible to act on the mind of another person and pour into him immense vital force which can bring about such results as the Russian revolution?

The statement made to X was not quite correct; it is putting things in too physical a form. A spiritual and occult working supplies forces and can watch over the members of the execution of a world event; but to put it like that makes the actual workers too much of automata which they are not. 25 January 1937

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Certainly, my force is not limited to the Asram and its conditions. As you know it is being largely used for helping the right development of the war and of change in the human world. It is also used for individual purposes outside the scope of the Asram and the practice of Yoga; but that, of course, is silently done and mainly by a spiritual action. The Asram however remains at the centre of the work and without the practice of Yoga the work would not exist and could not have any meaning or fruition. But in the Yoga itself there are different ways of proceeding for different natures, even though the general path is the same, surrender to the Divine and change of nature. But surrender to the Divine in the completest sense cannot be achieved in a short time, nor can the change of the nature. On the whole, one has to go as quickly as one can and as slowly as is necessary — which seems contradictory but is not. 13 March 1944

Therapeutic Force and Healing

Spiritual Force and the Body

It is a pity that X could not write all this time. Formerly when she wrote often she used to get better after writing. It is also a pity that she has been told by the doctors that she is not going to live; even if it is true, such a thing should not be told unless in case of necessity (which does not exist in her case), for it takes away much of the power of resistance and diminishes what chances of cure and survival there were. X's physical destiny has always been against her but this is a thing that *can* be cancelled if one can have sufficient faith and inner strength and openness and receive the spiritual force.¹

27 June 1935

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Perhaps I might say a word about Ramakrishna's attitude with regard to the body. He seems always to have regarded it as a misuse of spiritual force to utilise it for preserving the body or curing its ailments or taking care for it. Other Yogis — I do not speak of those who think it justifiable to develop Yogic siddhis, but of those who think that that should be avoided — have not had this complete disregard of the body: they have taken care to maintain it in good health and condition as an instrument or a physical basis for their development in Yoga. I have always been in agreement with this view: moreover, I have never had any hesitation in the use of a spiritual force for all legitimate purposes including the maintenance of health and physical life in myself and in others — that is indeed why the Mother has given flowers, not only as a blessing but as a help in illness. I put a value on the body first as an instrument, *dharmasādhana*, or, more fully, as a centre of manifested personality in action, a basis of spiritual life and

¹ *The woman referred to here as X lived until 1993. — Ed.*

activity as of all life and activity upon the earth, but also because for me the body as well as the mind and life is a part of the divine whole, a form of the Spirit and therefore not to be disregarded or despised as something incurably gross and incapable of spiritual realisation or of spiritual use. Matter itself is secretly a form of the Spirit and has to reveal itself as that, can be made to wake to consciousness and evolve and realise the Spirit, the Divine within it. In my view the body as well as the mind and life has to be spiritualised or, one may say, divinised so as to be a fit instrument and receptacle for the realisation and manifestation of the Divine. It has its part in the divine Lila, even, according to the Vaishnava sadhana, in the joy and beauty of Divine Love. That does not mean that the body has to be valued for its own separate sake or that the creation of a divine body in a future evolution of the whole being has to be contemplated as an end and not a means — that would be a serious error which would not be admissible. In any case, my speculations about an extreme form of divinisation are something in a far distance and are no part of the preoccupations of the spiritual life in the near future. 7 December 1949

Grace and Therapeutic Force

The Divine Grace has certainly done something. I [*the Ashram doctor*] acted according to your advice, and X felt better the whole day.

It was not the Divine Grace but the Divine Force. If it had been the Grace, it would simply have said तथास्तु [*tathāstu*] and the thing would be done. As it is, last night I had to work a damned lot for this result — I only hope it will last and complete itself.

30 January 1935

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But may I ask you why you are wasting such a lot of Force when a word could do the job? Why not cut short our labour and the patients' discomfort by saying तथास्तु? Is it as easily done as it is said? If working "a damned lot" reduces the temperature only by one degree and that too for 12 hours or less, what am I to think?

I did not expect you to take my तथास्तु with such grim seriousness. Speaking semi-seriously, I am not here to do miracles to order, but to try to get in a new consciousness somewhere in the world — which is itself however to attempt a miracle. If physical miracles happen to tumble in in the process, well and good, but you can't present your medical pistol in my face and call on me to stand and deliver. As for the Force, application of my force, short of the supramental, means always a struggle of forces and the success depends on (1) the strength and persistency of the force put out, (2) the receptivity of the subject, (3) the sanction of the Unmentionable — I beg your pardon, I meant the Unnameable, Ineffable, Unknowable. X's physical consciousness is rather obstinate, as you have noticed, and therefore not too receptive. It may feel the Mother inside it, but to obey her will or force is less habitual for it.

31 January 1935

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I still can't understand why you should bother to follow us doctors. The Divine can very easily act from the supramental consciousness directly; you don't really need a diagnosis given by ordinary men!

If things were like that, why the deuce should we have Doctors or a dispensary at all? And what would have been the use of your 20,000?² We don't propose to do the whole business of the inside and outside off our own bat. You are as necessary for this as X for the building or others for their work.

Another thing — why should a mental formation obstruct the supramental?

Who told you we are acting from supramental consciousness? We are not and cannot until the confounded quarrel with Matter is settled.

1 February 1935

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² *The amount (in rupees) paid by the correspondent for his medical education. — Ed.*

What is this “confounded quarrel with Matter” you mention? Does this refer to the lower vital and physical movements of the sadhaks?

I am not speaking of the sadhaks, but the resistance of the Earth nature itself in its material parts. But these are things you people cannot understand unless you have less childlike notions about things.

I am still wondering why there should be doctors and a dispensary at all! Isn't it a paradox — the Divine sending his disciples to the human physician?

Rubbish! This is a world of the play of forces, sir, and the Doctor is a force. So why should not the Divine use him? Have you realised that if the Divine did everything, there would be no world, only a show of marionettes? 2 February 1935

The Force Works under Conditions

Can't you send me some force? I am willing to try to believe or *à la X* remain passive — but I am not so foolish and irrational not to avail myself of any kindly force because of my mental reservations.

As for the Force, I shall write some other time. I have told you that it is not always efficacious, but works under conditions like all forces; it is only the supramental Force that works absolutely, because it creates its own conditions. But the Force I am using is a Force that has to work under the present world conditions. It is not the less a Force for that. I have cured myself of all illnesses except three by it and those too when they come I have kept in check; the fact that I have not succeeded yet in eliminating the fact or probability of those three does not cancel the fact of my success with the others. As for the Mother, she used formerly to cure everything at once by the same Power — now she has no time to think about her body or to concentrate on it. Even so when she makes a certain inner concentration she can see, read etc. perfectly well without glasses, but she has no time to work

out the possibility which that shows. The prevalence of illness just now is a fact; it is part of the struggle that is going on in the domain of Matter. But even so there are plenty of people in the Asram who get rid of their ills by reliance on the Mother. If all cannot do it, what does that prove or disprove? It only proves that the Power does not work absolutely, miraculously, impossibly, but it works by certain given means and under conditions. I have always said that, so what is there in that that is new or that annihilates the truth of the Yoga? 6 February 1935

*

I shall see also whether I can explain what I mean by Force (the one which I refer to being neither supramental nor omnipotent nor guaranteed to work like Beecham's pills in every case) and how it acts and in what conditions. I have tried it in hundreds of cases besides X's (on my own body first and always) and I have no doubt of its reality or efficacy under these conditions. However, of that on some later date. February 1935

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A successful cure of X's mother would be certainly a considerable achievement, and though difficult owing to the tenacity and malignance and extreme intractability of the disease, it is not impossible. What you say is true, the Force was acting before, but it acted with immediate rapidity and completeness only with those who had sufficient faith and receptivity (mainly sadhaks) or in other good conditions.

These cases seem to indicate a new power of the Force and a new technique. Your idea that it may spread and happen elsewhere is not without foundation; for, when once something is there in the earth-atmosphere that was not there before, it begins to work on many sides in an unforeseen way. Thus since the Yoga has been in action, its particular opening movements have come to a number of people who were at a distance and not connected with us and who understood nothing of what was happening to them. These things are to be expected for Nature is still in evolution and new Lights and Powers have to be brought

down in her and made part of the conscious earth-existence.

29 January 1936

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There has been no negligence on our part in putting the force for X's change — the Mother has been doing that daily; nor is the trouble she has contracted one for which we are in any way responsible — it is not imposed as an ordeal or anything else. If there is so obstinate a persistence of her attachment and the demands it makes, it is because there is in her own vital a resistance to the Force that would remove it. If there were the complete consent in the being for giving it up (not only mental wish or prayer, however strong), it could not possibly last — at any rate in this form, — only at most for a time in fragments of the old habit. There is in her vital a certain violence of temperament — I do not mean merely a tendency to violence of speech or act, but an exaggerated intensity in the feelings and vital reactions, and this is the source of the trouble. For it is this that when asked to give up the claim and attachment, has reacted vehemently calling in an outside Force to support its resistance. When this rises, her mind also begins to justify the claim and demand, her vital feels very hurt and angry with the Mother because she does not support it. All that is proof of a very familiar kind of resistance which refuses to yield to the mind's will or the soul's aspiration. It is like that in X; it is so in many others here.

The Divine Force does not act now in an omnipotent ease regardless of conditions — it might do that if it were the pure supramental Force in its native action; but that is not yet. Here conditions have been created and it acts under those conditions. You speak of the Force acting in the case of the illnesses you have treated. No doubt, but here too it is under conditions — only, favourable conditions. For you believe and are conscious of the Force, your whole will is to cure, the patient's will is to get well — the more he assents to the treatment, the more quickly the Force acts — the one obstacle is the force of the illness itself and the patient's habitual subjection to it. But with everything else against it, that does not succeed in remaining. It

is quite otherwise in these things where the consent of the being is far from being complete, where the mind often consents to and justifies the illness when it comes, even takes strongly sides with it, where the vital is there with its revolt and clamour and tempest. It is only if the sadhak's resolution is firm and one-minded, not to assent to the attack when it comes, to refuse all mental justification of it, to detach himself from the vital movement in the very time of its action that the liberation can be done with the clarity and ease which you desire.

Otherwise, the only thing to be done is to keep up the pressure of the force quiet and strong and persistent until it gets into the vital itself and makes it reject its own movement. For that you must help by getting rid of the violence and impatience in your own nature and being yourself patient, firm and persistent. You are here to change your nature and the difficulty is no reason for throwing up the spiritual endeavour. All this talk of going away cannot help — it would be of no advantage to yourself or to X in any way — any more than her talk of going has any sense or is in any way reasonable. Keep firmly to your object, develop that calm and force in the vital as well as the mind which are the basis of the spiritual life. That will help more in getting X's morbid rushes of excitement to subside and the control to come in her also.

9 August 1936

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No need to give up your faith, for it is faith that gets things done and even makes the impossible possible. But it has to be kept when even there is no immediate result. In the physical care of a patient also there are adverse periods when the resistance is great and obstinate and there seems to be more swinging back than going forwards or a persistent recurrence of the trouble. Faith persisting and the call bring down after a time sufficient Force to overcome the obstacle.

11 August 1936

The Force Acts on a Complex Nexus of Forces

I have not yet written about the Force because it is too complex

to be adequately stated in a short space and I had no time these days for anything long. Anyhow, the clue is that the Force does not act in a void and in an absolute way, like a writing on a blank paper or in the air, the “Let there be light and there was light” formula. It comes as a Force intervening and acting on a very complex nexus of forces that were in action and displacing their disposition and interrelated movement and natural result by a new disposition, movement and result. It meets in so doing a certain opposition, very often a strong opposition from many of the forces already in possession and operation. To overcome it three factors are needed, the power of the Force itself, i.e. its own sheer pressure and direct action on the field of action (here the man, his condition, his body), the instrument (yourself) and the instrumentation (treatment, medicine). I have often used the Force alone without any human instrument or outer means, but here all depends on the recipient and his receptivity — unless as in the case of many healers there are unseen beings or powers that assist. If there is an instrument in direct touch with the patient, whether the doctor or one who can canalise the force, then the action is immensely assisted, — how much depends on the instrument, his faith, his energy, his conveying power. Where there is a violent opposition, this is frequently not enough or at least not enough for a rapid or total effect, the instrumentation (treatment or medicine) is needed. It is especially where the resistance of the body or the forces acting on the body-consciousness is strong that the medicine comes in as an aid. But if the doctor is non-psychic or the medicine the wrong one or the treatment unplastic, then they become an added resistance which the Force has to overcome. This is a very summary and inadequate statement, but it gives the main points, I believe.

P.S. I forgot to say that the surroundings, especially the people around the patient, the atmosphere, the suggestions it carries or they give to him, are often of a considerable importance.

24 January 1936

Therapeutic Force and Medical Diagnosis

I was under the impression that it is quite possible for the intuition to know the exact condition of a patient without going through any mental processes like deduction from evidence and so arrive at a diagnosis like a shot.

It can if you can train it to act in that field and if you can make it the real Intuition which sees the things without ranging among potentialities.

But I find that it is not so. In several recent cases you have insisted on knowing this or that about the patient's condition. But what is the need of your knowing these things? Is not Yogic vision more powerful and accurate than our external optical capacities?

As for me, I have no medico in me, not even a latent medico. If I had, I would not need an external one but diagnose, prescribe and cure all by my solitary self. My role in a medical case is to use the force either with or without medicines. There are three ways of doing that — one by putting the Force without knowing or caring what the illness is or following the symptoms — that however needs either the mental collaboration or quiescence of the victim. The second is symptomatic, to follow the symptoms and act on them even if one is not sure of the disease. There an accurate report is very useful. The third needs a diagnosis — that is usually where the anti-forces are very strong and conscious or where the patient himself answers strongly to the suggestions of the illness and unwittingly resists the action of the Force. This last is usually indicated by the fact that the thing gets cured and comes back again or improves and swings back again to worse. It is especially the great difficulty in cases of insanity and the like. Also in things where the nerves have a say — but in ordinary illnesses too.

1 April 1935

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In the case of an illness, how do you decide whether it is the recrudescence of an old illness or the action of a dark force or

even some experience? From the description supplied to you by the doctor?

Yes, certainly — just as you go by the symptoms of a case as seen by you and as related by the patient.

I thought that it is not possible to have spiritual experiences, especially major ones, without your previously having knowledge about it.

Previously? My God, we would have to spend all our time prevising the sadhaks' experiences. Do you think Mother has nothing else to do? As for myself, I never prewise anything, I only vise and revise. All that Mother prevised was that there was something not right in X, some part of him at odds with his aspiration. That might lead to trouble. That is why, *entre nous*, I want him to find out what part of him didn't want the descent.

19 October 1936

Therapeutic Force and Medicines

We do not believe in taking too many medicines. One or two effective ones and the Force are better than disturbing the system by 101.

13 August 1934

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- 1) How can the use of medicines be consistent with faith?
- 2) When are medicines really necessary?
- 3) What is excessive use of medicines and what is sparing use?

The use of medicines is permissible, if it is necessitated by an insufficient responsiveness in the body or if the faith itself is of a mixed and insufficient character — i.e. if the mind or vital as well as the body feel uneasy in the presence of illness. It is consistent with faith when it is used only as a physical support to the action of the Force, not as a substitute.

To dose oneself with many medicines or to use strong medicines in ordinary cases or to use them when an opening to the Force or an exercise of the inner Will is sufficient, is

excessive. For a system not accustomed to curing itself the use of mild medicines in just sufficient quantity can be quite effective and that is all that is needed. 19 April 1935

*

The enclosed report shows how, without any [*homeopathic*] medicaments, a call to the Mother by me last night was sufficient to relieve what medicaments could hardly have been expected to do overnight. Hence it is better to make a note of the far-reaching possibilities of the action of the Force.

It so happens very often, but there is still an element of uncertainty in the relation of the amount of force put out and the reaction of the patient that allows a considerable *flottement* in the results as the French puts it. 17 April 1936

*

In homeopathic treatment there is a slight primary aggravation if the drug is correctly chosen. Does some such primary aggravation happen when you use your Force to heal?

Not necessarily, but if there is a strong force of resistance behind the illness or if there is something hiding there it may come out under the pressure. This is not however the invariable rule. Often the result of the force is immediate and without reactions or there is an oscillation, but no aggravation or increase. 30 May 1936

*

The patient is feeling miles better on the whole. Have you been FORCE-ing at last?

I have of course been forcing furiously for the last 3 days. But is it not the medicine that deserves the credit? 28 September 1938

*

It is only through your Divine help and the Mother's blessings that it is possible to diagnose correctly and give the right treatment. Kindly therefore press the action of the Force home without considering for a moment that the happy change in the patient is owing to medicinal action.

I see. The previous unreceptivity had led me to think that it was the medicine which made the difference. I will go on with the pressure of the Force. But it needs an unwavering, strong pressure to produce appreciable results in this respect and it is not easy to keep it up. If I had nothing else to do, it would be easy, but my day is full with all kinds of things. However I will try to keep up the continuity — don't want this fellow to peter out on our hands.

29 September 1938

*

Should I ever run into a malaria case, I will give you a loud shout and rest assured that I will come out scot free. I intend to scrap all malaria medicines.

Mm! Cromwell said "Trust in God and keep your powder dry!"

10 November 1938

Therapeutic Force and Homeopathy

I felt some improvement in the leg but the pain has not gone completely. Generally the medicines of X [*a homeopath*] are effective, but not in my case. Why is it so? I have heard that he is a wonderful medium. You have worked through him in the case of outside people, why not in me? Does that mean that they were more open to your force than I was? Kindly explain.

X is a remarkable medium, but he is more successful with people outside than with the sadhaks — (not that he has not succeeded with many of them also). For this there are two reasons. People outside are impressed by his apparently miraculous cure and believe implicitly and follow his treatment — the sadhaks question and dispute it; this mental opposition has a reaction upon the result of the treatment (e.g. X told me there had been a great improvement in Y's illness, Y denied that there had been any visible or undoubted improvement, yet today Dr. Z told the Mother that he was amazed by the improvement, he had not thought such a thing possible, but now he knew because he had seen it.) The other reason is that sadhaks ought not to need an intermediary between themselves and the Mother — their bodies

as well as their minds ought by this time to have become sufficiently receptive for that — outside people do need a medium, for they cannot be expected to have the same receptivity.

*

Today's case has again convinced me that X doesn't know much about physiology, pathology, dieting, diagnosis, etc. You may say, "Homeopaths are concerned with symptoms." But I shall be the last to believe that he cured this man by relying on symptoms alone.

Because you are tied in your own system and do not understand that Nature is not so rigid as your mental ideas.

All big homeopaths, I have heard, were originally allopaths who knew anatomy, physiology, pathology etc. X is unique and his cures also unique. I am puzzled about the real mystery behind.

Is it not the very principle of homeopathy that it cures the disease by curing the symptoms? I have always heard so. Do you deny that homeopaths acting on their own system, not on yours, have cured illnesses? If they have, is it not more logical to suppose that there is something in their system than to proclaim the sacrosanct infallibility of the sole allopathic system and its principle? For that matter I myself cure more often by attacking the symptoms than by any other way, because medical diagnosis is uncertain and fallible while the symptoms are there for everybody to see. Of course if a correct indisputable diagnosis is there, so much the better — the view can be more complete, the action easier, the result more sure. But even without infallible diagnosis one can act and get a cure. 23 December 1935

*

There were evidently three factors at work in this case: Mother's Force, the mediumship of X, which was constituted of faith, confidence, vital power, intuition, etc., and his drug treatment. Now what I am puzzled about is the exact contribution of X's medicines in this case.

Exact? How can one measure exactly where vital and mental and spiritual factors come in? In dealing with a star and atom you may (though it appears you can't with an electron), but not with a man and his living mind, soul and body.

24 December 1935

*

A symptomatic treatment can't be applied in cases where the same symptom is produced by two or three different diseases.

Why can't it? There is a possibility that you can strike at the cause, whatever it be, through the symptoms and you can kill the root through the stalk and leaves and not start by searching for the roots and digging them out. That at any rate is what I do.

24 December 1935

*

I wonder whether our mode of looking at things is altogether wrong. If there really are such drugs in homeopathy that can give results in cases where we [*allopaths*] have almost none, it would be worthwhile trying to study it and combine both systems.

Certainly there are — the universe is not shut up in the four walls of allopathic medicine. There are plenty of cases of illnesses being cured by other systems (not homeopathy alone) when they had defied the allopaths. My experience is not wide but I have come across a good number of such cases.

24 December 1935

*

X gives a high-blood-pressure patient on the verge of heart-failure "moderate" licence in eating, drinking etc. He calls it "leaving to Nature"!

Well, I have followed that system with myself and others and gone on the basis that Nature is very largely what you make of her — or can make of her.

28 December 1935

*

I believe that an allopath would have been as successful as X if he had the backing of your Force.

The Force needs an instrument and an instrumentation also sometimes. The instrument was X, the instrumentation partly at least his drugs. I don't believe in the story of the inefficiency of homeopathic drugs only because they are homeopathic. Also, I don't believe that X knows nothing about them and can't properly apply them. I have noted almost constantly that they have a surprising effect, sometimes instantaneous, sometimes rapid, and this not on X's evidence alone, but in the statement of his patients and the visible results. Not being an allopathic doctor, I can't ignore a fact like that.

Some symptoms like headache, vomiting etc. may be caused by many diseases, such as brain-tumour, syphilis, high blood-pressure, etc. If you tell me that a homeopathic medicine for headache, vomiting etc. will be a panacea for all these diseases, it will be difficult for me to accept it.

Tumour, syphilis etc. are specialities, but what I have found in my psycho-physical experience is that most disorders of the body are connected, though they go by families, — but there is also connection between the families. If one can strike at their psycho-physical root, one can cure even without knowing the pathological whole of the matter and working through the symptoms as a possibility. Some medicines invented by demimystics have the power. What I am now considering is whether homeopathy has any psycho-physical basis. Was the founder a demi-mystic? I don't understand otherwise certain peculiarities of the way X's medicines act.

Allopaths after all are not yogis and have no third eyes! Still I should say that mistaken diagnoses of appendicitis, for example, are very rare.

Good heavens! It happened in scores and scores of cases when there was the appendicitis mania among doctors in France — and they have other manias also.

Why ignore the wonderful things due to thousands of right diagnoses and let sporadic cases of error loom large in your eyes?

Sporadic cases! I have heard of any number of them, they are as plentiful as blackberries in Europe. And as for difference of diagnosis it is almost the rule except when doctors consult together and give concessions to each other. Don't try to throw allopathic dust in my eyes, sir! I have lived a fairly long time and seen something of the world before my retirement and much more after it.

28 December 1935

*

Is there not some occult healing power in homeopathic medicine which effects miraculous cures? Or is it the doctor who has it?

I suppose it is as much the man and the force working through him as the medicine that makes the difference. I doubt if the medicine by itself could do so much.

11 January 1936

*

The Mother and I have no preference for allopathy; the Mother thinks doctors very usually make things worse instead of better, spoiling Nature's resistance to illness by excessive and ill-directed use of their medicines. We have been able to work through X's homeopathy far better than through anything else — though it is likely that the Force working through homeopaths who were not conscious instruments might not have succeeded better than with the allopaths.

September 1936

*

I am taking X's medicine, but there is no marked result as yet in regard to the nervous weakness. The only effect is in the relief of pain. Pray free me from this nervous trouble.

How then was X left for days under the impression that there was nothing the matter in this respect? If you want his treatment to succeed you must inform him from day to day accurately,

without suppression or exaggeration of all the symptoms happening. This treatment is a system which deals with the symptoms as they come from day to day and shapes itself accordingly. In every case in which *X* succeeded “markedly” daily reports of the utmost fullness were given. Apart from that, in a case like yours of long duration immediate miraculous results cannot be expected. I told you that you must stick patiently to the treatment for a long time, if you wanted a radical cure.

13 September 1936

*

I must say that *X*'s theories about disease are absurd, however successful he may be as a homeopath-physician.

You may say what you like about the homeopathic theories, but I have seen *X* work them out detail by detail in cases where he had free and unhampered action and the confidence of the patients and their strict obedience and have seen the results correspond to his statements and his predictions based on them fulfilled not only to the very letter but according to the exact times fixed, not according to *X*'s reports but according to the daily long detailed and precise reports of the allopathic doctor in attendance. After that I refuse to believe, even if all the allopaths in the world shout it in unison, that homeopathic theory or *X*'s interpretation and application of it are mere rubbish and nonsense. As to mistakes all doctors make mistakes and very bad ones and kill as well as cure — my grandfather and one of my cousins were patently killed by one of the biggest doctors in Bengal. One theory is as good as another and as bad according to the application made of it in any particular case. But it is something else behind that decides the issue.

Just hear what grave errors he has committed. He said to me that he used his drug to bring about the profuse menstruation in *Y*'s case. Then he asked me whether this profuse flow should be stopped. Yes, I said, it must be stopped.

To bring out the latent illness and counteract it is a recognised principle in homeopathy and is a principle in Nature itself. He misapplied it here because he was in ignorance of the full facts about the menstrual trouble. 3 October 1936

*

Why didn't your Force prove decisive in this case? About the Supermind and its failure over hostile forces, I give you a chance to bombard me or else I will!

What has the Supermind to do here? Who told you that I was using the supramental Force? I have said all along that it was not the supramental Force that was acting. If you want the supramental Force, you had better go to Jogesh Mama of Chittagong. I hear from Chittagong that the supramental Force is descending in him.

I have put down a few comments to throw cold water on all this blazing hot allopathism. But all these furious disputes seem to me now of little use. I have seen the working of both systems and of others and I cannot believe in the sole truth of any. The ones damnable in the orthodox view, entirely contradicting it, have their own truth and succeed — also both the orthodox and heterodox fail. A theory is only a constructed idea-script which represents an imperfect human observation of a line of processes that Nature follows or can follow; another theory is a different idea-script of other processes that also she follows or can follow. Allopathy, homeopathy, naturopathy, osteopathy, Kaviraji, hakimi have all caught hold of Nature and subjected her to certain processes; each has its successes and failures. Let each do its own work in its own way. I do not see any need for fights and recriminations. For me all are only outward means and what really works are unseen forces behind; as they act, the outer means succeed or fail — if one can make the process a right channel for the right force, then the process gets its full utility — that is all. 3 October 1936

Lights, Visions, Dreams

Sri Aurobindo's Light

If it is pale blue, it may be my colour. Pale lavender blue, pale blue but very brilliant in its own shade. 6 August 1932

*

Nowadays I see Sri Aurobindo's light for most of the time but in different forms — sometimes like a big star, sometimes like a moon, sometimes like a flash of light. Why do I not see it in the same form?

It varies according to the circumstances. Why should it be always the same? 21 April 1933

*

Two days back in a dream I saw Sri Aurobindo coming towards me. His body and dress were blue. Why did I see him in this colour and not any other?

It is the basic light Sri Aurobindo manifests. 23 June 1933

*

Sri Aurobindo's light is not a light of the illumined mind — it is the divine Illumination which may act on any plane.

7 September 1933

*

Someone was giving an explanation of the legend of the churning of the ocean. He said that blue is the colour of poison, which is why Shiva is called Nilakantha, while whitish blue is the colour of Sri Krishna and therefore of you.

The different blues mean different forces (the real blue has nothing to do with poison). The whitish blue is specially called my

light — but it does not mean that that alone can come from me.

22 November 1933

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There are many blues and it is difficult to say which these are. Usually deeper blue is higher Mind, a paler blue Illumined Mind — whitish blue Sri Krishna's light (also called Sri Aurobindo's light).

March 1934

*

It depends on the shade of the blue. Ordinary pale blue is usually the light of the illumined Mind or something of the Intuition. Whitish blue is Sri Aurobindo's light or Krishna's light.

6 February 1935

Receiving Sri Aurobindo's Light

How can I receive Sri Aurobindo's light in the mind?

It can always come if you aspire patiently. But the basic condition, if you want that Light, is to get rid of all other mental influences.

29 May 1932

*

What is the meaning of "to get rid of all other mental influences"? Is it this that I had better not read any other books except Sri Aurobindo's or not try to learn anything by hearing or admiring others?

It is not a question of reading books or learning facts. When a woman loves or admires, her mind is instinctively moulded by the one she loves or admires, and this influence can last after the feeling itself has gone or appears to be gone. This does not refer to X's influence merely. It is a general rule given to keep yourself from any other admiration or influence.

30 May 1932

Light in a Photograph

As one approaches your photograph in the Reception Room,

there is a feeling that it is an emanation of yours. There seems to be a special light in it.

The Sadhaks may themselves bring this light by approaching me through the photo. 24 August 1934

Meditation with a Photograph

When the meditation is done with the photo, it is better done with open eyes.

Seeing Sri Aurobindo in Vision

I looked at your photograph in the Reception Room after meditation and clearly saw the portrait move its shoulders and as if breathing.

There was a movement in the vital plane and you opened to an inner vision of it. 22 March 1933

*

As I was sitting in prayer, I saw Sri Aurobindo in a vision coming down the staircase till he came just near to the floor. What does this mean?

It indicates perhaps the bringing of the Divine Consciousness down from level to level till it is now nearer the material.

23 September 1933

*

Today while meditating I saw in a vision that in Sri Aurobindo's light Nataraja Shiva was manifesting with many hands. What does this signify?

It is the sign of the manifestation.

Then I saw that in the sky Sri Aurobindo's light and red light were manifesting in the form of a globe. Does this signify the manifestation of Sri Aurobindo's divine light on the physical plane?

Yes.

Then I saw that Sri Aurobindo's light was manifesting on a sea along with another light of pale blue colour. Does this mean that in the vastness of consciousness Sri Aurobindo's divine light is manifesting through the Intuitive Mind consciousness?

Yes.

15 October 1933

*

I saw Sri Aurobindo last night in a vision seated on a chair and writing something. Behind his head there was a circular green light. What does this mean?

The green light is that of a dynamic vital energy (of work). As I was writing — at work — it is natural that that light should be behind my head.

5 November 1933

*

I have started concentrating in the heart now. Last Sunday while I was meditating I had the vision of your face floating before me for about an hour or so, accompanied by a deep joy. I was fully conscious, but the body became as if dead, all movements stopped, and what a rapture it gave me.

That was very good!

Has anything opened up in me, really? Or is it only a momentary phase of a descent like Peace or Ananda? But I feel as if you have given me a lift forward — the fulfilling of the Mother's promise — "I am coming". Am I right?

It looks like it. At any rate there is evidently an opening in the heart-centre or you would not have had the change or the vision with the stilling of the physical consciousness in the body.

30 October 1934

*

Last night I had a dream that you had come out of your seclusion for once; you were tall, quite young, but very dark. I began to wonder if this was Sri Aurobindo of former years!

No. It is not likely. It is probably some subtle physical form — the one corresponding to the Shiva element in me. I have seen myself like that sometimes and it was always the Shiva formation. 11 December 1934

Help in Dreams

X had a dream of you as shown in the photograph giving him instructions in his engineering work. Two features: (1) Sri Aurobindo has come out of retirement; (2) he has come out as an engineer!

I suppose, the present Sri Aurobindo having left all engineering work to the Mother, the previous Sri Aurobindo had to come to do it in this case. Anyhow what has it to do with coming out? Any number of people meet me in dreams and get instructions or intimations about this or that. It is an activity of the vital plane where I am not in strict retirement — it has nothing to do with any future physical happening. 25 August 1936

*

Do you mean to say that people getting instructions from you in dreams is as real, effective and correct as if you had written them on paper?

Yes, if the record is correct.

26 August 1936

Darshan

Admission to Darshan

Write that usually Sri Aurobindo sees on these days only his disciples, whether those residing in the Asram or those who come to him from outside, and a few others who are either connected in some way with the Asram, its work or its members or else are given permission for special reasons. Permission is not given to all who would like to come, as that would mean an impossible number and it would besides entirely break the principle of Sri Aurobindo's retirement.¹ 5 February 1930

*

You can write to him that he can have permission for himself and his wife — but for the children it depends on their age, whether they are young children under ten or not — young children are not allowed for darshan. 17 July 1935

*

Nobody should ever be *asked* to come for Darshan or Pranam or meditation. If somebody spontaneously asks, it is another matter. Here too as a rule, there should be no eagerness that they should come. Encouragement should be given only in those cases where there is a good or special reason for it. The number of people coming especially in the August darshan, when the Pondicherry people also come, is already very large and we are kept for 7 or 8 hours at a stretch receiving them, so it is not advisable to go on increasing the numbers under the present circumstances. If a man is especially deserving or likely to be a helper or sympathiser of the Asram or there is any other reason

¹ *This and many other letters in this and the next chapters were written by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary, who replied to the correspondent. — Ed.*

for encouraging him, then of course this general rule does not apply. 27 July 1937

*

I have heard about you and read your books and feel impelled to ask for your help. In case you think your darshan will help better, I most humbly request you to grant me one at your convenience.

Tell him it is not necessary. Transformation comes only by inner sadhana and development. A darshan can at best only give some strong experience.

Several times when my mind has become blank I have experienced light descending from higher planes — probably supramental.

But he has the root experience already in the descent of the Light in the state of blankness. The Light is the Divine Light from the plane of spiritual consciousness above. The supramental comes only at the end of a long sadhana. 1 February 1938

*

But who is he? New persons are, as far as possible, refused for November — unknown persons not recommended by someone known are usually not permitted at all. 26 October 1938

*

The most we can concede is that she may be brought for Darshan in the way proposed, but she must simply take the blessing and pass, there must be no lingering. It is a mistake to bring sick people or the insane to the Darshan for cure — the Darshan is not meant for that. If anything is to be done or can be done for them, it can be done at a distance. The Force that acts at the time of Darshan is of another kind and one deranged or feeble in mind cannot receive or cannot assimilate it — it may produce a contrary effect owing to this incapacity if received at all. If the force is withheld, the Darshan is useless, if received by such

people it is unsafe. It is similar reasons which dictate the rule forbidding children of tender years to be brought to the Darshan.

Making Pranam during Darshan

There is no obligation on European visitors to make the pranam [*during darshan*] — very few have done so, none perhaps. Even from those who have stayed here, it was not asked — they were left free to abstain unless they asked for it — e.g. X, Y, Z and A. B must not get the impression that we exact it from anybody. I do not know whether a mere “look” at us will help him — it is only in some cases that that happens, and these usually when there was a previous disposition or habit of response to supraphysical Light or Power as in the case of C. These days have been arranged with a view first to their main object, viz. for myself to give the darshan and blessing to the disciples, and the form of it is designed for that — visitors first came in as a superfluity, though now except in November they are more than half the crowd. But as they are mostly Indians accustomed to this form of the spiritual contact and aware of its meaning, it does not usually matter. It is only when a European comes that this difficulty arises — but it need not be any as he is not asked to make the pranam.

As for the rest, there is nothing much to say. The distance between the man and the Power manifesting through him is not an idea that can trouble the eastern mind, to which the gulf does not exist, but it is natural to the modern intelligence.

20 November 1933

*

Is it possible for darshan to do pranam on behalf of X, Y, my mother, etc.?

It is not possible to make separate pranams. There are nearly 700 people this time, and if all is not rapidly done we shall have to be there till the afternoon 2.30 or 3. Even one minute for each means 6 hours for the first 350.

11 August 1934

Right Attitude towards August Darshan

Someone told me that only ten days were left for the August 15th Darshan. I replied that every day should be considered as the 15th.

That is the right attitude. Every day should be regarded as a day when a descent may take place or a contact established with the higher consciousness. Then the 15th itself would be more successful.

4 August 1934

*

As to the 15th August, well, don't lay too much stress on it which is after all more a general than a personal occasion — for the individual any day in the year may be the 15th — that is, *the* birthday or a birthday of something in the inner being. It is with that feeling that one should do the sadhana.

13 September 1935

Remarks on Darshan

It would be very good if you could come out to give Darshan once a month instead of only three times a year.

If I went out once a month, the effect of my going out would be diminished by one third.

2 March 1933

*

When I came for your Darshan, it seemed as if it was Shiva himself I was seeing. I felt Ananda too. The consciousness of these things remained for two or three days, and then as if evaporated.

There is no reason to be discouraged by what you call the evaporation of the consciousness that you got on the darshan day. It has not evaporated but drawn back from the surface. That usually happens, when there is not the higher consciousness or some experience. What you have to learn is not to allow depression, but remain quiet allowing time for the assimilation

and ready for fresh experience or growth *whenever* it comes.

4 December 1934

*

It was certainly the best Darshan of all yet passed today, though those to come will surely exceed it. I was struck by the rapidity with which your consciousness has grown since last time, much more solid and insistent and with a power to overcome all mixture. One can surely now have the confidence, not prophetic merely or founded only on the spiritual necessity in you but also on what has been accomplished, that what is not of a piece with this growing consciousness will change or disappear! X's feeling about the darshan was quite true.

21 February 1935

Difficulties at the Time of Darshan

I have heard that at the time of Darshan all our hidden subconscious desires and attachments are thrown up.

There is no such inevitable rule. It is true that attacks are frequent at that time, but one need not admit them.

6 July 1934

*

During this Darshan, instead of Ananda, Force or Light I felt a great dryness.

It depends upon your condition whether the Ananda or Force or Light descends or whether the resistance rises. It is the resistance of the ordinary physical consciousness ignorant and obscure that seems to have risen in you. The period of the 15th is a period of great descents but also of great resistances. This 15th was not an exception.

17 August 1934

*

I do not think that the difficulty you are feeling has anything to do with your receiving what your husband sends you. It very often happens that when the Darshan day is approaching the adverse Forces gather themselves for an attack individually or

generally in order to prevent what has to be individually received from being received and what has to be generally brought down from being brought down. Also very often there is a strong attack after the darshan day because they want to undo what has been done or else to stop it from going farther. But as far as the individual is concerned, there is no need of undergoing this attack; if one is conscious of its nature, one can react and throw it away. Or if it still presses one can keep one's will and faith firm and come out of the temporary obstacle with a greater opening and a new progress. The Mother's force and mine will be with you always.

Contact with People Outside the Ashram

Correspondence with Outsiders

You can tell him about the arrangements for correspondence. We do not write ourselves. He can always write to the Mother or to myself (we have received his letters); but answers, if any, are given on our instructions to Nolini who has the general charge of the correspondence or in certain cases by someone else specially deputed for the purpose. 21 August 1931

Does Not Give Advice on Mundane Matters

Since he has sent a stamped envelope, you can write to him (in Bengali) that it is no use putting these matters before Sri Aurobindo, as he makes it a rule not to advise people in their mundane affairs and confines himself only to what is proper to the spiritual life and for the rest to his own path of Yoga.

*

I hope you will help me and send your reply to the following queries:

- (1) How long will the business partnership last with my partner?
- (2) Will I be able to recover my money from him in September?
- (3) What kind of business am I likely to do in future?
- (4) When will I have children and how many in all?

Write to him that these are not questions that ought to be put to me. It is to another class of persons that he should go for the answer. 28 July 1928

*

Reply to him (at X's address) that we cannot tell him what job he should do — it depends on his opportunities, tastes and

capacities. All that we can tell him about is his sadhana. If he progresses in his sadhana, opens his consciousness, can feel a higher and wider consciousness and the Divine Presence or Power at work, he will then be able to get our inner guidance for his life.

27 February 1933

*

Can you induce my Gurudev Sri Aurobindo to think kindly of me, even though the terrible situation I am placed in is of my own folly and creation? I do not know if I am doing the right thing by writing this letter. But with full love and confidence in you I hope to be kindly excused.

Nolini, you can answer him as he has sent a stamp.

Sri Aurobindo does not usually extend any personal help or direction to any but accepted disciples who are practising a serious Yoga. Worldly life is a field of Karma (a field of growth) in which the soul progresses through the play of energies inner and outer, personal and universal producing a complexity of results until it is ready for the spiritual change. Once one practises this Yoga, the life becomes a part of the sadhana. Even so Sri Aurobindo seldom gives directions or advice in specific matters; only the Mother's Force is there to help and if the sadhak is open and sincere, he can receive and become aware of help and guidance. For discipleship a certain readiness is necessary. To be able to bear adverse fortune with a calm equanimity and inner strength (not a tamasic inert acceptance) would be a very strong qualification for it.

19 March 1936

*

Sri Aurobindo has asked me to reply on his behalf to your letter. I informed him at the time of all that your wife told me of your difficulties.

Sri Aurobindo does not as a rule give any advice in secular affairs, but only spiritual advice and spiritual support and blessings. In this matter the trouble seems to be the result of an education or influences, common enough at the present time, which turn the mind away from all living faith in the old beliefs

and standards of life and from any openness to the Truth that was embodied in them. It does not seem likely that a return to them can be brought about easily now. If the mind affected could come to receive that Truth in a new light, that might be the remedy.

For you and your work Sri Aurobindo sends his blessings. Where there is sincerity of heart and selflessness in purpose and an openness to the help from above, difficulties however great can be overcome or turned in course of time. December 1939

Does Not Give Instructions in Yoga to Outsiders

X has sent a letter to you, which I enclose. He would like some *upadeśa* from you.

I do not usually give *upadeśa* like that. I believe he complains of an inability to concentrate his mind or feel bhakti, but that is not due to past karma and cannot be got rid of by any *prāyaścitta* — it is the inherent disability of the human mind that goes outward and not inward.

*

Sri Aurobindo does not usually give instructions of this kind. It is only those who have been accepted into his own path of Yoga to whom he gives spiritual guidance. Suggest to him that as he is a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, he would find his natural guides in the Ramakrishna Mission. 4 February 1931

*

You can write to him that Sri Aurobindo does not intervene by giving instructions in the Yoga of anybody except his own disciples. His own way of Yoga being of a separate kind and not meant for all to follow. 26 November 1932

*

I am instructed by Sri Aurobindo to reply that he does not give advice or instructions to anybody except his own disciples (already accepted by him), those whom he finds fitted and ready

to prepare themselves for his path. This path has neither the same aim nor the same method as the ordinary Yoga, it aims at a realisation of which their results are only component parts; it may be said to begin its capital experiences where these end and its object is one that they would consider impossible. Much of it is virgin ground in which the paths have yet to be cut and built. The obstacles and difficulties in the way of success are formidable and demand either a strength and patience or a faith and unquestioning reliance on the Guru who is the pathfinder and leader. Or otherwise they have to have so strong and clear a call that no difficulties matter, or else to be in some way predestined to follow this path and no other, to cleave to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as Guru and to no other. Your preparation seems to be mainly intellectual and for this Yoga the intellect is not sufficient; relied upon as the chief guide it may become instead a barrier. This Yoga depends upon a supra-intellectual knowledge which can come only from the soul or psychic being within and the secret spirit above. Moreover attachment to ideas, people, things are hampering obstacles in this Yoga. You could perhaps understand for yourself that there may be many obstacles in the way of your accepting this Yoga. All the same, if you still wish and are able to come for Darshan next August, you may do so. But for the moment for the reasons pointed out Sri Aurobindo is not able at present to give you any instruction or suggest a discipline.

17 October 1934

*

Is it not possible that you tell me about my weaknesses, defects and deficiencies so that I may try to remove them?

It is not a question of defects and weaknesses. You have to grow spiritually from within till it is certain that your call is to this Path. Till then it is not possible for me to give you any definite verbal guidance. What comes to you must come from within yourself at present.

11 April 1935

*

You had better write to her saying that Sri Aurobindo does not usually give instructions to anyone but those who follow his path of Yoga which is a difficult path and not possible for everybody. Nor is it by oral instructions that he helps his disciples as he speaks with none nowadays and lives entirely retired. There would therefore be no utility in coming here.

It would be difficult for anyone suffering from nervous debility to follow Yogic processes; the recovery of health would be a necessary preliminary. It would be especially dangerous in Sri Aurobindo's path of Yoga.

1 May 1935

*

[Letter from an outsider to one of Sri Aurobindo's disciples:]
Can you enlighten me as to the reason for Sri Aurobindo's silence?

Just as I see no one, so I answer usually no letters except those of the disciples and many of these even are not answered by myself personally if they are outside the Asram.

Will you also advise me how I can obtain his *krpā*?

My spiritual work is limited to a very small field and a particular purpose. Outside that field I never intervene whether for spiritual instructions or worldly matters. This limitation is absolutely necessary otherwise I could not do the work I have to do. All depends on whether the man who comes to me is meant for the spiritual path and its work — if not, then all I can do is to give him the *kalyāṇecchā* which one can always give. The rest depends upon himself or his karma. I shall ask Nolini for X's letters and see. But at present I can say nothing.

25 January 1936

Does Not Grant Interviews or Personal Darshans

You had better write to him that an interview is impossible, that I see and speak with none, not even my disciples, — except on three days of the year when they and a few others specially

permitted come and make pranam and receive a silent blessing,
for even then I do not speak. 28 January 1930

*

Write that the paragraph in the *Jyoti* is a sheer invention. I have said nothing about the present movement to either disciple or visitor. I could not have done so, because since it began, I have seen and spoken to no one. My rule of giving no interview to anyone, of speaking with none, even on the three days when I come out, remains unchanged. 25 April 1930

*

A Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University wrote some time back asking if it was possible to meet Sri Aurobindo during a proposed visit to South India. I let him know that he may write to Sri Aurobindo and if he was lucky he may find it possible to see Sri Aurobindo. He has written again. What reply shall I give him?

In such cases you should not write anything without consulting me. What he wants is evidently to talk with me and that is impossible. You will have to write to him now regretting that it is not at all likely that I shall come out of my retirement just now. 13 January 1932

*

If the Baba Maharaj asks for an answer, you will tell him that it is impossible for me to satisfy his requests. I am in entire retirement, seeing no one, not even my disciples, so I cannot see him. As for the Asram, it is a strict rule that none but disciples can reside in it; the whole life of the Asram is besides governed by a system elaborated in all details and it is only the disciples trained to this life who can conform to it. 16 September 1932

*

I am afraid I don't see how I can see William Arthur Moore — how can I extend to him so extraordinary a privilege (since I see nobody) which I would not have conceded to Sarat Chatterji?

You say Barin certifies him as a bhakta — but Barin’s language is apt to be vivid and exaggerated; he probably means only an admirer. I think he must be answered that certainly he would have been allowed a meeting with me if I had been coming out but the entire seclusion has been taken as a rule for Sri Aurobindo’s sadhana and it may not be subjected to exception so long as the rule is in force. If he is really a bhakta, that will give him a ray of distant hope and if he isn’t, the impression made does not very much matter. Barin surely exaggerates the power of the publicist — after all he is only the editor of the *Statesman* — but even otherwise that is not the main consideration. By the way why have you transmogrified Moore into Jones? — there was a Jones there but he has departed and yielded the place to Moore.

17 August 1933

*

I pray for Sri Aurobindo’s Darshan once more before I leave. I know that it is against the rule but I hope you won’t mind relaxing it for the sake of a bhakta.

I am afraid it is impossible. No separate personal Darshan can be given at this stage — it is not a rule, it is a necessity for the work that Sri Aurobindo is doing.

17 August 1934

*

The Maharani’s request was placed by the Mother before Sri Aurobindo. But it has been his strict rule for many years past to see no one except on the three darshan days in the year and no exception has been made up till now. If an exception were made now, it would be difficult for him to maintain the rule in future. There is no possibility of keeping the matter secret and publicity would be undesirable for the Maharani and also Sri Aurobindo, as it would give rise to many requests for a special darshan or interview from others. It is therefore better that the Maharani should not maintain her request. But if on her way back she wishes to visit the Mother, the Mother will be glad to see her.

31 January 1938

*

There seems to be some misunderstanding about Mr. C. R. Reddy's visit to the Ashram. He was sent to Pondicherry by the Chancellor of the Andhra University to present the medal of the humanities prize given by the University and accepted by Sri Aurobindo. The Chancellor was to have come himself, but as it turned out that he was unable to do so the Vice-Chancellor came as his representative. Sri Aurobindo when he accepted had expressed his inability to leave Pondicherry in order to receive the medal but had consented to this official visit for the purpose. There was therefore no question of Mr. Reddy coming for a personal visit. The last visit of that kind Sri Aurobindo received was from Tagore very long ago. The only exception made to his rule of seclusion has been for the giving of instructions and receiving the report of a disciple entrusted with some work or some mission. It is difficult or even impossible for Sri Aurobindo to relax his rule any farther, still less to make any departure that would have the result of opening the doors widely or altogether. He might make some relaxation if a compelling occasion arose or if he felt it necessary because of some public emergency or some need of his work or the necessity of an exceptional case. But at the moment he still feels it essential to maintain his rule for some time at least and not less strictly than before.

10 January 1949

Part Four

The Practice of Yoga in the Ashram and Outside

Section One

The Practice of Yoga in the Ashram 1926–1950

Entering Sri Aurobindo's Path

Acceptance as a Disciple, 1926–1949

His aspiration may be satisfied if he makes himself fit. Let him continue to read the *Arya* and practise daily meditation. In the meditation he should concentrate first in an aspiration that the central truths of which he reads should be made real to him in conscious experience and his mind opened to the calm, wideness, strength, peace, light and Ananda of the spiritual consciousness. Let him write to you from time to time what experiences he gets or what are the difficulties that rise and prevent the experience.¹

30 November 1926

*

Sri Aurobindo is retired and sees no one.

If you have not had even a glimpse of the Truth from any spiritual man, the fault is likely to be yours. Either you have not made it your chief concern to know and realise, putting all things else in the background or holding them to be of no account, or else you have been seeking with your mind, through the thought, and not with your inner being, your soul and spirit.

No suggestions of any practice can be given you unless you write more fully and state how you have tried hitherto, by what kind of practice etc.

19 July 1927

*

All is possible if there is a true faith, a complete consecration, a sincere and pure aspiration and a persistent endeavour.

¹ *This letter and many other letters in this section were written by Sri Aurobindo to one of his secretaries. The secretary would reply to the correspondent over his own signature, quoting Sri Aurobindo's exact words or else paraphrasing or translating them. — Ed.*

There is no one path for all. The nature of the aspiration expressed seems to indicate Bhakti as the proper path. That also is the quickest way, though none is easy.

Sri A. cannot undertake to point the way to any except those who follow his own path and are capable of it. The right thing for a seeker is to find the Guru destined for him. Usually one who has been in search for twelve years finds the way and the leader of the way long before the end of that period. Probably a more whole-hearted and concentrated seeking is needed.

4 August 1927

*

Answer that I am ready to help him in his aspiration. But first he should give some fuller information about himself. He will also have to take some time to see whether he is really called to this way or to another. And before he is finally accepted, it will have to be tested whether he is really capable and ready to give himself entirely to this aspiration. This Yoga implies not only the realisation of God, but an entire consecration and change of the inner and outer life till it is fit to manifest a divine consciousness and become part of a divine work. This means an inner discipline far more exacting and difficult than the ethical and physical austerities which are the rule at the Satyagraha Asrama. He must not therefore enter on this path, far vaster and more arduous than most ways of Yoga, unless he is sure of the psychic call and of his readiness to go through to the end.

6 April 1928

*

Some time back, I had written to you to request whether you could take me for training in the yogic lines. I have not yet the favour of your reply. As already said in my last letter I need not write anything concerning me to the people of your type, as you can know all you want through your own powers. I should be much grateful for your early favourable reply.

I do not use powers of this kind or in this way. If he wants a Yoga of miraculous siddhis he must go elsewhere.

The object of Yoga is a change of consciousness, and opening into spiritual knowledge and experience and union with the Divine. If any powers come along with this change, they are not to be used in a trivial manner. 9 June 1928

*

Write to your friend that we do not ask for any financial help from your father and therefore you are not called upon to answer the questions in his letter. It is not everyone who has the *adhikāra* to help in the work of the Asrama. Those only can do so who have faith in it or sympathy or at least confidence in Sri Aurobindo.

As for the house, it was simply said that your wife would be allowed to come, if she wished to enter this path or prepare herself for it; but only when a house could be bought which could be set apart for women disciples. Sri Aurobindo is not anxious to increase the number of his disciples and only those are accepted usually who have the call and capacity for Yoga and are ready to satisfy the conditions. The permission was given for your wife at your request as a special favour and stands only if she wants to come and is prepared to live here under the conditions of life in the Asrama. 14 October 1928

*

Your letter this time is sufficiently explicit regarding your state of mind and your object in practising Yoga. You have apparently a call and may be fit for Yoga; but there are different paths and each has a different aim and end before it. It is common to all the paths to conquer the desires, to put aside the ordinary relations of life, and to try to pass from uncertainty to everlasting certitude. One may also try to conquer dream and sleep, thirst and hunger etc. But it is no part of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga to have nothing to do with the world or with life or to kill the senses or entirely inhibit their action. It is the object of his Yoga to transform life by bringing down into it the Light, Power and Bliss of the divine Truth and its dynamic certitudes. This Yoga is not a Yoga of world-shunning asceticism, but of divine Life.

Your object on the other hand can only be gained by entering into Samadhi and ceasing in it from all connection with world-existence. You cannot get help in this path from Sri Aurobindo; you must go to someone else in order to find a Guru.

1 January 1929

*

He can have darshan (only) if he comes for one of the three days. His request for advice etc. is too vague. I do not give advice or instructions in this general way. The whole question is whether he has the call or the capacity for the Yoga. That can only be seen when he comes here. He has to see first if the wish to offer himself is real, deep and persistent, — if the message has captured his heart or only touched his mind. All else afterwards.

8 September 1929

*

No one is initiated in this Yoga in any formal way. Those are accepted by the Mother who are found to be called or chosen from within for this path or for Sri Aurobindo's work. That acceptance is sufficient. Those are considered as called or chosen who can open and be receptive to the Power that goes from her here and can feel its working. If by doing what he is doing now, he can in time thus open and receive and feel the Power that will be a sign that he is meant for this way of Yoga. Nothing else is needed; prayer and aspiration are sufficient, if there is sincerity and a true call within.

23 February 1930

*

Answer to X that at present his mind seems to be under too many conflicting influences for him to take up Yoga with a single mind, much more for him to give up everything and come here, even if he were accepted. If he came, he would be pulled backwards by these influences. A divided nature is the worst possible condition for this path. Moreover he has a wife and a very young child, and he would have to give them up and practically renounce all connection with family life. As for politics, if he still feels

the political call, he certainly cannot come here. It is better if he exhausts these desires of the ordinary nature, before he takes up the spiritual life. If at any time he feels them fallen away from him and only the spiritual attraction left, he can then take up the spiritual life, though it would still remain to be decided which path was the right one for him. Sri Aurobindo's path of Yoga is a very difficult one and there are others that are much easier to follow and might suit his nature better. But whichever path it is, Yoga asks for a one-centred endeavour, and until that can be given, a preparation like that which he is spontaneously undergoing is all that is possible.

20 May 1930

*

You had better send a copy of this letter to X and ask him to be careful in future with those whom he takes for the sadhana. Everybody must be made to understand clearly that this is not a sadhana of emotional and egoistic *bhakti*, but of surrender. One who makes demands and threatens to commit suicide if his demands are not complied with, is not meant for this Yoga. Also they must understand that they must not consider that they have a right to be called here at their own demand either for darshan or for permanent residence. Farther, it is not the habit of Sri Aurobindo or the Mother to answer every letter written to them; they do not answer unless there is a special reason for reply. Sadhaks who write about their sadhana will get the help they need if they take the right attitude and can receive it. But no written answer can be demanded for any letter.

You may write also to the boy himself to the following effect.

(1) If he cannot take the right attitude, he had better leave this Yoga and take to the ordinary life or follow some other path like Gandhi's.

(2) *Satyāgraha* and *prāyopaveśana* are no parts of this Yoga — they are parts of Gandhi's teaching and practice, but anyone who tries to bring them in here will be considered unfit to be Sri Aurobindo's disciple. If he writes again in this strain, no farther notice will be taken of him and he will be left to his own ways.

(3) It is not the habit of the Mother to answer letters written

to her; all letters are written by you under my instructions or at the Mother's order. But no disciple has the right to demand an answer to his letter. If he writes about his sadhana, he will receive *silent* help, provided he has the capacity to receive it and the right attitude. In future he must expect no direct answer to his letters; if anything has to be said, you will write through X.

(4) He must not expect to be called to Pondicherry. Only those are allowed who are ready for sadhana in the Ashram or who are called for work for which they have a special capacity or training. For darshan, permission is given only when the Mother chooses; demands made in the spirit of his letter are always refused.

(5) This Yoga is not a Yoga of emotional egoistic vital bhakti full of demands and desires. There is no room in it for *ābdār* of any kind. It is only for those who surrender to the Divine and obey implicitly the directions given to them by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

2 August 1930

*

You may get his photograph—it may help to see what kind of nature he has. But there is no need to go out of the way to *persuade* him; from his letter he does not seem altogether ready for the spiritual life. His idea of life seems to be rather moral and philanthropic than spiritual at present; and behind it is the attachment to the family life. If the impulse to seek the Divine of which he speaks is more than a mental turn suggested by a vague emotion, if it has really anything psychic in it, it will come out at its own time; there is no need to stimulate, and a premature stimulation may push him towards something for which he is not yet fit.

12 January 1931

*

Am I fit for Sri Aurobindo's Yoga? Will he take me up?

If by my Yoga you mean the integral Yoga leading towards the supramental realisation, you have not at present the capacity for it. All you can do at present is some preparation for it by Bhakti and self-dedication through Karma; if into this preparation you

put a strong sincerity and a settled psychic aspiration, then one day you will be ready for more. 23 February 1931

*

The letter is an extremely intelligent one and shows considerable justness of mind and discriminating observation both as to the nature of the sadhana and its obstacles and the movements in him. You had better correspond with him and encourage him.

Tell him that his observations are all very correct and there is little to add to them. If he perseveres with sincerity and the same discriminating correctness of vision he is sure to progress. The sadhana is a difficult one and time should not be grudged; it is only in the last stages that a very great and constant rapidity of progress can be confidently expected. As for Shakti, the descent of Shakti before the vital is pure and surrendered, has its dangers. It is better for him to pray for purification, knowledge, intensity of the heart's aspiration and as much working of the Power as he can bear and assimilate. 18 May 1931

*

As to the girl, X, it hardly seems possible to say anything definite from her experiences — they are in the vital plane; it is only if the experience is in the psychic that it has a decisive value as indicating the call to Yoga.

The vision of the boy purports to be a call from Srikrishna, but these vital visions are not always what they seem to be. The vision about Kali and the dark forces and the fainting indicates on the contrary very serious difficulties, danger from the Asuric forces and an insufficient strength in the Adhar. On the other hand the vision of Kali with the dagger followed by that of the boy *might* mean that the Divine Shakti will destroy the difficulties and make the way clear for the service of Krishna.

Nothing however can be definitely said from this kind of experience. If her call to Yoga is real, it will declare itself irresistibly hereafter; it will then be seen to what path she is called, for as yet there is no clear and indubitable indication of a call to *this* Yoga. 7 November 1931

*

You ask about your friend, X. It is very evident from his own letter that he is not ready for the spiritual life or fit for Yoga. If he were to attempt it in his present condition, he would only be wasting time and energy (which could be turned to other purposes) in a futile endeavour. The spiritual life is only for those who have a single-minded or else a dominant turn towards it sufficient to carry them through all its struggles and difficulties. An awakening of the soul (not a turn of the mind only) is the one sure sign of a call to the Yoga. 26 December 1931

*

At times I feel a kind of peculiar fear as if I am going to lose my brain (especially at night when I go to bed).

You can reply to him that if he has fears of this kind, it would be better not to try the sadhana. It is a difficult Yoga and faith, a steady and quiet will, courage and strength are necessary if one is to follow it. 21 March 1932

*

Tell him he can meditate and put himself into spiritual relation with us and if anything opens in him he can write.

25 March 1932

*

X is certainly capable of doing Yoga, he has a good adhar, — but whether he will be able to do this Yoga, is not quite certain as it is a very difficult path and would need more vital energy and single-minded concentration than he might be prepared at present to give for the purpose. 16 August 1932

*

The experiences you have had are very clear evidence that you have the capacity for Yoga. The first decisive experiences in this Yoga are a calm and peace that is felt, first somewhere in the being and in the end in all the being, and the descent of Power and Force into the body which will take up the whole adhar

and work in it to transform mind, life and body into the instrumentation of the Divine Consciousness. The two experiences of which you wrote in your letter are the beginning of this calm and the descent of this Force. Much has to be done before they can be established or persistently effective, but that they should come at this stage is a clear proof of capacity to receive. It must be remembered however that this Yoga is not easy and cannot be done without the rising of many obstacles and much lapse of time — so if you take it up it must be with a firm resolve to carry it through to the end with a whole-hearted sincerity, faith, patience and courage.

The vision of flowers is a symbol usually of psychic qualities or movements whether in potentiality or promise or in actual state of development. The swaying is due probably to the body not being habituated to receive the Force — it should cease as soon as the body is accustomed.

2 May 1933

*

I am interested in spirituality. My desire is to live in direct touch with the Asram.

You can give him some kind of answer — for his stamp. Spirituality is a vague term, — there are many ways of approaching the spiritual consciousness and the Guru's choice of a disciple depends on whether his mind or his nature and inner capacity call him to the particular path or not etc.

7 January 1935

*

We have read your letter and the Mother is willing to accept X as she has already accepted you. It is understood that he will do all he can to merit the acceptance.

You can tell him that reading and study, though they can be useful for preparing the mind, are not in themselves the best means of entering the Yoga. It is self-dedication from within oneself that is the means. Nor is it entrance into the atmosphere of the Asram that is needed, for there are many things in the atmosphere of the Asram, not all of them desirable. It is with

the consciousness of the Mother that he must unite and there too a sincere self-consecration in mind and heart and will is the means for it. The work given by the Mother is always meant as a field for that self-consecration; it has to be done as an offering to her so that through the self-offering one may come to feel her Force acting and her presence.

P.S. The Mother will give the interview asked for, but it will not be possible immediately as just now her days are too crowded — you will have to wait some days for it. 27 February 1935

*

What you say about those whom we receive — that if one part in them sincerely desires the Divine, we give them their chance — is quite true. If we demanded more at the beginning, exceedingly few would be able even to commence their journey towards the Divine. 24 April 1935

*

You can tell him that no one is accepted as a disciple unless the Mother has seen him and it appears that there is some possibility in him of an opening not merely for Yoga but for the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo. At present however Sri Aurobindo does not wish to accept more disciples unless the circumstances are exceptional. He can however, if he likes, come for darshan in August.

(I suppose he knows of my retirement and not speaking with people.) 9 May 1935

*

All Yoga is difficult, because the aim in every Yoga is to reach the Divine, to turn entirely towards the Divine and that means to turn away from the ordinary movements of the nature to something beyond it. But when one aspires with sincerity the strength is given that ends by surmounting the difficulties and reaching the goal.

The Mother was speaking of sadhaks who had entered into the life and atmosphere of the Asram and felt the touch on the

psychic of what is here. It does not apply to those who have come here from the outside world but still belong to the outside. All the ties of X's nature were still with the outside life; her vital was quite unadapted to the Asram life and recoiled from the idea of living it always. She gave her psychic no time to make that connection and absorb that influence which would have fixed in it the feeling of this as its true home. People can come here like that and stay for a time and go without any difficulty as many have done. The feeling of difficulty or uneasiness in going is on the other hand a sign that the soul has taken root here and finds it painful to uproot itself. There are some who are like that and have had to go but do not feel at ease and are always thinking of how to come back as soon as possible.

To help others without egoism or attachment or leaving the spiritual surroundings and spiritual life is one thing, to be pulled away by personal attachment or the need of helping others to the outside life is different.

18 May 1935

*

X, who was a residential disciple of yours at Pondicherry but came here some months back, is a neighbour and a friend of mine. Under his instruction, I have been practising sadhana for a few months. I concentrate in the heart. Concentrating at this place for some time, I feel a descent first and then an ascent of a force within me. At first this was very irregular. Now I am having this descent and ascent regularly. I feel a power descending within me, then after one or two or sometimes three minutes, I feel it ascending and going above the head and the same upward and downward movements go on in cyclic order. I do not practise more than one hour daily. When the descent and ascent go on, the concentration at a certain place does not become necessary or rather my personal attempt of concentration stops or hampers the movements. In such a state, I keep myself vacant and watch the movements listlessly and keep off the passing thoughts that sometimes come. I feel calmness, quietude and vastness within me.

Accepted as disciple. As long as the calmness, quietude and vastness lasts, a special concentration need not be continued.

The special concentration is intended to bring the experience — during the experience the attitude of witness should be kept with rejection of anything that might disturb the experience. Listlessness however is not the proper poise of the witness but rather a still quietude. 1 November 1935

*

Wire me if I am accepted or not.

What the deuce does he mean by asking a wire? One does not take disciples by a wire. And how that face [*in the man's photograph*] is going to do Yoga, I don't know. I suppose it is through X that he comes. Has the latter written anything about him?

circa 1935

*

I am sending the photograph of X. Please see him, for he has come with much faith and *bhakti* for the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Mother does not want to see him; he has come without permission and, if we start seeing all the people who come like that, there will be no value in the rule. If he had a true Yogic capacity, it would be different, but we see no trace of it. Tell him he needs another kind of guidance — he would not be able to stand this Yoga. 3 July 1936

*

X is planning to go back to his home. But he would like your instructions and guidance from here.

It is not possible for me to give him help and guidance — for that would mean an Influence put on him and in his present stage of development he has not the necessary strength and balance to receive it and bear it. I have said he cannot do this Yoga. He needs something else that he can assimilate. 4 July 1936

*

You can write to him in Bengali and tell him that Sri Aurobindo has seen the letters and says that the vision is interesting as showing that his inner being which came up in the dream is capable of receiving the Light which descends from above through the head into the other centres of the being. It is too early to say more. But he can continue with his aspiration and endeavour and report what experiences he has.

You can also tell him that there are two stages in the Yoga, one of preparation and one of the actual intensive sadhana. It is the first that he can undertake. In this stage aspiration in the heart with prayer, bhakti, meditation, a will to offer the life to the Divine are the important things. Purification of the nature is the first aim to be achieved. There should be no over-eagerness for experiences but such as come should be observed and, if helpful to the right attitude and true development, accepted. All that flatters the ego or feeds it should be rejected. There should be no impatience if the progress is slow or difficulties many — all should be done in a calm patience — and full reliance on the Divine Mother. This period tests the capacity of the sadhak and the sincerity of his aspiration towards the Divine.

12 November 1936

*

A correspondent has asked whether it is possible to receive spiritual initiation from you. He has heard from somebody that if one has earnestness to be your disciple, you appear in your mental body and give the initiation.

There is no formal initiation; acceptance is sufficient, but I do not usually accept unless I have seen or the Mother has seen the person or unless there is a clear sign that he is meant for this Yoga. Sometimes those who desire to be disciples have seen me in dream or vision before acceptance.

20 May 1937

*

You can write to him that when someone has a sincere and strong call for the sadhana Sri Aurobindo does not refuse to accept him. But it may be that he has first to prepare himself before he can

face the full difficulties of the Path. As for leaving all it would be premature to do so before one is sufficiently advanced on the way to make such a step spiritually profitable; too early done, it often creates more difficulties than it removes. 31 May 1937

*

Sometimes people whose aspiration is doubtful or whose acceptance is not known to me, come and claim to join my meditations here as a matter of right.

The word “accepted” in these conditions has no great importance. If people want to join the Asram, then acceptance or non-acceptance has a meaning. But outside there are any number of sadhaks practising Yoga who have started without asking even for acceptance on their own motion. I do not interfere unless it is a question of something quite opposed to the Yoga in them, something neurasthenic, ill-balanced or hostile. It is quite impossible to stop the flood in most cases — even if refused, people say, “You alone are my guru” and go on doing sadhana. 18 July 1937

*

I don't very much care to accept unknown people unless they turn out to be of the right stuff. His visions were interesting² but what I wanted was for him to prepare himself and see whether anything developed in him. If there is nothing in his letters about experiences or spiritual developments, he has not satisfied the test. You will in that case write to him that his acceptance depends upon his development and showing that he is really called to this sadhana. 8 March 1938

*

I have received the photo and his letter and I should not advise him to undertake the Yoga — at least not now. In spite of his mental capacity which is considerable there is a weakness of the vital force in him which would stand very much in his way.

² See the letter of 12 November 1936 on page 551. — Ed.

Moreover to overcome the difficulties of Yoga, there must be a definite call and he himself says that he has not got that. It is better for him to increase his vital force and will by some life-action steadily undertaken and followed out — that is the one thing he needs before he can go farther. 6 June 1938

*

Two days ago my friend X wrote to the Mother imploring her to take him in hand. Can I answer him in the affirmative?

Well, at present it is better not to write anything too positive. Nowadays especially, the Mother takes people in such circumstances on probation, she does not give them large immediate assurances, but waits to see how they open. If he justifies his aspiration, all will be well. 26 February 1943

*

As for the Zamindar he seems to expect some *dīkṣā* of the traditional kind from me, but this I do not give. He will have to be told that I do not and that my method is different. It may be a little difficult to explain to him or for him to understand what it is. Perhaps he may be told that those who come to have the Yoga are not accepted at once and there is sometimes a long period of trial before they are. We can see how he takes it and decide afterwards if he persists in his desire to come here. 11 July 1949

A Special Path

This Yoga is a special way to a high and difficult spiritual achievement. It is given only when there is sufficient evidence of capacity or an irresistible call. Inner peace is not its object; that is only one of the elementary conditions for it.

29 July 1927

*

Ask him to let me know more about himself.

What is the nature or object of Yoga which he says is the aim of his life? Has he practised at all before?

What makes him turn to me? Does he know anything about my way of Yoga and its aims?

I accept only those who are found capable of the Yoga practised here and who are either naturally drawn to this way or who are prepared to put themselves with entire confidence and without any reserves under the guidance they will get here.

I shall reply more definitely to his request after I have received his answer. 12 July 1928

*

Answer to him that my way of Yoga is a special path and extremely difficult and I do not readily accept disciples — unless there is something to indicate that they have a special call.

16 December 1928

*

Write to him that compliance with his request to see me is impossible. I do not *see* anyone — I do not speak with anybody or give oral instructions in Yoga. As for the rest, this is a special path of Yoga and only those are accepted who have a special call to it, not merely a general desire for the spiritual life. It is not a life of Sannyasa or a Yoga that can be done by Japa etc. but something much more difficult, so difficult that even those who have a call do not find it easy to go through to the end, and for those who have not the call, it would be impossible. If he likes, however, he can go on practising his Japa with an aspiration towards this path and if he gets any experiences by which a call to it becomes evident, then I can reconsider his case. 13 February 1930

*

May I ask if you have published anything (in English) on the Tantra?

For at least ten years I have been getting symbols and instructions in the sleep-state, but only within about one year have I been able to see at all (with the Inner Eye) while awake. . . . But I long to develop a little faster in the waking state. Can you suggest any way?

If you can put any literature in my way along these lines

or give me any hints as to higher development than that which I have, I will be greatly under obligation to you.

1. Sri Aurobindo has written no book in English upon the Tantra.
2. Mention *The Mother* and give her the address of the publishers.
3. For the rest, say that Sri Aurobindo does not usually care to intervene in the sadhana of others even by such hints and suggestions as she asks for, because such intervention might unprofitably disturb their own line of development or basis of experience. His own way is of a special kind with a well-defined purpose and he has made it a rule — for very strong reasons — not to touch spiritually anyone who has not entered this particular way.

February 1931

*

He has himself said that he could not follow any path consistently owing to doubts and difficulties. Sri Aurobindo's path is long and difficult and it is not possible to follow it unless there is a strong call and a power to go through to the end. He cannot be admitted until it is clear that he has both.

3 May 1932

*

Sri Aurobindo's way of Yoga is of a special character — it is neither sannyasa nor does it accept the ordinary way of human life. Its first stages can be practised anywhere. But unless there is a personal call to this particular way, there is no use in anybody taking to it. For it is a difficult path and there is little chance of success unless the aspiration is clear and fixed and the demand of the soul sincere and unbreakable. Sri Aurobindo does not admit anyone to this Yoga unless he has some ground to decide that there is in him this special call and that he has an evident capacity for this way — usually it is only after seeing personally at the time of one of the three darshans he gives to disciples and others that he decides whether or not to admit. On the strength of correspondence only he very seldom makes any decision of this kind.

1 May 1933

*

You have written [*in the preceding letter*] that Sri Aurobindo's way of yoga is of a special character and unless there is a personal call to that special yoga, there is no use taking to it. First of all my idea of yoga is very hazy and confused and I do not know anything about Sri Aurobindo's system of yoga. Does it put too much stress on pranayama? . . . Does it follow Anahata Nad and Jyoti?

You can tell him that it has nothing to do with the things he speaks of. It is a Yoga whose aim is to bring down a supra-mental consciousness and its Light, Power, Peace, Knowledge and Ananda for the transformation of the mind, life and body consciousness into an instrument of the Divine Consciousness. It does not follow any of the old ways though it takes something from all of them — but it is in essence the finding of a new way and is therefore extremely difficult and under certain conditions may be dangerous, — so it is not likely to be what he wants. You can give him the dates and explain that there is only darshan and Sri Aurobindo does not converse with those he sees.

17 May 1933

*

The difficulty is that she seems to have only vairagya for worldly life without any knowledge or special call for this Yoga and this Yoga and the life here are quite different things from ordinary Yoga and ordinary Asrams. It is not a life of meditative retirement as elsewhere. Moreover it would be impossible for us to decide anything without seeing her and knowing at close hand what she is like. We are not just now for taking more inmates into the Ashram except in a very few cases.

May 1936

*

I have been doing asanas for the last year and a half, but do not seem to have derived any benefit from this, nor do I see light while doing pranayama. I have been a devotee of Sri Dattatreya and have been given a mantra by a sannyasi whom I regard as my guru. Recently I have read your book *The Mother* and feel that the Mother and Dattatreya are not

different but one. Still, I do not see the light that, it is said, comes to those who practise asanas and pranayama.

Please give me some instruction in asanas and pranayama.

Tell him that this is a different way of Yoga and it does not include Asanas and Pranayam. The seeing of light depends on a certain opening of the inner consciousness — it can come by pranayam or without pranayam. If he does not see, there must be some obstacle not yet removed in himself. But whatever difficulties he has, he should seek their solution from his guru.

25 June 1936

*

Reply that the Mother is not able to write letters herself, and you are writing on her behalf. What is given by the Mother is not a development of supernatural force, but if someone is accepted to take up this path of Yoga he is led towards a deeper and higher consciousness in which he can attain union with the Divine Mother. This however is a path long and full of difficulties — Sri Aurobindo and the Mother do not admit anyone to it unless they are sure of his call and his capacity to follow it and the person himself is sure of his will to follow it until the goal is reached. You can also inform him that Sri Aurobindo is retired and sees no one, he only comes out to give a silent blessing to his disciples and some others specially admitted for Darshan three times a year. If he comes in December, it will not be possible to see Sri Aurobindo, but he can see the Mother.

6 March 1937

*

The writer of this letter wants to know if he is fit to be a disciple or if he has yet to prepare himself.

This is a difficult yoga and very few are “fit” — one has to prepare oneself for a long time in order to become fit.

11 May 1938

*

Inform him that

(1) No one is admitted into the Asram, unless and until he is accepted as a disciple of Sri Aurobindo.

(2) Sri Aurobindo sees no one, not even his own disciples, except on three days of the year and he speaks with none.

(3) Sri Aurobindo's path is a special one to which few are admitted. He seems to want Rajayoga (*cittavṛttinirodha*) or something similar, but that is not the way followed here. He should seek a guru who can give him what he wants.

*

I had the good fortune of securing a real guide in the spiritual path, who initiated me into Rajayoga. But I have lost the chance of further guidance. I would now like to be guided by you.

Reply that Sri Aurobindo gives help or guidance only to those who follow his own special path of Yoga, but this is a path which would not be suited to his case.

Will you kindly lead me and help me in my attainment of what I desire? I take refuge in you as your own disciple.

Reply to him that this Yoga is a long and difficult one and needs a perseverance and a steadiness which according to his own letter he does not seem to possess. If he found the path being shown to him by his "guidance" too hard for his zeal, this will be still more difficult for him either to understand or to follow to the end. This is not a Yoga one can start today and leave tomorrow. It is only if there is a sign of a real call to it that Sri Aurobindo would be willing to take anyone into this path.

Admission, Staying, Departure

“Acceptance” and “Admission”

Reply that residence in the Asrama is only allowed to sadhakas who have been accepted into Sri Aurobindo’s path of Yoga, and not to all of them. This path is a special way of Yoga, difficult and different from others; only those are accepted who have a special call to it.

8 February 1930

*

Many thanks for [*a transcript of the preceding letter*]. Permit me to ask as to the qualifications of persons who can be accepted and admitted into the holy ashram as sadhaks.

There are no specific qualifications except the call to lead a divine life embodying a higher spiritual and supramental Truth (not Sannyasa), the spirit which is prepared to sacrifice all for that one end accepting even the hardest conditions, ordeals and tests, and the recognition of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. It is the Mother herself who decides after seeing the aspirant and the nature of the call within him. You may point out to him that the seeking in him seems from his letter to be of a vague kind; he seems to seek any path and any Guru he can find. There is nothing definite that would indicate a call to this way of Yoga.

22 February 1930

*

X may write explaining that the Asram is not a public institution with rules etc. which anyone satisfying the rules can enter. Only those are admitted who are already Sri Aurobindo’s disciples and who are considered ready for the Asram life.

1 April 1930

*

Answer that admission to the Asram is very strictly limited and only those who have already been accepted as Sri Aurobindo's disciples are admitted there. This acceptance is not easy, as Sri Aurobindo's path of Yoga is different from others and only those who are specially called to it in preference to other paths and who show some sign of the call or are believed to be initially capable can become disciples.

The answer must be in Hindi.

30 April 1930

*

No one can be received into the life of the Asram unless he has first been accepted as a disciple — there are no “students” of Yoga — and no one is accepted as a disciple until he has been first seen and it is known whether he has the call to this Yoga and the capacity for it. If he likes to come to Pondicherry, he may; the Mother will see whether he is fit. But permission to stay in the Asram cannot be given now. All the rest can be seen afterwards.

22 August 1930

*

I am quite tired of this selfish and frail world and therefore I wish to stay in your Ashram for the good of my soul. I have heard much about you and I fully trust you will very kindly help me as your younger brother to be free from such a selfish and frail world.

Give him the usual answer that stay in the Asram is allowed to some only of those who are already accepted as Sri Aurobindo's disciples and that owing to the difficulty of the path, only some who have a call or a capacity are accepted as disciples.

It is not possible for him to join the Asram; Sri Aurobindo does not admit anyone who is not personally known and already his disciple; even among his disciples he admits only those whom he considers to be ready or called to the life of the Asram. Moreover the Asram is now full and there is hardly any room for new members.

All are not equally capable of practising Yoga and in Yoga itself some paths are more difficult than others. There are some

who have a special call to a path; others have no call; though they may feel drawn to Yoga, it is to other disciplines that they must go. This path is especially difficult and even some of those admitted to it find great difficulty in following it. Therefore Sri Aurobindo is not willing to admit any new disciples unless he has reason to think that they have a special call for it or a special capacity.

11 June 1932

*

Those who follow the Yoga here are accepted by the Mother — for “accepted” means “admitted into the Yoga, accepted as disciples”. But the progress in the Yoga and the *siddhi* in the Yoga depend on the degree to which there is the opening.

24 June 1933

*

One cannot enter the Asram like that. One must first be admitted to the Yoga and show that there are the experiences which indicate that one is really called to this path. Even afterwards it rests on the decision of Sri Aurobindo whether the sadhak is to be admitted to the Asram or practise his sadhana outside.

8 January 1934

*

You will tell him that admission to the Asram is only allowed to those who are already accepted as Sri Aurobindo’s disciples. There are no arrangements for visitors residing in the Asram; those who come for darshan make their own arrangements outside. Sri Aurobindo does not readily accept disciples as his is a special path of Yoga and very difficult for most. For what he wants, another Guru with an easier way of Yoga would probably be more helpful.

31 December 1935

*

You can tell them that it is not possible. Admissions to the Asram have been stopped owing to want of accommodation. Moreover, it is only those who are already Sri Aurobindo’s disciples and

practising his special way of Yoga who are admitted as members of the Asram.

19 April 1935

*

Write to him that only those who are already Sri Aurobindo's disciples and have practised his Yoga can be admitted. Moreover at present admissions are rarely made as there is no longer any sufficient accommodation in the Asram.

(This should now be the answer to all these candidates from nowhere and everywhere — i.e. if they persist, otherwise they can be left without answer.)

15 May 1935

Admission to the Ashram, 1927–1943

It is best for him to put away all family and worldly cares if he wishes to succeed in the sadhana.

As for staying here, things have changed since he was here. I no longer take direct charge of people's sadhana; all is in the hands of Sri Mira Devi and the force acting here is much more direct, powerful and insistent than it was then. It needs a certain strength and a strong receptivity to bear and answer to it, especially a great sincerity in all the being and a preparation is sometimes necessary before it can do its work.

The best would be perhaps for him to have an experimental stay for some time.

23 March 1927

*

People are not accepted in the Asram or in the Yoga unless it is seen that they have the call and the capacity. A mere formal request is not sufficient for the purpose.

Sri Aurobindo is not at present seeing anyone, not even his own disciples.

If he likes, he can enter into a preliminary correspondence and explain his case, what he is seeking and why and the nature of his past efforts.

3 June 1927

*

Everybody is not admitted here, only those who are fit and who have a true call to Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. The desire for a "calm and peaceful" or Asramic life is not a sufficient passport for this admission.

22 July 1927

*

There is no question about grihastha and Sannyasin here, because the distinction does not exist for us. There is no place for the Sannyasin of the ordinary type at least, because we do not turn our backs on life; neither are we grihasthas, because we do leave behind us the ordinary human life and its institutions and motives.

==

The difficulty in X's case is of two kinds. First, his mind seems to cling to traditional ideas and ways of action, while here they are thrown aside altogether. It is impossible without an entirely free intelligence (or, in its place, a strong psychic faith and ardour) to follow the movement here. I doubt whether X would be able to appreciate, much less to assent to it and follow it.

(2) X seems to lay entire stress on the reasoning intellect and to have fixed himself in that movement. Here the endeavour is of a supramental and therefore suprarational character. It has to be carried out through a silent mind, an active psychic being, a descent of the supramental Light and Power and Vastness and Ananda transforming all the instruments. An attachment to the way of the intellect, a bondage to the rational mind would be an insuperable obstacle. The supramental can be reached through the active mind only if the latter is large, free, subtle, plastic, ready at every moment to renounce its own way and to admit enlightenment and contradiction of all its cherished conclusions and habitual movements by a higher Light. Not one intellect in a thousand is of that kind. And even then it would not be enough without the heart's opening and the support of the psychic brought to the surface.

It would be useless for X to come here and find himself at a loss in an atmosphere foreign to his temperament. There is no sign that he is *psychically* ready for such a transplantation. A

certain agreement of the philosophic idea is quite insufficient.

Only two kinds of people can stay here with any true profit;

(1) Those who are ready to absorb the spiritual atmosphere and change.

(2) Those who, if not yet ready, can still surrender to the influence and prepare slowly till they are ready.

==

It may be that X cannot advance precisely because of this interference of the intellect in the ways of the Spirit. The reasoning mind can never give itself confidently to the greater Influence, not even to God or Guru; it is capable of turning unprofitably around itself for ever. July 1927

*

He cannot come here to join the Asram. If he finds that he is under a pressure too much for his body, it is better to relax and take to healthy physical habits which will restore strength. Yoga is only for those who have brains and bodies strong enough to bear the pressure. 6 August 1927

*

Is it possible under your guardianship (or elsewhere and in that case where?) to live a longer life than usual in India, and similarly to transplant self with body to other planets or other distant parts on the earth? I believe you have achieved all these powers. I do not mean transplanting the soul alone which could naturally be achieved after death.

Will you very kindly admit one who has some practice in yoga and is prepared to abide strictly by the injunctions to a student in yoga?

Only those who take up this way of Yoga are admitted, if otherwise fit or ready, to this Asrama. The miraculous powers he mentions are not among the objects of this Yoga.

19 August 1927

*

He will have to wait. Admission here does not go by each one's own desire or idea of his readiness; there is an inner source of

decision which has nothing to do with any of the reasons given by the mind. But also from a more external point of view we have neither means nor accommodation to entertain all who would otherwise come and there are some who are not called and are yet more ready than X.

He must make his sadhana deeper, less mental, more psychic, by a stronger aspiration and more devout surrender, before he can hope to come. Let him learn too to face the difficulties of life and keep his inner consciousness amongst them. It is not always the best thing for everybody to have the external circumstances made easy and favourable for the sadhana.

6 September 1927

*

The best thing will be for him to come here for a few days; the Mother will see him and decide what is best to be done after seeing his capacity etc., whether he is to remain here for a time or practise there.

Inform him that there is no fixed rule for everybody here. Fruits except bananas are not easily available in Pondicherry. For expenses (ordinary diet etc.) Rs. 20 a month can be reckoned as a fair amount; but he can meet his own expenses if he likes, taking his own diet etc.

Also inform him that I do not see anybody now or personally give initiation, but that will make no difference. He must have understood from Jotin's article¹ that all the work is in the hands of the Mother.

He should not come till a little time after February 21st.

circa February 1928

*

X of Burdwan writes that he intends to come here and I will have to support him, because he has nowhere else to go and because

¹ "Sri Aurobindo's Ashram: Daily Life of Disciples", by Jatindranath Sen Gupta, published in the *Hindu (Madras)* on 6 May 1927. See the Note on the Texts to Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest, volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 608.

he has the need of an intensive sadhana. Write to him not to come. Only those are allowed to live here who are accepted by myself and the Mother. People cannot merely come because they want or need or think that I ought to receive and maintain them or on the mere ground that they are sadhaks. As for himself, he has not as yet even the first conditions, a psychic opening or an attitude of self-surrender. He is only in the first mental stage of initial realisations. In any case no claim is allowed in these matters.

13 April 1928

*

This path of Yoga is very special and a very difficult one. *Yogic Sadhan* does not give a sufficient idea of it. It requires not only capacity for sadhana, but a psychic call of a very definite kind — a mental adhesion is not sufficient. Before I can assent to his coming here, I must be sure of his having this call. Why should he not continue his practice at Rishikesh and see what develops in him and what is his real way?

8 September 1928

*

It will be better for him to write again stating

- (1) What Yoga he has practised during these 15 years, or, especially, during the last two years.
- (2) With what results.
- (3) His age, circumstances etc.

There are no external rules for admission to the Asrama. The conditions are internal, the call to the way and spiritual purpose of this Yoga, an entire and one-minded readiness for surrender and the giving up of all else for the one Truth, acceptance by myself and the Mother. Those who practise, are not always admitted at once to the Asrama.

11 September 1928

*

The obstacles to his coming here are of two kinds.

- (1) There is nothing as yet in his experiences, at least as he has recorded them, which would indicate a real call, necessity or readiness for his stay here.

(2) If he comes here, unready, the pressure of the forces at the centre is likely to be injurious rather than beneficial to his sadhana. The illness from which he has suffered, may return or regain force; the peace he is gaining may be disturbed etc. He is mistaken in thinking that to stay here will necessarily make his sadhana easier; it may make it more difficult, especially if, as is likely, the demand and pressure of the Force that is acting here is too great for him and he is unable to receive it or to answer.

I do not wish to increase the number of people in the Asrama excessively under the present conditions and I allow only those to remain with regard to whom the indication from above is perfectly clear and unmistakable.

11 September 1928

*

Write to X that I am not pleased with the tone of his letter. Demands of this kind, talk of suicide etc., claim to come here on the ground of poverty are all entirely out of place in one who aspires to practise this sadhana. Those who cannot face the difficulties of life in the right spirit, will not be able either to face in the right way the difficulties of sadhana. To stay here is a privilege accorded by the Mother to some who are fit or are called to do some work for her here. It is not conceded to anybody because he is poor and has no other resource or for any other irrelevant reason. And no one has a right to demand or clamour for it. If he wants to practise this Yoga, he must do it with a quiet spirit, demanding nothing but the calm, peace and light and strength of the divine consciousness and the presence of the Divine. And he must face all that comes to him in life, in a spirit of quiet faith and equality and endurance. circa 1928

*

It is very evident from his letter that in his mind he is not at all ready. If he has this wandering and experimental spirit, let him satisfy it first in the other places he thinks of visiting or the other experiments he wants to make. Here only those should come who feel a definite call and are sure that here lies their spiritual destiny and nowhere else.

16 January 1929

*

He says he wants to come here for his sadhana, but for what sadhana? The Yoga here is of a special kind and everybody is not called to it or fit for it. He himself seems to have been living very much in the mind and in external things. He is leaving the Asram there because he has fundamental differences (it is to be presumed, differences of idea and mental outlook) with the workers. How is it sure that there will be agreement here? In any case, it is the capacity for a special kind of inner life or the inner call to it that can alone be a reason for admittance to the Asram here. This is what you must explain to him. I do not know what sadhana he has been doing or what experiences he may have, if any. But when he came here, he did not seem to be at all ready. A mental decision to give up one kind of life or activity and take up another, is not sufficient for the purpose. 7 June 1929

*

What you should write to him is that it is not so easy to get permission to come here. Many desire it, but only a few are admitted. The desire is not enough, it has to be seen whether the applicant is fit.

As for the letter itself, he only says that he wants to serve a "good man" and that he is ready to do any work you (X) tell him to do. I do not see in that any sufficient call or reason for his coming here. 21 June 1929

*

I do not consider it advisable that he should abruptly give up his service and come here for good. When he came, he had a difficulty in bearing the pressure of the atmosphere up to the end. It will be better if for the present he comes at intervals, — we can see how he progresses and, if after a time, the difficulty is finally and definitely eliminated, then a decision can be taken.

1 August 1929

*

Write that permission is given for his coming but there are at present nearly 90 people here and, even when the temporary

ones have gone, something like 80 are likely to be here, for already the permanent number is over 75. In these circumstances it is extremely difficult to find room for new people, even for one. But still this may be arranged; in a few days we shall be able to see what is possible.

But if he wants to bring the child, it is another matter. Our experience is that most children cannot bear the pressure of the atmosphere, and after two or three experiences of this kind it has been made a rule not to admit young children to reside in the Asram. If he comes with the child, he must make his own arrangements for a separate lodging.

After receiving this letter he should let us know what are his definite plans and when he proposes to come.

circa August 1929

*

Answer that there are many paths of Yoga, — Sri Aurobindo's is one which is very difficult and exacting and he does not care to accept anyone into it unless he is satisfied that he has a special call and is capable of following the path. No one is admitted to the Asram as a member in the indefinite and conditional way he suggests. It is no use taking up Yoga without knowing what it is. If he wants to read books on the subject, he can read the *Essays on the Gita* and *The Mother*. They will not give him a complete idea of this path and its conditions and objects, but they should at least give him some notion of what Yoga is and of the spirit of this Yoga.

11 December 1929

*

It is not advisable for her to come now; she is not yet spiritually strong enough or sufficiently undivided to be able to support the pressure of the Yoga here. Nor is there at present room in the Asram. Also, she is mistaken in thinking that she has something to get directly from me other than what she has got or can get from the Mother. The only thing she can do now is to prepare herself, going on with what she has received and trying to assimilate it and bring it to her surface consciousness;

especially, she has to cultivate calm, balance, simple sincerity and a *quiet* and firm aspiration. 25 December 1929

*

You can write to X answering his questions.

There are three kinds of arrangements

(1) Those who live outside, rent their own house and see to their own arrangements.

(2) A room is sometimes given in the Asram to those who come for sadhana, as well as food etc.; but they pay a monthly sum so long as they stay.

(3) Those who are accepted as permanent resident members of the Asram and give all they have as property or income; these have nothing to pay.

If he comes, it is probably the first that would suit him best, at least at the beginning.

You can write this on your account and need not give it as coming from me. I have not yet decided anything about him.

circa 1929

*

I request, if you feel that I may be permitted to do so, to be kindly allowed to pay my pranams to both of you on the November festival of Sri Aravinda's darshan.

Write to him that he has permission for November 24th; but there is no room in the Asram; he must make his own arrangements.

Enter in the applicant's book.²

9 October 1929

*

I had the fortune of having Sri Aurobindo's Darshan and staying in the Asram for twelve days. I feel that I am greatly benefited. Yet I feel unless I can stay there for a long enough period I cannot know if I can aspire to get fixed in the path of

² This letter and the next three letters were written to a single sadhak in 1929 and 1930. The sadhak was admitted to the Ashram in September 1930. — Ed.

Yoga. I request therefore that you will be so kind as to let me remain in the Asram for at least six months commencing from 1st January 1930 or thereabouts. If I can be found by the end of that time to be a fit one I hope to stay in the Asram for ever if you would kindly take me in.

An “experiment” of this kind is not made in the Asram. Those who are as yet uncertain about their capacity or their call, are sometimes allowed to live here outside the Asram (at their own expense), but in connection with it for a time. It is only when they have accepted the spiritual life and are accepted that they can be admitted in the Asram as its members and workers or allowed to stay there for a long time on the same footing as the members.

10 December 1929

*

I want to dedicate myself and my life to yoga under the guidance of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

I request you to kindly accept me as one of your disciples and members of the Asram.

He is not ready for life in the Asram. He must be able first, staying where he is, to open himself to the divine Power and make sufficient inner progress. It is not enough to want to dedicate himself; there must be some clear indication that he is capable of entering into the path and following it.

17 December 1929

*

I entirely surrender myself and depend upon your divine Grace. If in your pleasure you direct that I should remain in the Asram, I feel the spiritual path will lose many of its difficulties for me. If on the other hand you should direct that I should go back to Nellore may I request at least that you will graciously accord me darshan tomorrow.

If he likes to spend some days more here, he can do so; but the time has not come for him to remain here permanently. He must wait for that for some time longer.

22 February 1930

*

As for coming here he will have to wait. Has he any clear idea of what this Yoga and sadhana mean? It is a one-pointed direction and concentration of all the being on an aim which most people would regard as remote from all current human aims and impossible. He would have to turn his back on all the old interests and pursuits and the sympathy and support of those now around him and undertake a most difficult effort and discipline which his vital being might find painful and distasteful to it. It is better if he considers long before asking for this Yoga and make sure that he has really an irresistible call.

1 January 1930

*

He can come in June. But I think, if I remember right, I had written that he should first come for some time and we would see from the results whether he should stay here permanently or not. To do the sadhana permanently in the Ashram is not always the best thing for everybody; it depends on the capacity and also on the stage which has been reached in the sadhana. For some the Force here would be too strong for a permanent stay; they get more advantage by staying for some time, receiving what they can and then going elsewhere to assimilate it; they are not ready for a continuous pressure.

I presume he will live separately, making his own arrangements? To live in the Ashram and take the food etc. would, I imagine, be a rather abrupt and trying change at his age.

10 May 1930

*

In each case there is a difference, for some are called upon to enter the Ashram life at once, others have to practise the Yoga while they are still in the world. No general rule can be made covering all cases. Each should do what he is called upon to do without troubling himself with suggestions of this kind. If any one has to enter the Ashram life either early or at a later stage, the call will come to him at the proper time. Meanwhile he should pursue the sadhana quietly keeping himself in close inner contact with the Force that comes from here.

3 July 1930

*

Write to him that it will be better for him to wait until he has from within himself the true and complete turn to a spiritual life. It is not in his mind only but in his vital nature that there are obstacles to a complete consecration. To come here might give him a stimulus, but it is not sure that it will be anything more than a partial stimulus which he could easily mistake for a total call. Often people receive such a stimulus, the psychic being opens, but the rest of the nature is only silenced for a time and does not sincerely concur, so that afterwards resistances arise and the sadhak falls away from the path, — which it is very injurious spiritually and otherwise to abandon once it has been begun.

5 July 1930

*

Reply that it will be better for his Yoga if he goes on for some time as he is — to practise it at the Asram might easily interrupt the present movement which is the right one for him and precipitate another for which he is not ready.

At present his experience is that of the mental being and mental nature opening to the Light and to some touch of a higher Ananda, with a basis of calm — the indispensable basis. This movement should continue till the heart and the vital being and vital nature also open. It is not necessary for him to make a special effort for these things. If he keeps concentrated and open and maintains his faith and the remembrance of the Mother, they will come of themselves in the proper time.

Meanwhile, he can keep himself in some kind of physical touch by writing from time to time giving succinctly his experiences and the progress of his Yoga. When a sufficient basis has been acquired, the question of his coming to the Asram can be reconsidered.

6 July 1930

*

What comes to my mind is to live in the Ashram where only it is possible for me to give myself up for the service of the Divine. May I have your permission for this?

No. It is elsewhere that you must prepare yourself, not here. You have not been asked to give yourself up to the service of the Divine in any outward or physical sense, but to prepare yourself inwardly by taking all life and all work wherever you are as a sacrifice, an offering to the Divine. That, if you are sincere in your seeking, you can do anywhere. 27 February 1931

*

It is possible to give X a room, the Mother says, in one of the houses. But he speaks of residing here permanently — in Pondicherry. To that there can be no objection; but as far as the life in the Ashram is concerned, I think it should be regarded as a trial at first — to be rendered permanent if all is found right afterwards. He should be informed that there are two kinds of residents in the Ashram, permanent members who give all they have or can dispose of and the Ashram undertakes in return all their expenses etc. and those who come for a time to practise Yoga. The latter pay their expenses of boarding and lodging and certain contingents, but, as the Ashram is in a town mostly in rented houses, these by themselves are sufficiently heavy.

17 May 1931

*

It is certainly quite true that the psychic contact can exist at a distance and that the Divine is not limited by place, but is everywhere. It is not necessary *for everybody* to be at Pondicherry or physically near the Mother in order to lead the spiritual life or to practise this Yoga, especially in its earlier stages. But that is only one side of the truth; there is another. Otherwise the logical conclusion might be that there was no necessity for the Mother to be here at all or for the existence of the Ashram or for anyone to come here.

The psychic being is there in all, but in very few is it well developed, well built up in the consciousness or prominent in the front; in most it is veiled, often ineffective or only an influence, not conscious enough or strong enough to support the spiritual life. It is for this reason that it is necessary for those drawn

towards this Truth to come here in order that they may receive the touch which will bring about or prepare the wakening of the psychic being — that is for them the beginning of the effective psychic contact. It is also for this reason that a stay here is needed for many — if they are ready — in order that under the direct influence and nearness they may have this development or building up of the psychic being in the consciousness or its coming to the front. When the touch has been given or the development effected, so far as the sadhak is at the moment capable of it, he returns to the outside world and under the protection and guidance even at a distance is able to keep the contact and go on with his spiritual life. But the influences of the outside world are not favourable to the psychic contact and the psychic development and, if the sadhak is not sufficiently careful or concentrated, the psychic contact may easily be lost after a time or get covered over and the development may become retarded, stationary or even diminished by adverse influences or movements. It is therefore that the necessity exists and is often felt of a return to the place of the central influence in order to fortify or recover the contact or to restore or give a fresh forward impulse to the development. The aspiration for such nearness from time to time is not a vital desire; it becomes a vital desire only when it is egoistically insistent or mixed with a vital motive, — but not if it is an aspiration of the psychic being calm, deep and without clamour in it or perturbing insistence.

This is for those who are not called upon or are not *yet* called upon to live in the Asram under the direct pressure of the central Force and Presence. Those who must so live are those called from the beginning or who have become ready or who are for some reason or another given a chance to form part of the work or creation which is being prepared by the Yoga. For them the stay here in the atmosphere, the nearness are indispensable; to depart would be for them a renunciation of the opportunity given them, a turning of the back upon the spiritual destiny. Their difficulties are often in appearance greater than the struggle of those who remain outside because the demand and the pressure are greater; but so also is their opportunity

greater and the power and influence for development poured upon them and that too which they can spiritually become and will become if they are faithful to the choice and the call.

7 October 1931

*

Reply that it is impossible to have X or anybody else here now (for staying) even if they were ready — for owing to damage to rented houses we are compelled to vacate them and have no longer sufficient room even for the sadhaks who are here, much less for new members. Moreover there are already a hundred here and we cannot take more (except for exceptional cases) till the funds of the Asram increase.

Moreover, it is not good for anybody to come here prematurely — even for Darshan. If they are not ready, the pressure of the Power here may disturb them, a resistance or obstacles in the nature may rise as in the case of Y.

As for the February darshan we do not yet know how we are going to accommodate even those who have already permission to come. It is probable that X will have to wait for the Darshan for some time longer.

1 January 1932

*

There is no possibility of admitting in such cases now. There are already nearly 100 people and it is impossible freely to increase the Asram by renting new houses or undergoing farther expenses at present. Therefore only in exceptional cases can new people, not already known as disciples, be accepted. If she wants to prepare herself for Yoga, she can try to practise where she is for the present.

11 February 1932

*

In the Asram there is very little room nowadays and what is there must be kept for disciples — for those who have been accepted and come for the practice of the Yoga and to profit by quiet meditation in the Asram atmosphere.

All that we can offer him is, if he comes to Pondicherry, that

he can see the Asram and meet people who will speak to him of the “philosophy” and the Yoga. At first more cannot be done.

This is not an Asram like others. It has a special life of its own and only those can live it who have entered into the spirit of the Yoga and are ready to assimilate its atmosphere.

As to your question about his sincerity, it is quite evident that his interest is mental only — it may be mentally sincere, but that does not carry one very far. If we were to admit everyone who is like that, we should soon have a thousand people here and there would be no Yoga and no spiritual life left. This, however, is for your information only; you need not hint anything of the kind to him in your letter!

24 February 1932

*

Oh Father! *I want a heart that can respond to all my moods, that can understand me, that can do me justice, that can love me intensely and exclusively.* Love, and love alone, is the chief note of my heart. But the inner voice says it is not love I crave for. It is Maya. . . . If you think it is time for me, will you allow me to come there for sadhana?

Reply to him that what he describes (in the sentence on the first page of this letter [*in italics above*], which you can quote) is a vital demand of the ego for emotional self-satisfaction; it is Maya. It is not true love, for true love seeks for union and self-giving and that is the love one must bring to the Divine. This vital (so-called) love brings only suffering and disappointment; it does not bring happiness; it never gets satisfied and, even if it is granted something that it asks for, it is never satisfied with it.

It is perfectly possible to get rid of this Maya of the vital demand, if one wishes to do it, — but the will to do it must be sincere. If he is sincere in his will, he will certainly get help and protection.

It is no use his coming to the Asram for sadhana; for so long as he has this vital demand, it will *not* be easier but rather more difficult to go on with his sadhana here. Here this vital basis for the Yoga is discouraged, there is a pressure against it and he would probably find the struggle in him made still more acute.

He must first get his basis changed from the vital to the psychic centre. 20 March 1932

*

Sri Aurobindo does not think that your coming here is advisable at the present stage of your sadhana. If you have this feeling that a Divine Guidance is there behind the circumstances of your life and especially if you feel this calmness, strength and light of which you speak, it means a great progress — for this is the real beginning of the spiritual and yogic consciousness and it shows that the foundation of the true being and the true consciousness is being laid in you. The psychic centre is that turned in all things towards the Divine, while the vital is that preoccupied with the desires and sufferings and enjoyments of the ego. If you continue with all sincerity under this sense of guidance and with this foundation growing in you, the psychic centre is likely to open of itself. It is when it opens and the present vital turmoil has sunk that it will be useful for you to come to Pondicherry for darshan. 29 July 1932

*

You can write to him (whoever he may be) that Sri Aurobindo is living absolutely retired, seeing no one and not corresponding with anyone outside. It is not possible therefore to get from him an opinion about the books.

In the Asram there is no accommodation for guests — it is only the disciples who live there under the rules of the Asram.

circa 1932

*

You can write to him that it is not possible to admit him into the Asram at once nor perhaps at any early date. He is too young and has not developed the necessary experience either of himself or of life or of Yoga. He should try to develop himself outside — develop in his inner spiritual urge and in spiritual experience and in strength and capacity. If he comes here in an unripe state, he is likely to meet not less but more serious difficulties than he has there. He must develop in himself the strength that can meet

them and a will strong enough to go through all possible opposition and ordeals without wavering or weakness. If these two conditions are satisfied, he may then be fit for a more intensive sadhana and for the Asram life. All depends on himself and his sincerity of aspiration and endeavour. 4 May 1933

*

Yes, you can leave everything and come to the Asram; but we suggest that, if it is at all possible for you to take a prolonged leave, say for six months, you should do that first. The reason is that there is sure to be a strong pressure on you (spoken or unspoken), especially from your father's side to return, so it is surest to test yourself first and see that there is no response in yourself, otherwise you might be subjected to a severer internal struggle if you come permanently at once. If all is well then the six months can become a permanent stay. But if leave is not possible, then you can give up all and come. 20 October 1933

*

If what she wants is to come here permanently, it is quite out of the question at this time. In future it is only those who make progress in sadhana and show that they have the necessary fitness to come here, who will be allowed. 18 November 1933

*

The question about the failures does not arise. I am not aware that anybody has come here who was a failure in life. Many have been very active and successful, each in his own line. What brings men to the Yoga has nothing to do with success or failure, it is the impulse of the psychic being to rise to something truer and higher than the ordinary life. 6 February 1934

*

This is not the time when we can go on increasing the number of members of the Asram — as you can well understand. We have no accommodation, the numbers are already unwieldy —

and there is the other reason.³ He must either wait perhaps for a very long time — he is exceedingly young — or find a place elsewhere.

17 February 1934

*

It is not possible to receive X here. In the first place we are obliged to stop or very strictly limit new admissions for some time to come. In the second place, X's struggle would be no less severe but more so here than over there, as the pressure is greater and the inner demand also. His difficulty is the usual difficulty in the vital and it can always arise at his age when the vital has to choose between the satisfaction of its normal movement and the single-minded pursuit of sadhana not for its own sake but for the sake of the Divine alone.

19 February 1934

*

Permanent admission is no longer given except in exceptional cases as the number is already large and accommodation is likely to be more and more difficult to provide.

All that can be permitted is to come for darshan in August — the rest is premature.

28 February 1934

*

In some minds there is, I think, the idea that the Divine is “in need” of instruments for the work of manifestation. With this idea are associated some very curious ideas. I suppose the Divine may be in need of us in his own supramental way, but that cannot mean that we have not to make any effort.

What you say is right. This attitude that the Divine has need of the sadhak and not the sadhak of the Divine, is utterly wrong and absurd. When people are accepted here, they are given a chance of a great Divine Grace, of being instruments in a great work. To suppose that the Divine *cannot* do his work without the help of this or that person is surely most arrogant and illogical. They

³ In February 1934, the Government of French India initiated an inquiry into the organisation and finances of the Ashram, as a result of which it requested Sri Aurobindo and the Mother not to buy or rent more houses. See pages 30–32. — Ed.

ought to remember the Gita's ऋतेऽपि त्वां, "even without thee" the work can be done, and its निमित्तमात्रं भव. 11 April 1934

*

I have recently gone through a volume called *Practice of Yoga* by Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh and learnt therefrom that about sixty students are practising yoga in the Ashram of your holiness. While writing a few words on the Ashram, the Swamiji says that "Those who really want to join the Ashram may communicate to Shree Arabindoo directly."⁴ It is really a very great fortune for a man who practises yoga under the guidance of such a great realised soul as your holiness.

The number of sadhaks is over 150 and it is impossible to make farther admissions except in the most sparing way, as the means of the Asram are not unlimited. Moreover Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is of a special and difficult kind and he admits only those who seem to him to have a special call to the life here. 9 May 1934

*

I send you back your friend's letters. As regards the question about his *śiṣyā*, I do not usually give directions in such matters — one has to follow the course that seems best relying on the Divine Will both for the choice and the consequence. It seems fairly clear that the course already suggested is the wiser one.

As for his coming here, he must first prepare himself. For the time being we are not making new admissions to the Asram except in certain cases, mostly where a promise had been previously given. He could come for darshan if he wishes in August and return back, — but the more important thing is that he should establish a conscious inner connection and attain to the calm and peace of mind which is always the best preparation and foundation of this Yoga. 24 June 1934

*

There is no possibility of that just now. The Asram is crowded

⁴ *Swami Sivananda, Practice of Yoga (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1929), p. 211.*

and we cannot admit new resident members for some time to come — except those who have already a claim or right to come.

10 July 1934

*

Impossible. We do not accept people for a long fixed period like that. Either they come as permanent sadhaks or, if they are disciples, on a short visit as at the darshan times. But at present we have suspended permanent admissions.

7 August 1934

*

He wants to stay — but for how long and where? The conditions are such now that we have been obliged to refuse all requests for permanent admission and even those for residence in the Asram. Otherwise we shall have no accommodation at all for those who are to come or for the habitual visitors at the darshan times.

28 August 1934

*

The Mother accepts in principle your coming here as a permanent member of the Asram. She would like you indeed to consider yourself, from now on as a member, — as X is though living for most of the year in Madras, — not an outside disciple.

The question remains about the time of your coming here not to return. Here the Mother is inclined to think that it would be more satisfactory to settle the affairs of the estate definitely, and then permanently come. There would in that case be some delay, but it would have this advantage of leaving little chance of a call or pull from over there to create any vibrations in the sadhana. The second date proposed by you would then have to be adopted.

Next, the children. Most of them are too young to have an intelligent will of their own in such matters as yet and in a matter like sadhana there should be no pressure or influencing of any kind. The delay will give some of them time to grow into a possibility of a clear and willed choice. Under this arrangement the matter of their coming over here can be decided then, when

things are ready. Meanwhile their photographs can be sent and perhaps the older of them can come at some darshan time so that the Mother can see them.

I think these are the main points in your letter. As for other details it is for you to arrange. You have given us a clear idea of the situation and the possibilities and we will help you with the Force we can give you to support your measures.

29 September 1934

*

You must reply to him that at present the situation is such that we have not sufficient accommodation and no likelihood of extension in the near future — so we are unable to make new admissions. There is room only for some who have already received a promise of admission when they are free to come.

17 October 1934

*

I have made no final decision about your request. But it does not seem to me advisable, as yet at least, for you to remain here longer than the two months you had settled on when you came. This Yoga is a long and difficult one and one has to travel far before there can be any question of a supramental illumination or transformation. It means besides a constant breaking up of past formations and realisations which would not be easy for you, as you have advanced fairly far on another line of sadhana with its own lights and inspiring sources. My advice to you would be to go on in the direction you had already been following and see where it leads you. If any light from my writings is of use to you, you can take it or if any help from me is necessary you will get it from within. But if in the end it is destined that you should enter this path of Yoga, you will get the necessary realisations which will make that possible. At present it seems to me premature for you to enter this way or to stay here for any great length of time.

10 March 1935

*

I am afraid it is not possible for him to join the Asram. It is open only for those who have practised or wish to practise a particular path of Yoga of a very difficult type. As a rule only those who are Sri Aurobindo's disciples are accepted and new admissions are almost stopped because there is no longer sufficient accommodation. Moreover he could not get here what he asks — it is a Yoga full of difficulties and even dangers and joining the Asram does not ensure a smooth path — that only happens to one or two who have a spiritual strength and mental and vital temperament that is very rare. 26 May 1935

*

There is no chance of her living in the Asram. She is too young and has seen nothing of life. 9 July 1935

*

There should be no desire or anxiety in your mind to get these people or others to come here. These things ought to be decided on one side by their call and fitness and on the other by the will of the Mother. 28 June 1936

*

“Dedication of life” is quite possible for some without their staying here. It is a question of inward attitude and of the total consecration of the being to the Divine. 28 June 1936

*

Here is a man of fifty intending *vānaprastha*, who thinks our Asram will just be the place for him. He says he has prepared himself for Asram life; his only fault being taking a little opium for the sake of health. He can bring with him Rs. 150 in cash.

Declined with thanks. Opium not allowed here. Also this is not a Vanaprastha Asram. 17 July 1936

*

What he asks for (to stay here immediately as a resident sadhak) is not possible. There are only two conditions under which such

a permission can be given — 1st if after seeing personally the Mother was satisfied that the applicant would be able to do the sadhana here or could be given a chance to prepare himself here by work or otherwise — or, if after practising Yoga outside it was seen that he had come to a point at which he could be admitted to the Asram.

1 August 1936

*

Inform him that Sri Aurobindo is not at present admitting any more resident sadhaks in his Asram, as the number is already too large.

4 December 1936

*

I have read and considered your letter and have decided to give you the opportunity you ask for — you can reside in the Asram for two or three months to begin with and find out whether this is really the place and the path you were seeking and we also can by a closer observation of your spiritual possibilities discern how best we can help you and whether this Yoga is the best for you.

This trial is necessary for many reasons, but especially because it is a difficult Yoga to follow and not many can really meet the demands it makes on the nature. You have written that you saw in me one who achieved through the perfection of the intellect, its spiritualisation and divinisation; but in fact I arrived through the complete silence of the mind and whatever spiritualisation and divinisation it attained was through the descent of a higher supra-intellectual knowledge into that silence. The book, *Essays on the Gita*, itself was written in that silence of the mind, without intellectual effort and by a free activity of this knowledge from above. This is important because the principle of this Yoga is not perfection of the human nature as it is but a psychic and spiritual transformation of all the parts of the being through the action of an inner consciousness and then of a higher consciousness which works on them, throws out the old movements or changes them into the image of its own and so transmutes lower into higher nature. It is

not so much the perfection of the intellect as a transcendence of it, a transformation of the mind, the substitution of a larger greater principle of knowledge — and so with all the rest of the being.

This is a slow and difficult process; the road is long and it is hard to establish even the necessary basis. The old existing nature resists and obstructs and difficulties rise one after another and repeatedly till they are overcome. It is therefore necessary to be sure that this is the path to which one is called before one finally decides to tread it.

If you wish, we are ready to give you the trial you ask for. On receiving your answer the Mother will make the necessary arrangements for your residence in the Asram. 26 March 1937

*

Usually we do not give consent to anybody staying in the Asram until we have seen him at one of the Darshans. If he wishes to come for the August darshan he may do so. 12 May 1937

*

X has requested me to bring to your notice his sincere prayer for permission to come here before August and stay as a resident sadhak.

We do not think it would be advisable at this stage. By coming to the Asram difficulties do not cease — they have to be faced and overcome wherever you are. For certain natures residence in the Asram from the beginning is helpful — others have to prepare themselves outside. 8 June 1937

*

As for X he can remain in Calcutta. I do not consider it likely that we shall permit him to be a permanent resident of the Asram unless he is or becomes very different from what his letter indicates. At some future date it may be possible for him to have darshan. Why should everybody want to be in the Asram? There are many practising sadhana outside. The number in the Asram must necessarily be limited. I have no objection to his preparing

himself for this Yoga, if he feels the call to do so, there are many who are doing that. 2 August 1937

*

Sri Aurobindo says you are mistaken in thinking that by merely being at Pondicherry one can keep the psychic being in front. Difficulties arise here as outside. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother would not advise you to throw up your practice and come here now, especially as this is a very difficult time for everybody even in the Asram itself. 26 April 1938

*

I want to live in the Ashram and be a regular inmate of it; so you will kindly advise me in this matter. Eagerly awaiting your reply.

What the deuce! Is the Asram a caravanserai that everybody who “wants” to live in it can come there? Who is this Ahmedabad monsieur? As these people are sending stamps and envelopes, I suppose they have to be answered. 9 October 1938

*

Here is a village girl, a young widow, who has heard your call in a dream and is eager to come here.

Too young — such dreams are not conclusive and there is too much of the vital tone in her remark; you need say nothing about that however. 14 October 1938

*

X has come here. If I happen to see him, what should be my attitude? If I speak to him should I advise him to stay here or go away?

X has come here not only without permission but in spite of repeated prohibitions. He cannot be received in the Asram or encouraged to stay at Pondi. It is not good for him; his mental illness would increase and it would be the cause of endless trouble for himself and others. To live a normal life with work

and study and without intensive sadhana or seclusion is his only chance of keeping normal.

You must tell him, if you see him, to go away and if he can be persuaded to return to the Gurukul and live a normal life, that would be the best for him. 23 October 1938

*

X is there [*outside Pondicherry*] because he has not yet made up his mind about his future and Mother wants him to see fully both possibilities before him — the ordinary life and the Asram life — and choose his way. He cannot go on always oscillating between the one and the other. If he comes back to the Asram, it should be with the firm determination to stick to the Asram life. If he cannot be steady to that then he must choose the outer life and face its problems and find his way there. In that case he cannot be always dependent on you [*his father*], but must train himself to live his own life on his own basis. He has parts, special gifts, a fine intelligence, but no full training and no steadiness in one line. He must acquire that or he will not be able to stand in the outer life. It is during this time that he must make up his mind one way or the other. 8 November 1938

*

I have already told you that X⁵ has not the capacity for disciplined study sustained for a long time. What is the use of forcing him any farther and trying to make him do what he will not because he cannot do? It will be a sheer waste of time and energy.

I cannot sanction his coming here to stay, for under present conditions his vital being will not remain steady here and it will take him away again. The one thing to do is what he himself wants to do, to take a job requiring intelligence and energy rather than book-learning and maintain himself; there must be plenty of jobs of that kind and it ought not to be difficult for him to get one when men are so much needed. Once he has shown to himself and others that he is not helpless in the world, then the

⁵ *The same person as in the preceding letter. — Ed.*

vital conditions will be much better for his taking up the Asram life if he wants to do it. This is the one thing to be done and at present there is no other way that is worth taking.

*

Why does he want to come to Pondicherry for solitude and peace? The Asram itself is not a place of solitude and peace, much less the town. In any case, one has to get peace *in oneself* much more than from one's surroundings. 21 June 1943

The Purpose of the Ashram

The liberated person finds everything going on according to the will of the Supreme. What then is the purpose of the Ashram and the necessity of our individual sadhana for a divine creation on earth? Is it only an experiment for the individual's own development?

I don't catch the point. The Divine does not act in the void, but through instruments, embodiments or channels. If a creation is intended, those will have to be prepared who can be part of the creation and at the same time the means of developing it, I suppose. 25 July 1932

*

I don't know where to draw the line between the egoistic will and the divine Will. Can there really be anything like the will of the instrument in the practical field? As the physical mind would put it: Since only the Divine's Will is done, what is the need of your creating instruments for the divine creation?

As long as there is egoism, the egoistic will is there. And so long as there is Ignorance, there will be a will of the instrument in the practical field. If the ignorant egoistic will is to be considered as a manifestation of the Divine Will, then there is no utility in Yoga — in that case the Yogi and the ordinary man stand on the same footing, they are both the Divine and their will is the Divine Will.

The Divine can create his own instruments in an institution

as well as outside it. Whether He does it in an institution or not, depends on what He intends to do. If His purpose is to manifest something through a collectivity and not only through scattered and separate individuals, there is nothing to prevent Him from creating an institution for the purpose. 26 July 1932

*

This is not an Asram like others — the members are not Sannyasis; it is not *mokṣa* that is the sole aim of the Yoga here. What is being done here is a preparation for a work — a work which will be founded on Yogic consciousness and Yoga-Shakti, and can have no other foundation. Meanwhile every member here is expected to do some work in the Asram as part of his spiritual preparation. 16 August 1932

*

Your effort of so many years does not seem to have produced any effect on people in the world outside. They have not changed in the least in their aims. On the contrary they seem to be becoming more and more critical instead of appreciative of your aim and purpose.

We cannot make that a test at present. The Force is not working directly on the outside world at present — first something has to be prepared here — when the Asram is really a manifestation of the “aim and purpose”, then there will be less difficulty with the outer world.

Even in the Ashram there are extremely few who have reached or tried to reach even up to the Nirvana level.⁶ Even to reach Nirvana one has to give up desire, duality and ego and establish a certain amount of equanimity and peace. Could it be said that a sufficient number of Sadhaks in the Ashram have succeeded in doing so? At least everybody must be making some effort to do this. Why then are they not successful? Is it that after some time they forget the aim and live here as in ordinary life?

⁶ *The correspondent alludes here to an exchange of 29 April 1934 that is published on pages 309–10. — Ed.*

I suppose if the Nirvana aim had been put before them, more would have been fit for it, for the Nirvana aim is easier than the one we have put before us — and they would not have found it so difficult to reach the standard. The sadhaks here are of all kinds and in all stages. But the real difficulty even for those who have progressed is with the external man. Even among those who follow the old ideal, the external man of the sadhak remains almost the same even after they have attained to something. The inner being gets free, the outer follows still its fixed nature. Our Yoga can succeed only if the external man too changes, but that is the most difficult of all things. It is only by a change of the physical nature that it can be done, by a descent of the highest light into this lowest part of Nature. It is here that the struggle is going on. The internal being of most of the sadhaks here, however imperfect still, is still different from that of the ordinary man, but the external still clings to its old ways, manners, habits. Many do not seem even to have awakened to the necessity of a change. It is when this is realised and done, that the Yoga will produce its full results in the Asram itself, and not before.

30 April 1934

*

It will not be possible for me to return to Gujarat. I was ill-treated in my father-in-law's house. I stayed with my parents for a few months but I can't go back there permanently. I had permission for Darshan so I came here. Now let the Mother do what she thinks is right for me.

The Asram is not a place where people can come merely because they are unhappy in their homes. At that rate we should have to keep thousands of people. The Asram is for those who want to practise Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

13 July 1934

*

You can answer to your brother that Yoga life and the ordinary life cannot be the same thing — otherwise there would be no use in doing Yoga, if one lives just as others in the same way and with the same motives. The object of the Asram life is to prepare

a new way of living based on a spiritual consciousness — it is the preparation of a new foundation of life in which all works have to be done not for the self but for the Divine.

31 December 1934

*

Humanitarian work of this kind is outside the scope of the Ashram; it is not as in Ramakrishna mission. We avoid public work and activities and confine ourselves to the sole spiritual work of the Ashram itself. To do otherwise would be to disperse energy on the ordinary levels instead of concentrating it on the building up of a personal and collective spiritual consciousness and life.

27 October 1938

*

It is not absolutely necessary to abandon the ordinary life in order to seek after the Light or to practise Yoga. This is usually done by those who want to make a clean cut, to live a purely religious or exclusively inner and spiritual life, to renounce the world entirely and to depart from the cosmic existence by cessation of the human birth and a passing away into some higher state or into the transcendental Reality. Otherwise it is only necessary when the pressure of the inner urge becomes so great that the pursuit of the ordinary life is no longer compatible with the pursuit of the dominant spiritual objective. Till then what is necessary is a power to practise an inner isolation, to be able to retire within oneself and concentrate at any time on the necessary spiritual purpose. There must also be a power to deal with the ordinary outer life from a new inner attitude and one can then make the happenings of that life itself a means for the inner change of nature and the growth in spiritual experience. This was what was recommended to X when she first wanted to join the Ashram; she had already acquired the habit of inward concentration and it was suggested to her to proceed farther in this way, opening herself towards the spiritual and psychic aid she could get from here, until she had made farther progress; later on we acceded to her request to join the Ashram. The Ashram

itself has been created with another object than that ordinarily common to such institutions, not for the renunciation of the world but as a centre and a field of practice for the evolution of another kind and form of life which would in the final end be moved by a higher spiritual consciousness and embody a greater life of the spirit. There is no general rule as to the stage at which one may leave the ordinary life and enter here; in each case it depends on the personal need and impulsion and the possibility or the advisability for one to take the step, the decision resting with the Mother.

24 April 1947

Not a School or Teaching Institution

This is not an “institution” for practical teaching of Yoga. Only those who follow Sri Aurobindo’s path of Yoga and have been recognised as fit to bear the direct influence are allowed to come and stay here.

30 May 1927

*

I am an irregular student of your *Arya* philosophy. Nowadays I keenly feel the necessity of meditation and concentration; for, I fear, without it the ego sense is likely to haunt me still, however much I may talk of self-surrender and spirituality.

I hope you will be kind enough to send me a copy of the instructions you might have given to the yogic pupils staying with you, to enable them to learn and practise meditation.

If copying the notes would be a tedious task, I pray someone should be asked to send me his notebook, which I would copy out and return safely without any unnecessary delay.

Yoga is not taught as in a school. There are no set formal instructions or notebooks; therefore his request cannot be complied with.

Suggest to him the separation of Purusha and Prakriti, introspection, rejection of ego and desire wherever he sees it. Also to open to the Divine Shakti.

22 June 1927

*

I was discouraged to learn that you have not yet come out. I would like to come to Pondicherry on the 15th August and remain for about three months. I try to follow the instructions given me, and have been able to calm my mind and improve my nature to some extent.

I am still not coming out; no “instructions” are given for the Sadhana. All depends now on the sadhaka being able to open silently to the influence and allowing that to work while rejecting all lower influences and lower movements. I do not know if he is quite ready for that as yet. If he can once open himself to the Divine Shakti and feel the Power and get accustomed to its working, it would then be different and he would profit by his stay. Otherwise he may find the conditions too difficult for him here.

20 July 1928

*

Answer that the Ashram is not meant for “study” of Yoga but for spiritual life. It has no teaching and no courses. Only those come who are accepted for this particular path of Yoga, which is more difficult than any other. The Ashram has nothing to do with politics; but it is watched on account of Sri Aurobindo’s past political activities of 20 years ago.

1 December 1929

*

The Ashram here is not precisely a place for “spiritual training” but for growing into a divine consciousness and divine life. Those who come here must have grown already so far that they are ready to give up all past mental ideas, fixed life-habits or life-tendencies and even the very mould of their physical consciousness and open only to the light of a greater Truth which, by their complete surrender to it, will transform the whole nature. This is very difficult, and it has been found by experience that those who come here unprepared break down after a time and can go no farther, because they cannot consent to get free from their past selves. They find the atmosphere too hard for them to breathe and the pressure of the Truth too exacting. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are therefore unwilling to call anyone

here, especially from so great a distance, transplanted from such different surroundings unless they have first assured themselves that the one concerned is ready for the change and truly called to this way of Sadhana.

26 February 1930

*

There is no study of philosophy here; there is only a silent practice of Yoga. But this Yoga is too difficult for everyone to be admitted to it; one must have a special call or a certain capacity (not intellectual, but psychic or spiritual) before he is accepted. And even then all who are accepted as disciples are not allowed to stay in the Asram. The life of the Asram is of a special kind and it is only rarely that those are admitted who have not become permanent members; a few come and stay for short periods, but these are already accepted disciples of Sri Aurobindo.

11 April 1930

*

I wish to get all the information about the sadhak-Asrama in regard to the following matters:

1. The method of instruction.

No "instruction" given. It is an Asram for spiritual life and the only method is to open to the divine influence and live and work for the Divine.

2. The students living there.

There are no students, only disciples who give their lives and all they have to the Asram and its spiritual aim and in return are maintained by the Asram.

3. The terms of joining the Asrama.

Only those who are already disciples can join and among them only those who are chosen by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

4. Is the person free to communicate with friends and relatives?

If he wants, but the less he does so, the better for his Yoga.

5. Is the Asrama free from politics?

Entirely.

6. What language is spoken prominently in the Asrama?

English, French, Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu and Hindi — the sadhaks being of these nationalities.

7. Is the whole teaching based perfectly upon Hinduism?

No sectarian religion is the basis; orthodox Hinduism and its caste rules are not followed; but the spiritual Truth recognised here is in consonance with the Vedas, Upanishads and Gita while not limited by any Scripture.

5 September 1930

*

Your Ashram purposes to be as I believe a training school for the synthetic process of realisation. Knowing it to be a place of peace and prayer I have come as a pilgrim seeking entrance into your Ashram.

Reply to him that he has been misinformed about the Asram; it is not a training school for the synthetic process of realisation. It is simply that a number of disciples of Sri Aurobindo are living here in order to practise Yoga — only those are allowed who have accepted this path which is not identical with any other discipline but a thing apart and are permitted by Sri Aurobindo to stay here. Sri Aurobindo himself does not see or speak with anyone.

22 December 1932

*

You can write to him that the Asram is not an institution and no pupils are taken and no teaching given. Some of those who are already following Sri Aurobindo's Yoga are admitted to live here and practise the Yoga under the influence of the immediate presence of Sri Aurobindo. No others are admitted.

Sri Aurobindo does not usually accept new disciples unless they have been seen and he is sure that they are called to this particular way of Yoga and have some capacity for it.

21 July 1933

*

If he cannot receive help from a distance how does he expect to carry on the Yoga here? This is a Yoga which does not depend upon verbal instructions or anything outward but on the power to open themselves and receive the force and influence even in a complete silence. Those who do not receive it at a distance cannot receive it here also. Also without establishing in oneself calm, sincerity, peace, patience and perseverance this Yoga cannot be done, for many difficulties have to be faced and it takes years and years to overcome them definitely and altogether.

25 June 1934

*

Barin-da has just written me a letter. He has started a Yoga school. Fancy that!!

But what an idea, good heavens! A Yoga school — a class, a blackboard (with the gods on it?); interesting cases! a spiritual clinic, what? What has happened to Barin's wits and especially to his sense of humour? Too much *Statesman*? marriage? writing for a living? age?

5 December 1934

*

You can write and tell her this is not a school and there are no students or correspondence system. It is an Asram or residence for those of the disciples of Sri Aurobindo whom he selects and the Yoga done here is conducted not by verbal instruction but by special methods mostly of a silent influence, concentration and self-discipline. It is only for those who accept the aims and demands of this special path of Yoga.

29 April 1937

*

You can answer that the Asram is only a residence for a number of Sri Aurobindo's disciples to stay and practise Yoga. As the number has become very large, it was necessary to organise it as an Asram, but it still retains its original character. Outsiders are not usually allowed to reside, for there is no provision for that. There are no religious discourses nor any set course of instruction. All is done by meditation, work for the Divine and self-opening to receive knowledge and experience from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

27 May 1937

*

Write to him that pupils are not taken into the Asram, for there is no teaching or instruction. The Asram is a place where some of the disciples of Sri Aurobindo are allowed to live and practise Yoga or prepare themselves for it by work and service if they are not yet ready for the deeper inner practice. As a rule disciples are not allowed to live in the Asram unless they have been specially chosen and usually after some practice of the Yoga outside.

Sri Aurobindo does not receive anyone in a private interview or speak to anyone. The work of the Asram is carried on by the Mother, Sri Mira Devi. Only 3 times in a year Sri Aurobindo gives a silent blessing to his disciples in the Asram and those from outside and a restricted number of visitors from outside. The disciples admitted into the Asram are expected to know enough of the Yoga (through Sri Aurobindo's writings or otherwise) to practise it or prepare themselves for the practice — the principal requirement for progress in the Yoga is that they should be able to open their consciousness mentally, psychically and spiritually to the silent help and force which is given them from within; they must also follow implicitly the directions for work, action, life or their sadhana given them by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

In these conditions it may not be worth while for him to come here unless he has acquainted himself more intimately with the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and found that it is the path his nature accepts and can follow. The *Yogic Sadhan* does not give any real idea of the nature of this Yoga; he would have to read other works of a completer and deeper character. Most even

after accepting follow out the practice of the Yoga to a certain extent and communicate their experiences before thinking of coming here for a closer contact.

If however he is in any case coming to India to find his path and a Guru, he could pass through Pondicherry and see the Asram and establish a contact after which it can be known whether he can take up the Yoga. 7 July 1938

*

Write that this Asram is not intended for religious teaching, but for the practice of Yoga; its object, like that of all Yoga, is the attainment of a higher consciousness and the spiritual life. But Sri Aurobindo's Yoga is a special path with its own special objects in addition to this common aim of all Yoga. Only those are admitted who have a call to this special path which is a very difficult one, are recognised as having some capacity for it and are willing to give up everything else and follow without reservations the guidance of Sri Aurobindo. There is no separate asram for ladies; the Asram is composed of several houses and accommodation is given according to convenience.

Representation of People in the Ashram

My mind is so full of thoughts about the possibilities of new creation that whenever I see a sadhak I think of him as an aspect of the beauty of the new creation.

That is what he should be.

21 April 1934

*

What disciples we are of what a Master!

As to the disciples, I agree!

I wish you had chosen or called some better stuff — perhaps somebody like Krishnaprem.

Yes, but would the better stuff, supposing it to exist, be typical of humanity? To deal with a few exceptional types would hardly

solve the problem. And would they consent to follow my path — that is another question. And if they were put to the test, would not the common humanity suddenly reveal itself — that is still another question.

3 August 1935

*

In the Ashram one finds that people with forceful personalities and great capacities like X or Y are not able to put their energies to good use. Others, like Z and A, who have no great capacities, are able to apply their energies better. No doubt the Divine could give great capacities to Z and A, but could they ever become great writers or artists like X, Y or B?

There is no necessity for everybody to become artists or writers or do work of a public character. Z and A have their own capacities and it is sufficient for the present if they train themselves to make them fit for the Mother's work. Others have great capacities which they are content to use in the small and obscure work of the Ashram without figuring before the public in something big. What is important now is to get the true consciousness from above, get rid of the ego (which nobody has yet done) and learn to be an instrument of the Divine Force. After that the manifestation can take place, not before.

24 October 1935

*

It is necessary or rather inevitable that in an Ashram which is a "laboratory", as Adhar Das puts it,⁷ for a spiritual and supra-mental Yoga, humanity should be variously represented. For the problem of transformation has to deal with all sorts of elements favourable and unfavourable. The same man indeed carries in him a mixture of these two things. If only sattvic and cultured men came for the Yoga, men without very much of the vital difficulty in them, then because the difficulty of the vital element in terrestrial nature has not been faced and overcome, it might well be that the endeavour would fail. There might conceivably

⁷ A. C. Das, *review of Lights on Yoga*. The Calcutta Review 47 (October 1935), pp. 101–2.

be under certain circumstances an overmental layer superimposed on the mental, vital and physical and influencing them, but hardly anything supramental or a sovereign transmutation of the human being. Those in the Asram come from all quarters and are of all kinds; it cannot be otherwise.

In the course of the Yoga, collectively — though not for each one necessarily — as each plane is dealt with, all its difficulties arise. That will explain much in the Asram that people do not expect there. When the preliminary work is over in the “laboratory”, things must change.

Also much stress has not been laid on human fellowship of the ordinary kind between the inmates, (though good feeling, consideration and courtesy should always be there), because that is not the aim; it is a unity in a new consciousness that is the aim and the first thing is for each to do his sadhana, to arrive at that new consciousness and realise oneness there.

Whatever faults are there in the sadhaks must be removed by the Light from above — a sattwic rule can only change natures predisposed to a sattwic rule.

31 October 1935

*

Your description of the psychological state of the Asramites is vivid and convincing and very true. It is that which we are up against. It is the average physical consciousness of humanity concentrated in the Asram and the one consolation is that if the Force can transform *that*, then it can transform anything. If everybody were as accurately conscious of the nature of the thing as you show yourself in this letter, the transformation would be perhaps more quickly possible.

11 February 1936

Profiting from One's Stay in the Ashram

He can come, if he understands the conditions under which alone he can profit by staying here. Henceforth a stay here can only be profitable (1) for those who are ready for an intensive sadhana turning their back on all attachments belonging to the ordinary human life, (2) for those who, though not ready, yet

recognise fully the aim and open themselves so as to prepare for it, (3) those who, even if not capable as yet of an inner intensive sadhana, can yet dedicate themselves entirely in the way of service.

4 August 1927

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You can write to him that at present his coming here is hardly possible or advisable. There are now nearly 80 members in the Asram and all the accommodation available is taken up or else marked out already for others who are coming. Moreover if he has not been able to make the vital surrender, he would not be able to profit by coming here; for the conditions of the sadhana here are no longer what they were before and this vital surrender is precisely the first condition of any benefit from our help or any true farther progress.

As for his sadhana, if he can persist in the attitude he has taken and be entirely sincere in it, then the difficulty he is experiencing is bound to disappear. Necessarily, the resistance in the vital being and the body, based on all their past habits, cannot be overcome in a day. In his case, it is probable that the mental has reached the point where the surrender can be made, but the vital *purusa* still refuses. If he can become conscious in his sadhana not only of the resistance on the surface but of the vital being behind in its entirety, separately from the mind, and see all its deeper movements and offer them in the whole and detail to the Mother for transformation, then the work of transformation can be done. It is for more and more consciousness and more and more strength for consecration that he must ask.

1 December 1929

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You can write to him that, if he is in the grip of adverse forces, it is not a condition in which to come to the Asram. Only those are called here and allowed to stay who are ready to profit by the Asram atmosphere. What he can do, if he likes, is to come for the 15th August for darshan — after seeing him, then we can

say something more definite.

8 April 1932

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It is no use people staying here unless they have, first, the capacity and, secondly, the pull and the will for Yoga. 16 August 1933

*

No, it is not enough to be in the Asram — one has to open to the Mother and put away the mud which one was playing with in the world. 25 September 1934

*

But what is the meaning of the dull life we lead here? No scope for any skills, no use for knowledge. My five years of medical study all lost. Some at least have the satisfaction of using their capacities — X his training as an engineer, Y his medical knowledge. But for most of us, it seems like you have put square pegs in round holes.

Obviously the life here is not that of a place where the mind and vital can hope to be satisfied and fulfilled or lead a lively life. It is only if one can live within that it becomes satisfactory. Y himself if he were outside, would be dealing not with two or three selected patients but with many — he speaks of hundreds in the past — and would be living a much fuller vital life. But for one who has the assured inner life, there is no dullness. Realisation within must be the first object; work for the Divine on the basis of the true inner self and a new consciousness, not on the basis of the old, is the result that can follow. Till then work and life can be only a means of sadhana, not a “self-fulfilment” or a brilliant and interesting vital life on the old basis. 15 April 1936

*

Everybody has to deal with the lower nature. No Yoga can be done without overcoming it, neither this Yoga nor any other. A Yogic life means a life in which one tries to follow the law of Yoga, the aim of Yoga in all details of life. Here people do not do that, they live like ordinary people, quarrelling, gossiping,

indulging their desires, thinking of Yoga only in their spare moments.

13 February 1936

Departure from the Ashram

X is quite happy here and she is progressing very well in her sadhana. If she goes away from here, the progress will be stopped and much of what she has gained may be lost. An intensive and concentrated sadhana once begun has to be persistently continued in the right atmosphere. If it is kept up only for a short time and then dropped for another kind of life in which the concentration is diffused and weakened, there is no likelihood of fruition. For this reason we would disapprove of her departure.

9 January 1928

*

I have had no time to answer X's letter tonight. I will write in the course of tomorrow, afternoon or evening. He may at least ask the gentleman inside who is so furiously hurrying him away, to wait for one day.

It looks as if the hopes I had for him were either unjustified or premature—he is either too young or too raw and unfit. In that case there will be nothing to do but to let him return to the ordinary life and ordinary atmosphere. But he must understand, if he goes, that it is his own choice and must not blame either myself or the Mother.

c. August 1929

*

I certainly cannot sanction your departure on so wrong and trivial a ground. You must be aware, as you admitted at first, that you are yourself to blame. When the Mother after a long and exhausting morning's work still gave you time, it was very wrong of you to reward her by speech of an insulting character. And it was wrong of you to resent her kind letter and her reference to the adverse force which you yourself have called the "devil" and from which you have prayed insistently to be delivered. I shall add that if you allow yourself to be ruled in this way by

self-will and an abnormal sensitiveness, you will always create trouble for yourself, no matter where you go.

I could only sanction your departure if I came to the conclusion that you are still too young and raw and ill-balanced to bear the pressure for change which is inevitable in the atmosphere of the Asram. But before this attack, you were progressing very well with a rapid growth in consciousness and character. It ought not to be difficult for you to get over this attack and settle down to a self-development of your undoubted possibilities on the right line. It would be a pity if you threw away the chance by obstinate persistence in the result of a moment's pique.

I prefer not to give any decision till after the 15th. You will do well to wait till then and see if your present feelings do not change.

4 August 1929

*

When these moods come upon you, why do you run away from the Mother and avoid her? Why do you not come to her, tell her frankly what you feel and what is in your mind and let her take the trouble from you?

The reasons you give for wishing to leave us are no good reasons at all. If you want to see the richness and greatness of God, you will, if you wait, see more of it with us than you ever can outside. And if you want to see the Himalayas, it will be much better for you to see them hereafter with your Mother beside you.

You are quite mistaken when you say that if you will go, there will be no Devil left in the Asram. The Devil is not here because of you; he is here because he wants to give trouble to the Mother and spoil her work. And what he chiefly wants is to drive her children away from her, and especially those who like you are nearest to her. If you go, he will remain; and not only he will remain, but he will feel that he has won a great victory and will set himself with a double vigour to attack her through others.

You talk of not giving trouble to the Mother and to me; but do you not realise that nothing can be worse trouble to us than your going away? The moods of revolt that come upon

you are clouds that pass; but to see you leave us in this way and feel our love rejected and your place near us empty would be indeed a real trouble to us and we would feel it more deeply than anything else you could do.

You know that it is not true that your sole desire is to go away. It is only so when you are in these moods. And you know that these are moods that pass, and if you allow the Mother to take them away, they go at once. The trouble is that when they come, you take them too much to heart and you begin to think that there is nothing else to do but go away. I assure you that that is no solution and that we would much rather have you with us even with these moods than be separated from you; compared with our love for you, the trouble they give us is mere dust in the balance.

Read this letter, talk with the Mother and act according to your true self; never mind the rest.

7 March 1930

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It is certainly the force hostile to the Yoga and the divine realisation upon earth that is acting upon you at the present moment. It is the force (one force and not many) which is here in the Asram and has been going about from one to another. With some as with X, Y and Z it has succeeded; others have cast it from them and have been able to liberate the light of their soul, open in that light to the nearness and constant presence of the Mother, feel her working in them and move forward in a constant spiritual progress. Some are still struggling, but in spite of the bitterness of the struggle have been able to keep faithfully to the divine call that brought them here.

That it is the same hostile force would be shown, even if its presence were not for us visible and palpable, by the fact that the suggestions it makes to the minds of its victims are always the same. Its one master sign is always this impulse to get away from the Asram, away from myself and the Mother, out of this atmosphere, and *at once*. For the force does not want to give time for reflection, for resistance, for the saving Power to be felt and act. Its other signs are doubt, tamasic depression, an

exaggerated sense of impurity and unfitness, the idea that the Mother is remote, does not care for one, is not giving what she ought to give, is not divine, with other similar suggestions accompanied by an inability to feel her presence or her help, a feeling that the Yoga is not possible or is not going to be done in this life, the desire to go away and do something in the ordinary world — the thing itself suggested varying according to the personal mind. If it were not this one invariable hostile force acting, there would not be this exact similarity in all the cases. In each case it is the same obscurities thrown on the intelligence, the same subconscious movements of the vital brought to the surface, the same irrational impulses pushing to the same action, — departure, renunciation of the soul's truth, refusal of the Divine Love and the Divine Call.

It is the vital crisis, the test, the ordeal for you as for others — a test and ordeal which we would willingly spare to those who are with us but which they call on themselves by persistence in some wrong line of movement or some falsification of the inner attitude. If you reject entirely the falsehood that this force casts upon the sadhak, if you remain faithful to the Light that called you here, you conquer and, even if serious difficulties still remain, the final victory is sure and the divine triumph of the soul over the Ignorance and the darkness. 30 March 1930

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The Mother has told me what you said to her. In other circumstances I would have asked you to stay on in the confidence that, however sharp the struggle might be, the inner being in you aided by the Divine Force would prevail over the other and foreign influence. But in the condition of mind described by you some relief and rest from the inner struggle seems to be necessary for you. An absence from Pondicherry and change of atmosphere may be the best way to give it.

I do not, however, care to take the responsibility of sending you to Hyderabad, as that might turn out not at all the best, but the worst thing for you. Even if there were nothing else to do, it would not be possible to send you all that way

alone; arrangements would have to be made. We would prefer instead to see whether another means cannot be arranged, such as staying in a quiet place in the hills where you could have a healthy change of air for a time and other surroundings and recover your vital strength and nervous balance. We are making enquiries and in a few days hope to be able to let you know what can be done.

I write this much today in answer to your request for an immediate decision; but I have something to say with regard to your spiritual life and its difficulties which I have not had time to finish. I will finish it tomorrow and send it to you. 3 June 1930

*

You ought to be able to see, after receiving today's telegram, that the cause of the unrest is in yourself and not in the outward circumstances. It is your vital attachment to family ties and the ordinary social ideas and feelings that has risen in you and creates the difficulty. If you want to practise Yoga, you must be able to live in the world, so long as you are there, with a mind set upon the Divine and not bound by the environment. One who does this, can help those around him a hundred times more than one who is bound and attached to the world.

It is not possible for the Mother to tell you to remain, if you are yourself in your mind and vital eager to go. It is from within yourself that there must come the clear will on one side or the other. 24 February 1932

*

The crisis you are passing through might be due to your not being ready for an intensive practice of Yoga. On the other hand, a crisis of this kind often happens in the ordinary course of the sadhana. As long as the sadhana is only in the mind, things go on well enough, but as soon as the vital or the physical begin to be worked upon directly, all the resistance, inability, obscurity in the adhar rises up and there may be a prolonged period or recurrent periods of darkness.

I would suggest to wait a little longer — say, till the 24th

November. If by that time there is no return of the favourable course of the sadhana or if meanwhile you find the resistance too great, you may for a time discontinue.

In any case, the habit you speak of ought to be given up at once and altogether. You must be aware how injurious it is to the mind, the nervous system and the body, and it can of itself create the most serious obstacles in the way of any sadhana.

5 October 1932

*

In the outside world people live in quite a different consciousness and the sadhak if he goes there in the middle of his sadhana is bound either to fall back into it or to get so much mixed with it that he either falls out of his path or struggles through great difficulties. Either the work within is, outside, not done at all or what would here take 2 or 3 years would there be not done in thirty.

11 November 1932

*

How can the people in this Asram judge whether a man has progressed in Yoga or not? They judge from outward appearances — if a sadhak secludes himself, sits much in meditation, gets voices and experiences, etc. etc. they think he is a great sadhak! X was always a very poor Adhar. He had a few experiences of an elementary kind — confused and uncertain, but at every step he was getting into trouble and going off on a side path and we had to pull him up. At last he began to get voices and inspirations which he declared to be ours — I wrote to him many letters of serious warning and explanation but he refused to listen, was too much attached to his false voices and inspirations and, to avoid rebuke and correction, ceased to write or inform us. So he went wholly wrong and finally became hostile. You can tell this by my authority to anybody who is puzzled like yourself about this matter.

11 March 1933

*

If your staying here is to end in “death and scandal”, obviously I cannot tell you not to go. But I have not forsaken you; it is you who prefer to turn away from the Yoga. I will not “send” you away. If you go, it will be because you do not want to stay here or feel that you cannot and that you will be at peace elsewhere. You can take my blessings with you if or when you go — but I do not know why they should be of more use to you than my help and guidance in the Yoga. 11 March 1933

*

I know well that the ordinary life is not for me. Why then do I get thoughts of going? What part of me wishes it?

Is it a part of yourself at all that has the idea? It may be that it is only because others are thinking it or wanting you to come and some portion of you still in contact with them gets the impression. Such touches can easily be felt as if they were your own ideas, emotions or desires, but they may not be so.

7 April 1933

*

I hear that many people, at one time or another, have been on the point of going away from here due to pressure of Yoga.

It is not due to the pressure of Yoga, but to the pressure of something in them that negates the Yoga. If one follows one’s psychic being and higher mental call, no amount of pressure of Yoga can produce such results. People talk as if the Yoga had some maleficent force in it which produces these results. It is on the contrary the resistance to Yoga that does it. 11 May 1933

*

It feels as though some hostile force is trying to pull me back. But I have no desire to return to my old family life.

It usually happens like that — when one comes out of the world, the forces that govern the world do all they can to pull you back into their own unquiet movement. 4 October 1933

*

I don't know why. It is perfectly irrational. People have been going as well as coming since the Asram began. Perhaps it arises from the ignorant idea that the people who go like X and Y are true bhaktas and sadhaks — while the fact is that X never made much progress even elementary and Y has been in a state of vital revolt sometimes against the Mother, sometimes against myself, battling against both, for the last six or seven years. People go away because they are too proud and arrogant to accept the control of the Guru or of the Truth or of the Divine. Y had decided that the Truth was in him alone and there was no Truth in myself or in the Mother.

10 October 1933

*

What would be the best way of rejecting the thought of going away? Every few days or so I have to deal with this "challenge".

The reason why it recurs so much is that it is not so much a personal reaction as a force that whenever it gets the door of the consciousness open, is consciously pressing the idea of departure with all sorts of reasons to support it. There are a certain number in the Asram who have it with the same recurrence — while there are others who used to have it but from whose consciousness it is now after a long series of attacks excluded or fading out. Obviously to give the movement any kind of scope would be no conquest. One day it will give up coming of itself, as it has done with others, when the external vital nature has got as convinced as the inner being of the imperativeness of its spiritual destiny.

23 October 1933

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I do not understand the meaning of the complaint in your letter. I am not aware that there was any maltreatment of you by us or any lack of true love and care. In your spiritual life I have striven to give you all the possible help and support and guidance, more so than to most others because I felt that you had much need of it. I do not see any reason why you should go on the goad of a difficulty which always occurs in sadhana or under the driving

of a suggestion or impulse; if it were a mature and deliberate decision taken after full reflection, one could understand it. In any case, this Asram is here as your spiritual home so long as you choose to avail yourself of it and our help and consistent support in your difficulties are at your disposal so long as you need and desire them for the attainment of the goal of your spiritual endeavour. 5 November 1933

*

For the last few days, I have felt quite foreign here. I do not like going to work or doing anything else. If there is any reason for my being here, I don't know what it is.

Why do you allow these suggestions to get hold of your mind? You have made great progress here which you could not have made over there — and as for usefulness, there are few whose work can be relied on as yours can. Dry moments come to all — that is not a reason for doubting one's call to the Yoga. Shake off these false suggestions — they must surely be the result of the old atmosphere coming in in such a mass — and regain the peace and stillness that you were having before. 18 August 1934

*

I have given you the permission to go only on your insistence that the pull from there is too strong for you to resist. It is not because we think that it is the right or the best thing for you — on the contrary we do not like the idea of your going at all. I have told you that to stay and fight out any inner difficulty here is always the true course. If there is any misconception about that, you should reconsider your decision. 27 August 1934

*

I have written to X⁸ to set right any misunderstanding — if there is really a misunderstanding — about our consent to her going. That consent I consider as forced from me by her own insistence that she could not stay — the pull was too great — she must go.

⁸ *The recipient of the preceding letter. — Ed.*

I reminded her of what I told her before that the only true way was to stay and fight out the difficulty — the only justification for going would be if her call was more to the family life than to the spiritual life. I have told her that we keep to that and the Mother and I do not like her going — and asked her to reconsider her decision. For it is hers not mine. You know that I dislike any one who has a psychic call going away from here, because it is throwing away their spiritual destiny or at least postponing it. For I don't suppose X, if she persists in going, will remain always under the illusion of the family bonds — but the risk is there and the postponement is there. Mother has called her tomorrow morning and we will see what she decides. 28 August 1934

*

The Mother was not distant and had no reason for being so — that cannot be put forward as a reason for going away. It is the feeling of the vital-physical that has been stopped in its activities and is not yet able to receive the touch of the higher consciousness or keep it that makes you feel like that. I don't know that you would get so much interest or satisfaction from the life outside that it would be worth while to give up and go. To persist is better. 10 January 1935

*

The inability to go can come from the psychic which refuses, when it comes to the point, to allow the other parts to budge, or it can come from the vital which has no longer any pull towards the ordinary life and knows that it will never be satisfied there. It is usually the higher parts of the vital that act like that. What still is capable of turning outwards is probably the physical vital in which the old tendencies have not been extinguished.

19 May 1935

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I certainly do not wish to “put you in the wrong box”, nor have I an idea or any desire to keep you here against your own inclination or choice. Going or staying is a matter entirely for

your own decision. If you can stay here with spiritual profit to yourself, we shall be very glad; but if you find that there is nothing to be gained by staying or that you cannot receive anything or that your will is decidedly for the ordinary life, I certainly would not like to put any undue pressure on you to stay against your own real interest or will. You must consider yourself entirely free to shape your own course in life by your own independent choice.

24 May 1935

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Where will I begin again? There certainly is something fundamentally wrong — otherwise why these impulses to depart? Everything is confused. I can't see my way, and have lost all capacity to analyse or synthesise. In addition [*in the preceding letter*] you are practically giving me a *carte blanche* to depart!

I am not telling you to go, but if I tell you the opposite it will only strengthen the suggestion that is being put on you — viz. that you are being kept here contrary to your own nature's choice and your mind's judgment for something that you cannot do and no longer want to do, a spiritual life that you cannot live and don't want to live. You think it is something in yourself that says that, but in reality it is not so. Only as you cannot see that at present, I have no choice but to leave everything to your own decision so that the sense of being outrageously compelled to stay may have no ground for growing in you.

You have mentioned X's case more than once as analogous, but his was quite opposite. He considered himself as the holder of the supramental Truth whom all ought to approach for the Truth, but that this was an Asram peopled by Asuras who refused to recognise him and all these Asuras were supported against him at every step by the Mother and me. He gave me the ultimatum that in this we must support him against the others and give him his proper position or else give him freedom to leave the Asram with which he had no longer any affinity, an impossible place for such a one as he, so that he might give the Truth to others elsewhere. No point of contact at all there with you except the Force driving him away.

What is happening just now is that there is a great uprush of the subconscious in which are the seeds or the strong remnants of the habitual difficulties of the nature. But its character is a confusion and obscurity without order or clear mental or other arrangement — it is a confused depression, discouragement, inability to progress — a feeling of what are we doing? why are we here? how can we go on? will anything ever be attained? and along with it old difficulties recurring in a confused and random but often violent and distressing fashion.

You cannot “begin” again; it would be too difficult a thing in this confusion. You have to get back to the point at which you deviated. If you can get back to the Peace that was coming and with it aspire to the freedom and wideness of the Purusha consciousness forming a *point d’appui* of detachment and separation from all this confusion of the subconscious Prakriti, then you will have a firm ground to stand upon and proceed. But for that you must make your choice firmly and refuse to be upset at every moment and diverted from it.

25 May 1935

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Sometimes people who are in difficulty ask your permission to leave the Ashram, and you and the Mother grant it. But if things turn out badly they say, “Why did I fall even after taking their permission to go?” I think that too much should not be made of such “permissions”, which are often just concessions to their weaknesses.

It is well understood that the permission given does not exclude the possibility of the experiment ending badly. But the experiment becomes necessary if the pull of the ego or outer being and that of the soul have become too acute for solution otherwise or if the outer being insists on having its experience.

20 June 1935

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Do you mean [*in the preceding letter*] that when we feel a strong push to leave, it would be best to make the experiment?

It is especially when the outer being rejects the Truth and insists on living its own life and refuses the rule of the spiritual life that the experiment becomes inevitable. I have never said that it is recommendable.

Sometimes that part is so violent that we feel we can't deal with it.

In some it is too strong; they have to go and see for themselves. That does not mean that everyone has to go whenever he feels a difficulty. These are exceptional cases. 24 June 1935

*

Last evening I saw X off at the station. He looked very black in the face and gloomy too. I felt for the poor fellow who has lost his all through his own waywardness. I felt a little sad as I came back. The question recurred to me again and again: did Sri Krishna truly mean it concretely or did he merely poeticise when he said *na hi kalyāṇa-kṛt kaścīd durgatiṁ tāta gacchati?*

You have forgotten the context. Arjuna asks what of a Yogi who fails in this life because of his errors — does he fall from both the ordinary life and the spiritual and perish like a broken cloud? Krishna says no. All who follow the Good get the reward of their effort and do not perish — they get it first in the life beyond and afterwards in the next birth in which the Yogi who fails now may even resume his effort under the best conditions and arrive at Siddhi. Krishna never said that nobody ever in this life fails who attempts the Yoga. 20 September 1935

*

I feel a push to leave the Ashram often just before other people actually do leave. A day or two before X's departure on the 19th, I felt the same way. Do all people get such feelings?

There is a Force that is always seeking to push people away; formerly more than half the sadhaks were getting from time to time the suggestion to go. This has diminished now in its general power, but the Force is still there and presses very heavily on

some. When it gets anyone to go, then the power of the suggestion revives through that person and spreads to others. Those who are specially sensitive receive it most. 22 September 1935

*

If I am not doing anything useful here, why should I not try the world where also there is so much love and joy and the Divine?

Do you think so? Those who have gone do not find the world like that — they feel miserable and harassed on every side. So it has been with all who left here. 28 September 1935

*

It is difficult for the Mother to decide for you. If you had been settled in Yoga as a resident sadhak of the Asram recognised as such by your family and everybody, then the rule of not allowing any tie of the world to draw you away would have stood with force against all such calls. But now it is different and you have to see for yourself what you feel called upon to do. For the Mother to decide would not be a solution from the spiritual point of view and it is better if the decision rises out of yourself — then only is it likely to be *for you* the true one. 21 November 1935

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What takes people away mostly is not the smaller failings like family attachment etc., but either ambition and great vanity or sexual desire or else some extreme form of vital ego which wants its own way and not the Divine's. It is from the first two causes that the departures from the Asram have mostly taken place and X and Y's case is no exception to the rule. 1935

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You can have permission to go. But one knows when one goes, one does not know whether or when one will come back. But if you really want to go, we cannot refuse permission.

26 March 1936

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If you wish to go, Mother gives the permission. But we cannot assure you that you will be able to come back or that it will not injure your sadhana. These things depend on yourself and on circumstances.

26 March 1936

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X has been here on probation for three years now. If we are sending her home, it is not as a punishment for any offence or out of anger or any similar reason, but it is because that is the best thing for her also. It is after long observation of her that this step has been taken and it is not a sudden decision on our part but has been maturing for some time. We have not rejected her, — it is with our blessings that she will go and if she keeps the right attitude our protection will be with her there. This has all been now explained to her and I believe she is not *affolée* any longer.

3 May 1936

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It is a little difficult for me to answer your letter in view of what you have written there. I have certainly persuaded you to remain here because I did not think that going away was the right solution, nor do I think so now. But from what you wrote last time after this came on you, I understood that you did not really want to go and were glad that I had persuaded you, that in fact you would have suffered greatly if I had given my consent. Here you write very differently and in such a way that if I am to take what you say in its full sense I would have to reply at once “Yes, go, since there is no other alternative.” Let me say that persuasion is not force. Last time I don’t think I even used persuasion; I simply gave my opinion against your proposal. My opinion remains the same, but that is not binding on you. I have also never thought of cutting you off if you go to Cape Comorin for a time or to Calcutta. Everyone here is free to follow his own decision in these matters. But when I am asked for a full consent, I take it as an invitation to give my own view on what is proposed and I give it. There is no question there of detaining or refusing a bitter need and therefore there can be no reason for your being

driven to the extremes of which you speak in your letter.

As for the way out of the impasse, I know only of the quieting of the mind which makes meditation effective, purification of the heart which brings the divine touch and in time the divine presence, humility before the Divine which liberates from egoism and the pride of the mind and of the vital, the pride that imposes its own reasonings on the ways of the spirit and the pride that refuses or is unable to surrender, sustained persistence in the call within and reliance on the Grace above. These things come by the inner discipline which you had begun to practise some time ago, but did not continue. Meditation, japa, prayer or aspiration from the heart can all succeed, if they are attended by these or even some of these things. But I do not know that you can be promised what you always make the condition of any inner endeavour, an immediate or almost immediate realisation or beginning of concrete realisation. I fully believe on the other hand that one who has the call in him cannot fail to arrive, if he follows patiently the way towards the Divine.

Frankly this is my view of the matter. I have never seen that anyone by changing place arrived at spiritual realisation — it always comes by a change of mind and heart. I put before you what I can see. The rest is for you to consider. 29 May 1936

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I have surely never said that you should not want the Divine Response. One does Yoga for that. What I have said is that you should not expect or insist on it at once or within an early time. It can come early or it can come late, but come it will if one is faithful in one's call — for one has not only to be sincere but to be faithful through all. If I deprecate insistence, it is because I have always found it creates difficulties and delays — owing to a strain and restlessness which is created — in the nature and dependancies and revolts of the vital when the insistence is not satisfied. The Divine knows best and one has to have trust in His wisdom and attune oneself with His will. Length of time is no proof of an ultimate incapacity to arrive — it is only a sign that there is something in oneself which has to be overcome and, if

there is the will to reach the Divine, it can be overcome.

Suicide solves nothing — it only brings one back to life with the same difficulties to be faced in worse conditions. If one wishes to escape from life altogether, it can only be by the way of complete inner renunciation and merging oneself in the Silence of the Absolute or by a bhakti that becomes absolute or by a karmayoga that gives up one's own will and desires to the will of the Divine.

I have said also that the Grace *can* at any moment act suddenly, but over that one has no control, because it comes by an incalculable Will which sees things that the mind cannot see. It is precisely the reason why one should never despair, — that and also because no sincere aspiration to the Divine can fail in the end.

Mother does not remember having said to X what you report — it may have been something in another sense which X understood in that way. For it cannot be said that you have never received Force from us, you have received it to any extent; it can only be said that you were not conscious of it, but that happens with many. Certainly none of the sadhaks receives and uses all the Force the Mother sends, but that is a general fact and not peculiar to you.

I hope you will not carry out your idea of going suddenly away — if you have to go for a time, it should be with our knowledge and our protection around you. I hope it will not be necessary at all, but certainly it should not be in that way. Whatever else you doubt, you should not doubt that our love and affection will be always with you. But I still hope that you will be able to overcome this despair and this impulse of flight and develop the quiet force of intense will which brings the Light that is sure to come.

May 1936

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I have analysed and analysed myself, and have found that I have no real urge for the Divine. It seems more the unfavourable external circumstances that have brought me here. Had I been happy and in plenty there, would I have chosen

the path? . . . Where is the sincerity in me? . . . So wouldn't it be better for you to let me go instead of wasting so much of your time and labour on me?

Your analysis and reasonings are those of Grand-mère Depression which sees only what she allows to come to the surface for her purposes. There are other things that Madame suppresses because they don't suit her. It does not greatly matter what brought you here — the important thing is to go on till the psychic truth behind all that becomes manifest. The inertia of your physical nature is only a thick crust on the surface which gives way slowly, but under the pressure it will give way. If you had some big object in the ordinary life and nothing to hope for here it might be different, but as things are it would be foolish to walk off under the instigation of this old Mother Gloom-Gloom. Stick on and you will get the soul's reward hereafter. 14 June 1936

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There is no reason to be so much cut down or despair of your progress. Evidently you have had a surging up of the old movements, but that can always happen so long as there is not an entire change of the old nature both in the conscious and sub-conscious parts. Something came up that made you get out of poise and stray into a past round of feelings. The one thing to do is to quiet yourself and get back into the true consciousness and poise. . . . Always keep within and do things without involving yourself in them, then nothing will happen or, if it does, no serious reaction will come.

The idea of leaving for any reason is of course absurd and out of the question. Eight years is a very short time for transformation. Most people spend as much as that or more to get conscious of their defects and acquire the serious will to change — and after that it takes a long time to get the will turned into full and final accomplishment. Each time one stumbles, one has to get back onto the right footing and go on with fresh resolution; by doing that the full change comes. 17 August 1936

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You must not deceive yourself into thinking that the ordinary life will prepare you for the Asram life. So we cannot tell you how to prepare yourself. It is better to choose frankly between the two. If you go away, you would find the same difficulties if you came back. It is knowing that that you must decide.

21 August 1936

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Since the attacks of fear do not cease, it is best that you should go and rest for the time being from the sadhana — for these two cannot go together. In order to be quite sure, it would be advisable to see in Calcutta whether there is not some physical cause also such as blood pressure. It is not possible for the Mother to see you before you go as you have to go tonight. For the rest, we can decide only after seeing how you go on over there. If you keep your trust in the Divine and clear yourself of all that conflicts with it, there is no reason to fear that the Divine will abandon you. For the present what is necessary is to shake off this disturbance and get out of the condition of fear and nervous disturbance altogether.

21 October 1936

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As you say that you are determined to go, I can only answer by reaffirming our disapproval of the step you propose to take and the rejection — from a blind vital feeling — of the true path and the spiritual life. It is not true that you could not appreciate our help and solicitude or that you were unable to follow the sadhana, you are only shutting the doors of your mind and vital to the help and laying stress on a temporary block which would have disappeared if you had dissociated yourself from it. I can only express the hope that the true being in you will awake in time and draw you back from this course, restoring the inner contact with us and the unity with the higher Self, a glimpse of which had come to you for a moment.

31 January 1937

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Neither the Mother nor I have asked you to go nor approved

of your going. As I could not give any assent to it and the reasons put forward by you precluded my asking you to stay, I had to be silent. Mother could not withhold from you the money you asked for because you claimed it as your own and her withholding it would have looked like an undue interference with your personal liberty and your formed decision. I must now say however that if you go, it will be your own decision and not in any way ours. If you change your decision and resolve to face out your difficulty here until it is solved, we shall be very glad of it.

There is no such impossibility of your victory over the harder parts of your nature as you imagine. There is only needed the perseverance to go on till this resistance breaks down and the psychic which is not absent nor unmanifest is able to dominate the others. That has to be done whether you stay here or not and to go is likely only to increase the difficulty and imperil the final result — it cannot help you. It is here that the struggle however acute has, because of the immediate presence of the Mother, the best chance and certitude of a solution and successful ending.

5 March 1937

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No one in fact is kept here when his will or decision is to go — although the principle of the spiritual life is against any return to the old one even for a time especially if the deeper urge is there and striving towards a firm foundation of the new consciousness — for the return to the ordinary atmosphere and surroundings and motives disturbs the work and throws back the progress.

10 March 1937

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Does your allowing people to go out from here mean that now there is no harm in their doing so?

No, it does not; it simply means that we can't always be holding back people whose vital says "I want to go, I want to go" and they side with the vital. They are allowed to go and take their risk.

18 March 1937

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Each time somebody leaves the Asram, I feel a kick, a shock, a heartquake.

May I ask why? People have been leaving the Asram since it began, not only now. Say 30 or 40 people have gone, 130 or 140 others have come. The big Maharathas, X, Y, Z departed from this too damnable Asram where great men are not allowed to do as they like. The damnable Asram survives and grows. A and B and C fail in their Yoga — but the Yoga proceeds on its way, advances, develops. Why then kick, shock and heartquake?

You said long ago that the Supramental won't tolerate any nonsense of freedom of movement or wrong movement. Is this the kick he is imparting from high up? . . . In these two months he has struck a tall tower like *A* and a fat buoy like *B*; how many of these!

And what then?

I hold the view that the Supramental is descending concentratedly, though I don't feel it,

Not so strongly or concentratedly as it ought, but better than before.

. . . and that those who resist, who are between two fires, have either to quit or to submit.

Even if it were so, that is their own business. The Divine is driving nobody out except in rare cases where their staying would be a calamity to the Asram (for instance it could decide one day to drive *C* out); if they cannot bear the pressure and rush away, listening to the "Go away, go away" push and suggestion of the Hostiles can it be said then that it was the Divine who drove them away and the push and suggestion of the Hostile is that of the Divine? A singular logic! The "Go, go" push and suggestion have been successfully there ever since the Asram started and even before when there was no Asram. How does that square with your theory that it is due to the concentrated

descent of the Force?

21 April 1937

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What you say about yourself — the jealousy etc. — is already known; you have yourself written it all before to the Mother. In spite of that we did not consider you unfit for the Yoga. Every sadhak has by nature certain characteristics which are a great obstacle in the way of the sadhana; these remain with obstinacy and can only be overcome after a very long time by an action of the Divine from within. Your mistake is — not to have these defects, others have defects of anger, jealousy, envy etc. very strongly and not only have them within but show them very openly, — but to accept it as a reason for despair and the wish to go away from here. There is absolutely no meaning in going away, for nothing would be gained by it. One does not escape from what is within oneself by changing place; it follows and reproduces itself under other circumstances and among other surroundings. To go away and die does not solve anything either; for one's being and nature do not end with death, they continue. The only way to get rid of them is to throw them out and the only place where you can get rid of them is here. Here, if you remain, a time is sure to come when these things will go out of you. The suffering it causes cannot cease by going out — it can only cease by the *inner* cause being removed or else by your drawing back from them and realising your true self which even if they rose would not be troubled by them and could refuse to regard them as part of itself — this liberation too can only come here by sadhana.

24 May 1937

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What you have written is quite correct. To say that the Divine is defeated when a sadhak goes away is an absurdity. If the sadhak allows his lower nature to get the better of him, it is his defeat, not the Divine's. The sadhak comes here not because the Divine has need of him, but because he has need of the Divine. If he carries out the conditions of the spiritual life and gives himself to the Mother's leading, he will attain his goal but if he wants

to lay down his own conditions and impose his own ideas and his own desires on the Divine, then all the difficulty comes. This is what happened to X and Y and several others. Because the Divine does not yield to them they go away; but how is that a defeat for the Divine? 27 May 1937

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You speak as if the majority of the sadhaks who came here had gone! As a matter of fact it is only a small minority. Some went owing to a revolt of pride and ambition thinking that they had a great work to do or that they were already the equals or superiors of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo — some because they were unable to resist their sexual desires, others because they preferred to take their own way instead of following the directions of the Guru and went off the track. These things always happen to a number of those who start on the way, whatever the path they follow. It is no proof of the special difficulty of this Yoga. If one yields to ambition, sexual passion or self-sufficiency, a fall is always possible. There is also the possibility of being driven off the track by doubt or attraction to the old life — family, friends etc. The only one of these things that can act in your case is this doubt of your own capacity.

As I have told you, the capacity for having inner experience — and that is the one thing all sadhaks must have or develop — this you have, for it showed itself clearly. The rest does not depend on personal capacity, but on reliance and opening to the Mother's force. It was because you had that that you were progressing for some time very well. It got covered over by the physical consciousness which understands only external things and understands even those wrongly and obscurely. If that consciousness opens, there is no reason to suppose that you will not be able to go through. 12 July 1937

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By no means at my command can I make my mind even reasonably silent. It has again started bringing in doubts and misgivings and disquiet. One of them is that perhaps I am

on the wrong path; this is not the goal that my nature wants. Perhaps it is some ambition that has attracted me to this path. I write this to you because I cannot deal with it effectively. Temperamentally the rest of my instruments seem more amenable to influences representing other paths and other goals. Am I really on the right path, have I really the call to it?

It is the right path for your inner nature and there there is the call. The resistance is from the outer, especially the mind, but that is due to a dissatisfied restlessness which is part of the outer mental nature (the reasons given are only supports which it builds for its restlessness) and that would have interfered wherever you might have been and on whatever path. To conquer this outer nature is the only way and that can be best done here, since the change of the outer being is here a part of the sadhana and you will receive the necessary help. 17 July 1937

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Don't be with me as with X. You couldn't keep him here; forces took him away. Doubts!

I repeat that he took himself away. No Force can take a man away, who really wants not to go and really wants the spiritual life. X wanted the "Divine Response" only, not spiritual life — his doubts all rose from that. 2 August 1937

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Yes, you can do as you propose. So long as you have the attachment to the family, it is not possible to do any good sadhana here. Yoga and attachment do not go together. As long as you have it, the best you can do is to go on with the ordinary life, develop Bhakti and try to prepare yourself for a true and complete sadhana hereafter. circa 1937

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It doesn't seem to me that it will be impossible for me to return after I have exhausted my vital attachments. I feel I am destined for the spiritual life and will take the final plunge very soon.

When there is so sharp a difference between the inner and the outer being, it is always the sadhak who has to make his choice. As for coming back, many who have gone out have come back, others have not — for in going out there is always the danger of entering into a current of forces that make return impossible. Whatever decision you make should be clear and deliberate — otherwise, you may go out and as soon as you are there want to come back and after coming here again want to go; that would be inadmissible.

16 May 1938

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I have already answered more than once to what you have written in your last two letters and I can only give the same answer as before.

You write as if our only reason for not consenting to your going away or for not sending you away was that you had nowhere to go. But that is not so. It is because we do not approve of the idea of your going; it is a wrong step altogether without any sense or reason in it.

The difficulties in your nature are not peculiar to you alone among the sadhaks here and their persistence is no sign that you cannot do Yoga. The few years you have been here is too short a time to expect a transformation of the character. Nobody can expect a transformation in so short a time.

It is not a fact that you are incapable of doing Yoga. Anyone who can open his consciousness and have inner experiences is capable of Yoga and that did happen in you. The closing of this openness by a descent into the physical consciousness is something that has happened to most in this Asram and it usually takes a long time to come out of the closing. There is therefore no reason for concluding that this shows incapacity for Yoga and therefore there is no use in staying here.

The only reasonable thing for you to do is to get rid of this wrong idea and remain quietly here where alone the true consciousness and the true life can come to you.

7 July 1938

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These ideas are only suggestions that always come up when you allow this sadness to grow in you; instead of indulging them, they should be immediately thrown from you. There is no “why” to your feeling of our far-away-ness and indifference, for these do not exist, and the feeling comes up automatically without any true reason along with this wave of the wrong kind of consciousness. Whenever this comes up, you should be at once sure that it is a wrong turn and stop it and reject all its characteristic suggestions. It is when you have been able to do so for a long time that you have made great progress and developed a right consciousness and right ideas and the true psychic attitude. You are not hampering our work nor standing in the way of others coming here; in cleaving to the sadhana in spite of all difficulties you are not deceiving yourself but, on the contrary, doing the right thing and you are certainly not deceiving the Divine, who knows very well both your aspiration and your difficulties. So there is not a shred of a reason for your going away. If you “sincerely want to do Yoga”, and there can be no doubt about that, that is quite a sufficient reason for your being here. It does not matter about not having as yet any occult experiences, like the rising of the Kundalini etc.; these come to some early, to some late; and there are besides different lines of such experiences for different natures. You should not hanker after these or get disappointed and despondent because they do not yet come. These things can be left to come of themselves when the consciousness is ready. What you have to aspire to is bhakti, purification of the nature, right psychic consciousness and surrender. Aspire for bhakti and it will grow in you. It is already there within and it is that which expresses itself in your poetry and music and the feelings that rise up as in the temple of the Mother at the Cape. As the bhakti and aspiration in the nature grow, the right psychic consciousness will also increase and lead to the full surrender. But keep steady and don’t indulge these ideas of incapacity and frustration and going away; they are stuff of tamas and good only to be flung aside.

19 October 1942

The Ashram and Its Atmosphere

The Ashram Precincts

X told me that Y has said that there is a very strong circle of Mother's protection around the main Ashram house, and a less strong one in the other houses.

It is not the house, it is the inner nearness that matters.

What is true is that there is a strong force going out from here and it is naturally strongest at the centre. But how it affects there, depends on how one receives it. If it is received with simple trust, faith, openness, confidence, then it works as a complete protection. But it can so work too at a distance.

16 January 1933

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Mother said once that all the houses were sanctified by her presence and there were no houses more favoured than others. This appeals to me. For if it was otherwise I would of course try to get into a room within the Asram precincts, as people often say that there the atmosphere is ever so much better.

The atmosphere of the houses as houses is pretty much the same in all the Asram. But people make their own atmosphere as well; a number of people living together may create one that is agreeable to this person and disagreeable to another. A single man also may leave a vital atmosphere in a house which is felt by others who follow him or, even if they do not feel it, they may be influenced by it for a time — that I have observed often enough. The surroundings also have sometimes an effect. But all that is very secondary — one ought to create one's own atmosphere (of course of the right kind) and keep it, then other vibrations will fall away from it.

What are the Asram precincts? Every house in which the

sadhaks of the Asram live is in the Asram precincts. People have a queer way of talking of the houses in this compound as the Asram — it has no meaning. Or do they think the Mother's influence or mine is shut up in a compound? 12 January 1935

The Atmosphere of the Ashram

When I sit on the staircase to your room, I feel something very special there. But now I find that wrong things are coming in when I sit there. I hope I am not disturbing the atmosphere.

The force is there in the atmosphere, but you must receive it in the right way — in the spirit of self-giving, openness, confidence. All the rest depends on that. 16 January 1933

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I was surprised to learn that X and Y are staying in the town. How, after being in the Ashram for two years, can they bear the outside atmosphere? Z, who just returned from a visit home, tells me he could not endure the atmosphere over there.

It is certainly strange. Most people after the atmosphere here cannot tolerate the ordinary atmosphere. If they go outside, they are restless until they return. Even A's aunt who was here only for a few months writes in the same way. But probably when people get into the control of a falsehood as X and Y did, they are projected into the unregenerated vital nature and no longer feel the difference of the atmosphere. 30 May 1933

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It is easier to feel the presence in the atmosphere of the Asram than outside it. But that is only an initial difficulty which one can overcome by a steadiness in the call and a constant opening of oneself to the influence. 16 August 1934

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I have translated the first four pieces of Maurice Magre's "*L'Asram de Pondichéry*"¹ into Gujarati. There are some exaggerations in his perceptions: "*les hommes les plus sages de la terre*" and "*Ce sont des Parfaits entre les hommes*". This is too much to say about us sadhaks. I find it almost impossible to put such sentiments in Gujarati, as people there would find them overblown.

Magre like many others got an immediate strong impression of the atmosphere of the Asram — most feel it as an atmosphere of calm and peace, something quite apart from that of the ordinary world. He thought it was the atmosphere of the people. Besides, of the few who saw him, he saw only the best. Also many here if not most have something in their appearance different from people outside, something a little luminous, which a man of sensitive perceptions like Magre could feel. The other side becomes apparent only if one stays long and mixes in the ordinary life of the Asram or hears the gossip of the Sadhaks. People from this country, Gujaratis or others, more easily see or feel this side and do not feel the rest because they enter at once into relation with the exterior life of the Asram.

4 February 1937

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There are two atmospheres in the Asram, ours and that of the sadhaks. When people with a little perceptiveness come from outside, they are struck by the deep calm and peace in the atmosphere and it is only when they mix much with the sadhaks that this perception and influence fade away. The other atmosphere of dullness or unrest is created by the sadhaks themselves — if they were opened to the Mother as they should be, they would live in the calm and peace and not in unrest or dullness.

15 March 1937

¹ *Maurice Magre, À la poursuite de la sagesse (Paris: Fasquelle, 1936), pp. 99–104.*

The Ashram's Physical Expansion

Is having more houses a sign of progress?

It is a sign of physical expansion. The progress depends upon what is behind; if the inner progress is not there, the physical expansion is of no great use.

7 July 1933

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If the Asram expands very much and there are no houses available in Pondicherry, naturally the extension will be somewhere in the villages nearby?

There was some idea of that years ago, but circumstances took another turn and it did not materialise.

14 April 1935

Sadhana in the Ashram

Communal Sadhana

In respect to Yoga, what is the meaning of communal sadhana?

There is no communal sadhana. It is the individuals who do the sadhana and that creates a collective atmosphere with a character and movements of its own.

In the commune can sadhaks help each other in their sadhana?

What commune? There is no commune here, there is only a group of people who are supposed to follow the same sadhana.

In what way?

Anyone can help another if he has the capacity. It has nothing to do with a “commune”.

Not living in a commune, is it possible to reach the highest Truth?

The highest Truth is there for anyone who can reach it.

16 May 1933

Personal Difficulties and Progress in Yoga

You have now taken the right attitude, and if you keep it all will go better. It is to the divine Mother that you have come for Yoga, not for the old kind of life. You should also regard this as an Asram, not an ordinary Sansar, and in your dealings with others here strive to conquer anger, self-assertion and pride, whatever may be their attitude or behaviour towards you; for so long as you keep these moods, you will find it difficult to

make progress in the Yoga.

8 July 1932

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If the difficulties in my nature still persist after so many years of sadhana, how can I be certain of success? How can I think that I am fit for the Yoga?

The vital difficulties persist so long as one indulges in any way the lower nature — even after one has ceased indulging, they persist so long as there is anything in the lower consciousness which desires or regrets them or is still responsive to their touch when they return either as waves from the universal Prakriti or an attack by the hostile forces. If length of time in mastering the vital or transforming it were a proof of unfitness, then nobody in this Asram — or outside it — would be fit for the Yoga.

Until success actually comes, there is always the chance that it will *not* come at all.

The mind can argue like that about anything not yet actually realised and established beyond dispute and without flaw. But what one has to lean on in Yoga is not the reasonings of the physical mind, but faith in the soul and the secret certitude of the Spirit.

I want to have the Yogic consciousness at all times and never lose it. This constant moving between light and darkness, peace and struggle cannot be a proof of progress. In what way am I incorrect?

Absolutely incorrect. The progress of the sadhana is for most even such an alternation because it is precisely a struggle between the powers of Light and Darkness, those who want the divine transformation and those who want the continuance of the old ignorant Nature. At each step something has to be conquered from the hold of the Ignorance, something brought down from the Light above. When the whole nature is opened and the peace and equality are brought down into the vital and physical and settled there, then there is no inner disturbance, but the struggle

continues until there is the beginning of the supramental transformation.

20 July 1933

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How is it that many sadhaks who had a strong spiritual tendency before coming to the Asram have got stuck in vital difficulties after many years of sadhana?

It is because outside before people come here, they are quite satisfied with their inner spiritual experiences and there is no idea of changing or attempt to change the vital. The moment this idea is imposed on the vital or the attempt begins all the vital difficulties begin. That is one reason, but by itself it would not have mattered so much, the difficulties would have appeared but they could have been conquered without so much trouble. But here owing to the wrong attitude of many sadhaks, their indulgence of the vital opposition and revolt, an atmosphere of extreme vital difficulty has been created and when one comes to stay here all that atmosphere throws itself upon him and it is only by a great and prolonged struggle that he can get back to the spiritual simplicity and straightforward aspiration or the psychic poise.

18 July 1934

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I do not see why your having difficulties or the external consciousness denying the inner truth should prevent you from calling our help. At that rate hardly anybody could call for help. Almost everybody in the Asram except a few have this difficulty of the external consciousness denying or standing in the way of the inner experience and trying to cling to its old ways, ideas, habits and desires. This division in human nature is a universal fact and one should not make too much of it. Once the Peace and Power are there, it is best to trust to that to remove in time the opposition and enlighten and occupy the external nature.

19 July 1934

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You have often spoken of the Man of Sorrows in connection

with me. But I was a cheerful fellow at school and college. So I am afraid he is a contribution, partly at least, of your Yoga.

Not of my Yoga, but of the blasted atmosphere that has been created here by the theory that revolt, doubt and resultant sorrow and struggle and all that rot are the best way to progress. The Asram has never been able to get out of it, but only some people have escaped. The others have opened themselves to the confounded Man of Sorrows and got the natural consequence. But why the devil did you do it? The Man of Sorrows is a fellow who is always making a row in himself and covering himself with sevenfold overcoats of tragedy and gloom and he would not feel his existence justified if he couldn't be colossally miserable — when he gets on people's backs he puts the same thing on them. Yoga on the other hand tells you even if you have all sorts of unpleasantnesses to live in the inner sunlight, your own or God's. At least most Yogas do except the Vaishnava — but the Yoga here is not a Vaishnava Yoga. 19 June 1935

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All I want to know is whether the whole of my being wants God or not. I am always saying, "I have come here to attain God." But perhaps this is just self-deception.

I have already answered your question. You came because your soul was moved to seek the Divine. That some part of your vital has strong attachments to the people you left behind, is a fact, but it does not make your soul's seeking unreal. If the presence and persistence of vital difficulties were to prove that a sadhak is "unfit" and has no chance, then only one or two in the Asram — and perhaps not even they — would survive the test. The feeling of dryness and not being "able to aspire" is also no proof. Every sadhak gets periods and even long periods of such emptiness. I could point to some who are considered among the most "advanced" sadhaks and yet are not free yet altogether from the family instinct. It is therefore quite unreasonable to be upset because these reactions still linger in you. These reactions come and go, but the need of the soul is permanent, even when covered

up and silent, and will always stay and reemerge. 24 June 1935

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A vast abyss has opened its jaws to swallow X for ever. I tell you, Sir, it will be a pathetic failure on the part of the Divine.

Rubbish! It will be a failure on the part of X. I don't profess to transform men against their will. 1 September 1935

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If I want to hang myself, would you say, "I can't help him against his will"?

If that were your will and not merely an impulse of the vital being, nobody could stop you. 2 September 1935

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All who come here did not come with a conscious seeking for the Divine. It is without the mind knowing it the soul within that brought them here. In your case it was that and the relation your soul had with the Mother. Once here the force of the Divine works upon the human nature till a way is opened for the soul within to come out from the veil. The conscious seeking for the Divine does not by itself prevent the struggle with the ignorance of the nature; it is only self-giving to the Mother that can do that. 7 November 1935

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Why is the sex-force working so vehemently now? Does it mean that the supramental also is vehemently descending? Or at least some Divine Force, giving a last kick at the sex-force?

The Divine Force has nothing to do with it. It is the sex and other lower forces that are attacking in order to make it impossible for the Divine Force to do its work or the Supramental to descend. They hope to prevent it altogether or, if by some miracle it still descends, to limit its extension and prevent anything more than an individual achievement. 6 August 1937

**The Supramental Evolution, the Ashram
and the Hostile Forces**

With Sri Aurobindo and the Mother so close to us here, how is it that we continue to fall into darkness and sorrow — even into struggles with the hostile forces?

You are right. The hostile forces, their attacks, their suggestions ought now to be superannuated, out of date, out of place here in this sadhana. If somebody would realise that and fulfil it in his sadhana, the others might perhaps get strength to follow. At present these things are still here because the sadhaks open themselves to them, out of habit, out of desire, out of attraction for the drama of the vital, out of fear, out of passive response and unresisting inertia. But there is no real necessity for them any longer or true justification for their presence here, — the outer world is a different matter. The sadhana could very well go on and should go on as an unfolding, a natural falling away of defects and difficulties, a coming of greater and greater light and power and peace and transformation. 8 November 1933

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Many people are experiencing acute difficulties. Is this the result of an inrush of forces or a pressure in the atmosphere?

It is not the pressure from above that creates difficulties. There is a strong resistance to change in the lower planes and certain Forces take advantage of it to throw in vortices of disturbance and try to upset as many people as possible. The only action of the Pressure from above on these is to push them out from the atmosphere of the person touched or from the atmosphere generally. After a time they are pushed out of the atmosphere of the person and can no longer work on him except from a distance with very slight effect. When that can be done generally — so as to push them to a distance from the atmosphere of the Ashram, then all this trouble will cease. 9 November 1933

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You wrote, in the letter that was placed on the notice board,¹ that there is not “any longer” a justification for the hostile forces here. That suggests that there has been some change in the atmosphere, which makes possible their elimination. But can they really be eliminated?

I wrote because now there is a sufficient descent of Light and Power, for one not to be subject to the ordeals and tests which the Hostile Powers are permitted to put when one has only the mental, or ordinary spiritual forces on the plane of mind, to support one’s progress. If you look closely, you will see that when these Forces work now it is in a perfectly irrational, instinctive way, repeating always the same movements without any intellectual or higher vital power behind them. Theirs is now an irrational mechanical method which obscures more in the lowest physical and subconscious than anything else. That means that their true justification for being there is gone. 9 November 1933

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I have something to ask about your letter [*of 8 November 1933*] about the hostile forces. You write that they are “out of place here in this sadhana”. But you go on to say that attacks continue because “the sadhaks open themselves to them, out of habit, . . . out of passive response and unresisting inertia”. Please explain all this more clearly. Do you mean that the forces that were obstructing the sadhaks have been destroyed?

There is no question of destruction. There is only the question of their exclusion from the Asram. The things enumerated are not causes of the attacks, but they are the occasion, the weakness in the sadhaks that allows them when they could very well be dismissed. The hostile forces are there in the world to maintain the Ignorance — they were there in the sadhana because they had the right to test the sincerity of the sadhaks and their power and will to cleave to the Divine and overcome all difficulties. But this is only so long as the higher Light has not descended into the physical — now it is descending, it is sufficiently there

¹ *The letter of 8 November 1933 on page 639. — Ed.*

for anyone to receive it more and more fully, so that the way becomes smooth and open, a progressive development and not a struggle.

10 November 1933

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Since I wrote to you last, the hostile force has been trying to prove that it still has a place in this world.

Even if it had a place in the world where men do not seek the Divine, it has no right of place in the Asram.

14 November 1933

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It seems to me that the evolution out of matter could have taken place without the hostile forces. It could have happened quickly, by the descent of the Supramental and other lights, powers and joy of the Transcendent.

Anything could have happened — but if the Supramental was to descend immediately, there was no need of matter or evolution — the only reasonable thing would have been to create a supramental world at once without any slow evolution of matter, of life in matter, of mind in living matter or of the spiritual or supramental in spiritualised life in the material body.

Without the hostile forces and the self-contradictory consciousness of an exclusive division, *avidyā*, the manifestation would have been self-luminous and perfect and there would have been no need of an evolution from imperfection to perfection.

Obviously — but this world was created for evolution and not for an immediately luminous manifestation such as already exists on some other planes.

Whoever gave the hostile forces the power of *avidyā* to enter into and interfere with the earth-evolution has allowed tremendous pain and suffering to grow in the earth-consciousness.

Avidya did not interfere with the earth evolution, it existed before the earth life was evolved in the form of Inconscience. The meaning of evolution is the evolving or slow manifestation of life, mind and conscious supermind out of matter with its original Inconscience. Avidya is one thing and the intervention of the hostile forces is another.

Even if the hostile forces go back to their own region, they will certainly wage war against the transformed divine world. The only way for God to save us from this would be for him to put some pressure on them for self-transformation.

It is supposed that the supramental Light and Force is to descend — if the descent is so complete that these forces are driven back to their own world, it is not likely that any efforts on their part would have any success. It is the darkness or the insufficient Light that gave them their chance to intervene. If there is the victory of the true light, they cannot any longer.

The Mother has said that the hostile forces are necessary in the life of the Asrama for testing the sincerity of the sadhakas.

The work of this Yoga and therefore the principle of the Asram life is to take the world as it is and deal with it by a transformation of which the supramental descent is not the first but the final process. The presence of the hostile forces is a part of the world as it is and not to deal with them at all or to act as if they were not there would have been to leave the problem unsolved and the work undone. The sadhaks of the Asram are not spotless Saints or perfect born Yogis but men who carry in them their human nature and typify each in his own way what is in the world and what has to be changed. The influence of the hostile Forces was on them as on all human beings in a less or greater degree, and so long as they open themselves to that influence, it works on them as on the world, — it is only by a perfect sincerity and by a perfect opening to the Light that it can disappear. In that sense the presence of these forces is a test and the world that has to be changed being what it is and their

nature being what it is, it could not be otherwise.

I believe that each divine being has a hostile being associated with it for some unknown purpose in the Asrama.

It is not only in the Asram but everywhere that it is like that. It is a well-known principle of all occult knowledge that there are these two elements overstanding each seeker of the Truth.

The Mother once said that she never upheld the hostile forces, nor was she their Mother.

The hostile forces are upheld not by the Mother but by something in the sadhaks themselves which opens the doors to them by concentrated egoism, mental arrogance, vital revolt and many other things, e.g. lying, sex etc.

I remember how I was suddenly betrayed into the hands of the hostile forces when I came to the Budhi house. When I asked to be moved to a house near the Asrama, you ordered me to remain here.

The hostile forces were not in the Budhi house any more than in any other and being in a house near the Asram does not save anybody from their attacks — as is shown by the case of several who lived in houses near the Asram. Even to be in the central building does not necessarily save anybody from attacks. It depends on oneself, not on purely external things.

You have said that the hostile forces are no more necessary here in the Asrama. Will you let me know when they are going to be put out of the Asrama life altogether?

They are no more necessary if the sadhaks open to the Light that is descending — that was what I said — but if they do not open and go on exposing themselves, there will still be a possibility of their presence for some time to come.

Please give me the highest solutions and not temporary truths of a passing evolution.

The highest solutions cannot be brought in like that, as if one were acting in a clear field. If the “temporary” truths of the evolution could be got rid of so easily, there would have been no need of preparation or of a trying and difficult sadhana. It was necessary to deal with what had come into existence in the evolution so that the supramental descent might become possible. 9 December 1933

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What I meant in my first question [*p.* 641] was that, as far as I can see, evolution is not necessary for the divine manifestation.

There is no question about the possibility of a non-evolutionary manifestation — but that is quite irrelevant, for this *is* an evolutionary manifestation and it was evidently intended to be so from the beginning.

But on account of the interference of an exclusive *avidyā*, the manifestation has been perverted into what it now is.

What do you mean by an interference? The exclusive Avidya, that is the Inconscience of Matter, was the starting point, not something that came in after life had begun.

If there had been a gradual descent of the supramental light in the beginning, the true life, mind and higher planes might have been released and organised.

A gradual descent of the Supramental Light into what? Matter being the starting point, life and mind had to evolve first — to begin with a supramental descent would have reversed the order of the creation.

Thus the hostile forces and the perversion that they bring might have been dispensed with.

All that depends on the original statement that it might have been otherwise — if a rapid supramental creation had been intended and not an evolution. As this is in its nature an evolutionary world, there is no practical use in pressing that possibility.

My point is that the hostile forces could have been dispensed with, and that they still can be dispensed with, at present.

As for what can be done at the present time, that is just what is being fought out. But there are two parties to the issue, the higher consciousness and the earth consciousness, the latter largely represented by the sadhaks here. If the earth consciousness is ready an easy descent is quite possible, but if it resists, then there is in the nature of things difficulty and struggle and the Asuric forces have their chance.

25 December 1933

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It may be that a God-man was created first. But by “interference” he degenerated into the present man in his surface mental and vital consciousness. And this same spirit of a self-contradictory hostile nature created in his surface consciousness the *exclusive* Avidya (*vide* Bible, Book of Genesis).

I am not aware of it — not on this earth at any rate. If he was a God-man, why did he allow the interference and degeneration in himself? The Bible to which you refer supposes Adam to have been innocent but ignorant in the beginning.

In 1926 you said that this creation was not intended to be as it is, but that a self-contradictory spirit interfered at a certain stage and perverted it.

My statement does not bear the meaning you give it.

Supposing that this physical body has evolved on this planet in the way understood by Darwin . . .

It has nothing to do with Darwin.

yet it seems from inner knowledge that it was essentially an action of the Supermind below, the Supermind above and the psychic being, and all the struggle and difficulty and delay that we see was caused by adverse forces of a consciousness of a self-contradictory nature.

I have no inner knowledge to that effect — that it was intended to be worked out by these three forces alone.

The whole thing looks like an intended perfect manifestation perverted in its surface mental and vital consciousness by the power of a self-contradictory hostile nature that was a possibility of God's being.

If it started from the Inconscience, it could not be a perfect manifestation from the beginning.

You say [*p.* 641] that in a supramental manifestation matter would not have been necessary. I suppose you meant that the darkness of matter was not necessary.

It would have been not matter but supramental substance.

You say that permission was given to the hostile forces to pervert the creation by a sort of beautiful Asuric stress.

What is this word beautiful? I never used it and it is an absurd epithet.

Also it seems that in this Asrama the hostile forces were allowed to move and play with the idea of testing the sadhaks.

Not at all — it is a law that grew up in the world, as I have said clearly, it seems to me, and as this Asram is part of the world, it worked here also.

At least the dangers of the hostile forces were not pointed out as clearly as they should have been.

That is false.

I for my part am not prepared to bear any part of the burden of transformation of the hostile forces.

So much the better. I am not asking anybody to transform the Asuras — I am only asking them to reject them.

I spoke of having seen and heard someone who showed me how he had organised, in the being of every sadhak here, a “dark being” veiling his “divine being”.

I do not know what you mean by this someone. The existence of a double being is a preexistent fact, it has not been organised by anyone here.

I am not aware that the condition of anyone in the Asrama was or is as difficult as mine since I have come to this house.

That is your ignorance. There were many others.

By my observation I have found it was not so.

Your observation is incorrect.

And it is my conviction that the sort of attack I have undergone cannot last when a man is with others and is busy with collective work.

I do not accept your idea of the origin of the attacks on you as correct.

I am neither for delay nor for incurring more danger for the sake of the dogma that we have to accept everything that is in the creation . . .

It is a practical fact, not a dogma — we have to proceed from what it is, not from what we would like it to have been.

and in the way chalked out by another.

Who is this other?

My greatest urge is to go up and see the truth in its own home.

There is no objection to that, but it is not so easily done — at least to my experience. Those who have tried it in a rush have not had very good results.

This I can best do by your grace, and by your answering my questions.

I don't see how my answers can do that — since you stick to your own view of the matter.

You once said that the ascension to the supermind and individual transformation must precede the manifestation of the Sangha. But why did you allow the Sangha to manifest before this condition was fulfilled?

Which Sangha? I have never called this Asram the Sangha. The Asram is a field of growth, not a manifestation of perfection.

Is there no possibility of an individual rising up to the Supramental separately, and then turning down towards manifestation with a fuller light, knowledge, power and joy, individually?

There is no possibility of shooting up suddenly to the Supermind — one has to go step by step — though it may be done more or less quickly — but not with any railway-train speed. Nor is it possible for the supramental to descend without a preparation of the lower parts.

Have you still the idea of transforming the hostile forces? If so, how?

I do not know what you mean by the transformation of the hostile forces. It is the lower nature that has to be transformed into the higher nature. The object of the Yoga is the transformation of terrestrial beings, not of the Asuras.

Is it not possible again to begin the sadhana of ascension to the higher mind and supermind and work out the transformation below *just as you did for yourself*, keeping this outward and inward Sangha formation, if possible, though curtailing the outward work to a minimum or for the greater need and purpose of the Truth giving it up temporarily?

That is an ignorant and incorrect statement of our sadhana.

Since the Chandernagore [*i.e. the Prabartak Sangha*] experience, it has always seemed to me that the best way of sadhana would be to rise to the *vijñāna* individually, to transform oneself personally, and then, when all was perfect to create or allow the Sangha to descend.

I do not know what you mean by a Sangha descending — it is the Supermind that has to descend.

This transformation cannot be done individually in a solitary way only — if it were possible we would not have undertaken the burden of maintaining this Asram.

It appears from all you have written that you do not accept my knowledge but have ideas and principles of sadhana of your own. My knowledge and action are based on the actual facts of the universe and the relation of the higher Truth with these as I have found them. If you have a knowledge superior to mine and a greater way of action, there is no necessity for these questions.

4 January 1934

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The forces compelled Adam — who does not seem to have possessed a great knowledge about the wiles of the hostile forces — to fall.

It means that he was ignorant and not merely innocent.

From your statement it is obvious that at a certain stage of the manifestation the hostile forces interfered but that up to that stage the manifestation was perfect.

Not at all. If it had been perfect, there would have been no need of evolution.

This supports the idea that a perfect manifestation was intended from the very beginning.

An unperverted manifestation is not necessarily a perfect manifestation — it may be unperverted but still imperfect.

You have not taken exception to my statement that the *exclusive* Avidya is not present in the inner vital and mental.

It depends on what you mean by Avidya. They are not inconscient like Matter, but until the higher knowledge comes, they are in the Ignorance.

I do not understand what you mean by “It has nothing to do with Darwin.”

The evolution I speak of is not the evolution of the Darwinian theory.

I understand that the interference of the Avidya or the hostile forces were the causes of man’s degeneration and delay in his evolution and that they were not helping forces as such, even indirectly.

They did not intend to be helping forces, but they have been obliged to help in certain ways.

Psychic innocence is a great perfection by itself.

What is psychic innocence after all?

You have not taken exception to my statement about Vidya and Avidya.

These are terms which one can use in different senses. There is no Avidya in the highest planes, if by Avidya you mean Ignorance.

You have not taken exception to my statement about the great pain created in the universe by the interference of the hostile forces in the life of man.

I have not accepted it.

Once pain is in the world and a main part of its working it cannot be got rid of arbitrarily by ignoring it or by a simple surgical operation of cutting out its source. It is the mind with its summary conclusions that thinks the complex knot of things can be dealt with by a simple cut — in fact it is not so.

The Mother has spoken many times of hostile forces that came here after the descent for transformation. In fact, she had transformed one hostile being who was present in the Asrama.

A transformed hostile being or one who wants to be transformed is no longer hostile. It is simply a power of the vital world which places itself at the service of the Divine. Hostility consists in opposing the Divine Light and fighting against the transformation of the earth consciousness.

But in any case the Mother never spoke of such transformation as the object of the sadhana or the Asrama.

You have not said anything about several of my questions and statements.

There are many things you have written about which I have not said anything but which I do not endorse. It is impossible for me with my limited time to answer such a long series of questions in detail.

After the descent, the Mother spoke of the Asrama as the spiritual cell (the word is mine) and Sangha.

The Mother was not in the habit of using the word sangha, I think.

9 January 1934

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A natural unfolding of the consciousness in manifestation from an involved state is quite a beautiful phenomenon.

No doubt — but when the evolution had to express the possibilities of an emergence from the Inconscience, it was not easy to materialise a flawless unfolding — since out of Inconscience came Ignorance and Ignorance is easily a field of deviation and error.

Probably you spoke of a psychological evolution whereas Darwin spoke of the evolution of the physical species.

Quite so. Many centuries before Darwin Puranic and Tantric writers spoke very explicitly of an evolution of the soul's birth through the vegetable and animal to man.

Psychic innocence is psychic existence in the eight planes of consciousness, manifestly.

Innocence has two meanings — sinlessness and ignorance. The psychic innocence is not an ignorant condition.

An ordinary vital being or a hostile vital being driven into the Asrama atmosphere by some presence from above or otherwise may at any time open to its own world and source in its darker aspects and then become the cause of much disturbance in the sadhana.

That does not apply to a converted Asura. The others are not driven — wherever sadhana is going on, they come to disturb it — a fact known to the Yogis and Rishis from early times.

Forced opening by a vital or a hostile force means a forced opening and entering of the same force in our mental, vital, physical body.

If you mean an invasion of the consciousness by a hostile force, that happens — but it cannot succeed unless something in the sadhaka either welcomes the invasion or is somehow attracted or won over or somehow responds. As for the ordinary attack not amounting to an opening, that nobody escapes.

In your reply of 4 January, you wrote: "That is an ignorant and incorrect statement of our sadhana" [p. 649]. Could you please clarify this?

I said that was an incorrect statement of my sadhana. I did not start by ascension to the supermind — I fought out the difficulties of the mind and vital first in such a way as to make it possible for not only the higher mind but the intuition and overmind to descend. The supermind comes last of all. 16 January 1934

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Inconscience is the involved state of the Sachchidananda. It is all-knowing, only the knowledge is involved. In Inconscience there need not be an exclusive *avidyā*, neither is it necessary for involving the Supraconsciousness.

In that case there is no exclusive Avidya anywhere — for wherever there is Ignorance, there is also the all-knowledge involved in it.

The condition of innocence realised by Christian saints and mystics was a psychic state of perfect self-surrender to and oneness with God on every plane of consciousness. But that perfection is not a state of Ignorance. Achieved in its fullness, it is *as good as* a state of supramental perfection — the difference being only in the basis, movement and *aiśvarya*.

Not at all. If it were then there would be no use of seeking for the descent of the supermind. A condition which one cannot retain by the inherent light and power of the Knowledge Will in it is not the supermind as I know it.

Sri Krishna when asked by Arjuna after the destruction of the Yadavas to repeat the sacred lore of the Gita, replied that the teaching of the Gita came into him once but that it was no more and he could not repeat it. Can one who has attained to the supermind fall?

Srikrishna did not say that he was in the supermind when he spoke the Gita to Arjuna — he was in Yoga, but one can be in

Yoga without being in the Supermind. So this is not a point in instance.

The only way to avoid the “fall” is to preserve oneself by a supreme knowledge and strength that refuses submission even to God if some part of His being should draw one down the path of darkness; and to correct this world-movement at its very source.

I am not aware of any state of supreme knowledge in which the separative ego or the individual becomes greater in knowledge and will than the Divine or can by his own separate power overcome the Divine Will and correct the world movement.

In the supermind there is not this division of one part of the being of God willing something and some other part fighting against it. There all is viewed from an integral vision and founded on a harmony in the being — how this works out cannot be fixed by the mind, which lives and acts in division. If there is no such integral supermind, then I have nothing to do here and will leave it to greater Minds to solve the problem in their own way.

When did the hostile forces begin their work of perversion — at the time of mental, vital or physical manifestation?

As soon as Life was to appear, they intervened in it.

A converted Asura, i.e. one who has consented to be God’s ally and undergo transformation, may easily change colour and become hostile. In fact, the Mother writes in her *Prayers* of some Asuras who promised to be God’s servants, but did not keep their promise as they wanted to lord it over others.²

The Mother was not speaking of any Asuras called into the Ashram and imposed on some human being there who was to bear the burden of his transformation. She was speaking of certain

² *The Mother, Prayers and Meditations (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2003), p. 223.*

Lords of the Vital who had taken birth in earthly bodies and tried to prepare the Divine Descent, but each imagining that he alone was the chosen instrument of the Force, spoiled the work they could have done. It was outside the Asram that this originally happened — only the Mother found the same mentality still persisting and interfering with the manifestation of the Force. But it had no reference to the converted Asura who tried to come here in his subtle Form of whom I spoke — that was many years afterwards — and he did not change colour or become hostile. Any other case of Asuric intervention was due to an affinity in the sadhak himself or a call from him — as in the case of X who was always calling Asuras into himself to convert them and although discouraged by us persisted thinking that he had himself a truer knowledge than we of what was wanted for the work. But again I have not known of any Asura who had accepted submission to the Divine becoming hostile. It is men who are under the influence of truly hostile beings who become like that.

The hostile beings generally attack, then make some way in, lay siege and create conditions for invasion and ultimately lead or compel the human being to fall.

I am quite aware of the way in which the unconverted hostile beings, who have a hostile intention, get inside — there have been plenty of cases like that, and their method besides has been known by occultists and Yogins all through the ages. As for attacks, they can attack anybody. Christ and Buddha too had to bear the assaults of the Asura. But invasion in a man is only possible if there is something in him that gives a response and opens the gate.

What I would like to know is whether all this can be done individually.

I do not seize the significance of the question. It has to be done in each individual — otherwise it cannot be done in the collective at all. But there can be a general descent of the Force by which

each can profit to have it done in him if he is ready or when he is ready. 25 January 1934

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Summing up, I understand you to say:

(1) That the hostile forces were permitted by God to pervert this creation at the time of the evolution of the human type.

No, I said “when life began to appear”, that is before the human evolution.

(2) That when the supermind comes down and manifests itself in the transformed earth consciousness they will go away or be driven out as there would be no need of their presence in this creation or Asrama,

No possibility either, if the supermind is once dominant.

(3) for here they serve some purpose (which I have not quite understood).

The purpose they serve *in the world* is to give a full chance to the possibilities of the Inconscience and Ignorance — for this world was meant to be a working out of these possibilities with the supramental harmonisation as its eventual outcome. The life, the work developing here in the Ashram has to deal with the world problem and had therefore to meet, it could not avoid, the conflict with the working of the hostile Powers in the human being.

(4) That you did not allow any hostile being in the Ashrama, except one converted Asura, and that no Asura owing allegiance to you had turned hostile.

We did not call any. The converted one too came but did not remain, so he too does not count.

(5) Outside the Ashrama some Lords of the vital world took birth on this earth, saying that they would serve God, but in

fact lorded it over others. But these were not Asuric forces though they were so called in the book.³

I said nothing about their not being Asuras. I said those to whom the Mother referred were not Asuras who had manifested in the Asram, but outside the Asram and before it was formed — as human beings who wanted to help and prepare the Divine Advent but spoiled their work, not by hostility, but by egoism — just as human beings with an Asuric temperament often do.

(6) The transformation of hostile beings is no part of the Yogi's work — though Mother transformed one. No such thing had been done in the Asrama or will be done.

The Mother's transforming one Asura was an incident, not an object of the Yoga.

I have not said either that it will not be done. If the Divine demands it, it will be done; if not, it won't be; but in any case it is not an object of the Yoga.

(7) That the Supermind can be attained individually though a force may descend by which men can profit according to the self-preparation — though you once said that it could not be done individually.

You have missed altogether the qualifying words which I put with great care and prominent emphasis — if you don't read carefully, you will necessarily misunderstand what I write. I said "*This transformation cannot be done individually in a solitary way only*" [p. 649]. No individual solitary transformation apart from the work for the earth (which means more than any individual transformation) would be either possible or useful. (Also no individual human being can by his own power alone work out the transformation, nor is it the object of the Yoga to create an individual superman here and there.) The object of the Yoga is to bring down the supramental consciousness

³ The "book" referred to here is apparently the Mother's Prayers and Meditations. See footnote 2 on page 654. — Ed.

on earth, to fix it there, to create a new race with the principle of the supramental consciousness governing the inner and outer individual and collective life. Therefore the existence of the Asram, whatever difficulties it created for ourselves or for the individual, was inevitable. The method was the preparation of the earth consciousness in the human being as represented by the members of the Asram and others (with also a certain working in the general earth consciousness) so as to make the descent of the supramental Force possible. That Force accepted by individual after individual according to their preparation would establish the supramental consciousness in the physical world and so create a nucleus for its own expansion.

(8) This world was originally intended to be an evolution out of ignorance in matter to knowledge through struggle and duality. Thus there was no original divine creation in the image of Heaven, or an original Satya Yuga.

It is quite possible that there have been periods of harmony on different levels, not supramental, which were afterwards disturbed — but those could only be a stage or resting place in a world of spiritual evolution out of the Ignorance.

(9) That a perfect manifestation is quite possible without need of evolution. But you have not said anything about whether an unfolding of the Inconscience (involved Sat-Chit-Ananda) without ignorance is possible.

I don't see how there can be, given the starting point of the Inconscience. An unfolding of anything involved must necessarily be an evolution.

(10) As for Krishna, he was God, who is everything consciously not excluding the Vijnana (the Supermind).

I have said nothing about that.

31 January 1934

In a letter of November 1933 [p. 639], you wrote that the intervention of the hostile forces was no longer necessary. But it seems that they have come full force this year and driven several people away. That suggests that the hostile forces will remain for ever — or at least until the final transformation.

When I said “no more necessary”, I did not mean that their action could not go on — I think I expressly said that if the sadhaks persisted in opening themselves to it, it would continue. There is a difference between the action of the hostile powers and the ordinary action of the lower nature. The latter of course goes on until it is changed but there is no necessity for it to take the form of hostile attacks and upsettings; it can be treated as a machinery that has to be set right and with the aid of the higher Light and Power can be set right. There are several who were once taken by hostile attacks who have now reached the point where they can follow this method, others are approaching it — some of course have always followed and never were attacked, at least in their mind and vital. But there are still many who are very far from it and so the action of the Hostiles continues. 14 October 1935

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There can be no question that it is a most desirable thing that the hostile forces should be destroyed or ejected from the Asram atmosphere and from all hold on the lower vital and physical of the sadhaks — the sooner the better. For the moment they are still able to resist and to keep up the disharmony in this part of Nature. It is only when they do so no more that the capital difficulty in the general sadhana will be over. 9 May 1936

Retirement and Progress in Yoga

Would not rejection of the problems of the lower vital be better done in retirement?

It is very doubtful. Our experience is that, generally, it does not succeed very well. Sometimes there is a great improvement so long as the person remains sequestered but it does not stand the test of again coming out into contact with others. Sometimes it

has led to an exalted inner activity, occasionally sound but often too unsound, the sadhak in retirement losing in the latter case the power of discrimination between subjective formations and valid truths of fact (*X* and others). In other cases the result has been a complete failure (*Y, Z*). As a general rule we consider it safer at the very least to combine some activity of outer life with retirement if any is made. 2 December 1933

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Mother does not at all approve of the idea of complete retirement. It does not bring the control, only an illusion of a control because the untoward causes are removed for a time. It is a control established while in contact with the outward things that is alone genuine. You must establish that from within by a fixed resolution and practice. Too much mixing and too much talk should be avoided, but a complete retirement is not the thing. It has not had the required result with anyone so far.

27 November 1936

Lack of Intensity in Sadhana

I have been thinking again about the general sadhana in the Ashram, how the intenser attitude of sincerity in all would bring an earlier victory. Does such thinking about others bring any difficulty in one's sadhana? Is it better to stick to one's own sadhana?

No — it is very good — there are few who have that in any intensity — if there were more, it might hasten things. 27 June 1933

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How is it that there is so little intensity of devotion here? Is it because there is more insistence on controlling emotions or because of constant Sadhana and the integral movement?

It is true that devotion here is very insufficient — but these cannot be the reasons, for psychic emotion is not discouraged by us and the integral Sadhana is not integral without bhakti. And yet it is a fact that those who come here full of bhakti lose much of

it after a time — with a few exceptions. I think it is because of the prevalence of a too positive mind and the habit of criticising everything from a quite external point of view which is rife in the atmosphere. 5 August 1933

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We have very little devotion and obedience compared to the disciples of Shankara and Buddha or the followers of old yogic disciplines, even though a greater discipline is needed because our aim is higher. This is perhaps due to the fact that you do not impose any discipline. Or perhaps there is a fundamental defect in our aspiration because of the western education many have had. I wonder if Shankara or Buddha or Mahavir would have allowed many of the things we do here.

They would not. All the causes you mention operate — perhaps the westernised atmosphere (even more than the education) of the present times is the strongest, but also the nature of the work to be done. 3 April 1934

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I feel that many have become “soft” after they come here. Is there something in the Yoga itself that makes them soft?

Nothing in the sadhana. It is because their desires had only been limited by poverty and, as soon as the poverty is removed, the desires come surging up. As for the self-imposed renunciation of desire which is of primary importance in this Yoga, only a few ever think of it. 13 June 1934

*

If the Force cannot bring definite and lasting fruit without our individual endeavour, don't you think at least half the sadhaks here will remain in the mud for long if not for ever? Half of them don't seem to want to make any steady personal effort. They depend on the action of your Force alone.

That is why the Asram is what it is. Only those who are taking the Yoga seriously are making any progress. 17 November 1936

*

How is it that people here become more soft than in ordinary life and a little hardship or discomfort becomes unbearable? Is it because they live a life of ease here doing no physical work?

What you have noticed is quite correct. It comes from a wrong movement which takes the rejection of asceticism as if it were a sanction for the indulgence of the body in whatever comfort it can get. The right principle is that one should be free from attachment and be able to do without things but also able to have them and use them without being bound or affected. Very few have taken it in that way — the vital has chosen to turn a deaf ear to anything said in that direction and to take as a right the comforts and conveniences given. What you have noted is one of the consequences.

December 1936

Egoism among Sadhaks

I have heard that some people here have gigantic egos, like X and Y, while some have fat egos, like Z. What sort of ego do I have?

Your ego is small and not gigantic — not tall and vehement and aggressive like Y's, but squat and inertly obstinate — not fat, completely, nor thin, but short and roundish and grey in colour.

3 November 1935

*

I looked up “squat” in the dictionary but could not guess which definition applied to my ego.

Squat = short in stature but broad and substantial, so difficult to get rid of.

You write: “not fat, completely, nor thin, but short and roundish and grey in colour.” What do all these symbols stand for?

Not tall and preminent or flourishingly settled in self-fullness — roundish = plenty of it all the same

Grey = tamasic in tendency, therefore not aggressive, but

obstinate in persistence. But these are not symbols, they are the temperamental figure of the ego. 5 November 1935

*

Nowadays I find ego in every little act or feeling. Formerly I saw it only when I acted with desire or pride.

Perhaps because then you were looking for ego only in the form which people specially call egoism, i.e. pride, vanity, selfishness, insistence on vital satisfactions. But ego is of all kinds — and you are only just now finding it out.

Half my being is trying hard to reject the sense of ego, while the ego itself colours all my actions. This contradiction creates an inner pain. Will the ego never be dissolved completely?

There is nothing to be troubled about. You ought rather to congratulate yourself that you have become conscious. Very few people in this Asram are. They are all ego-centric and they do not realise their ego-centricity. Even in their sadhana the I is always there, — *my* sadhana, *my* progress, *my* everything. The remedy is to think constantly of the Divine, not of oneself, to work, act, do sadhana for the Divine, — not to consider how this or that affects *me* personally, not claim anything, but to refer all to the Divine. It will take time to do that sincerely and thoroughly, but it is the proper way. 31 March 1936

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Many here seem to be proud of their surrender — even though they know that surrender and ego do not go together.

But who has got rid of ego in this Asram? To get rid of ego is as difficult as to make a complete surrender. 10 August 1936

Conversion, Realisation and Transformation

Today the Mother spoke to me of “conversion of consciousness” as distinct from “transformation of physical nature”.

Pointing to me she said, as for “the conversion of consciousness, it is there”. Did she mean, by implication, that all those who have gathered round Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have this “conversion of consciousness” — perhaps in varying degrees?

No. Those who come here have an aspiration and a possibility; something in their psychic being pushes and if they follow it, they will arrive; but that is not conversion. Conversion is a definite turning of the being away from lower things towards the Divine.

Can it be further explained in terms of the psychic being and its relation to the instrumental (nature) being?

It is certainly the psychic being turning the nature definitively Godwards, but the transformation has still to be worked out in the nature.

Or can it be said that whoever has some aspiration for the Light or Truth or God vaguely, has some sort of conversion of consciousness, for the reason that he has come to the Ashram and lives here?

No. Aspiration can lead hereafter to conversion; but aspiration is not conversion.

Mother spoke of three different things: conversion, the turning of the soul decisively towards the Divine, — inner realisation of the Divine, — transformation of the nature. The first two can happen swiftly and suddenly and once for all, the third always takes time and cannot be done at one stroke, in a moment. One may become aware of a rapid change in this or that detail of the transformation, but even this is a rapid result of a long working.

3 September 1937

Ashram Sadhaks and the Supramental Realisation

One day, while I was thinking that I would have to fulfil certain conditions before I could be saved from Ignorance, a strong feeling came to me from you that I need not fulfil any

condition, but that you would save me by a special Grace.
Was there any truth to what I felt?

I certainly gave you no such message or promise as you describe. You may have picked up something that was in my atmosphere, but, once again, your mental transcription of it was wrong — and turned it into something quite different from the truth. It may or may not be, although no promise of the kind can be made at the present moment, that you or other sadhakas here or all will be brought through in the end by the divine grace in spite of the very serious difficulties created by your and their external being and the obstinate obscurities and resistance in its crooked human nature. But in any case, to say that “you need not fulfil any condition” is a flagrant error. It is the old mischievous suggestion of an inert passivity to all influences as the true surrender and, if accepted, would legitimate every wrong movement of the nature. First, certain conditions have to be fulfilled; afterwards, there will be room for the divine grace to act.

18 October 1928

*

I have heard that sadhaks here will have perfect control over decay and death. I have some doubts about this. Could you say something about it?

It depends on the Supramental and on the Divine’s will in the sadhak. All that can be said is that to conquer disease and death is part of the total physical perfection. But as to other matters nothing can be said as yet.

13 September 1933

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You wrote to X, “It is the first step and perhaps for some it may be sufficient, for we are not asking everybody to become supramental.” Do you mean everybody in this Asram?

Yes. Only it does not mean that anybody here is debarred from the supramental consciousness or the physical transformation — if he wants it. It is not a question of possibility, but of the need and aspiration in the nature.

21 September 1934

Realisations by Sadhaks

I have all but made up my mind to give up the sadhana. I find it very humiliating to be reminded every month that I am far from the cosmic consciousness. In the midst of all my troubles, I have lost faith. Do you think it is of any use to keep me here?

When you have got out of this attack, you will yourself recognise the emptiness of such a question. You have the Yogic capacity in you as your experiences show and it is not by going away from here that you will develop it.

I do not understand why it should be insulting to speak always of the cosmic consciousness and the necessity of its settling down. I mean by it the living in the sense of the cosmic Self and the experience of the cosmic forces. A certain number here have contact with that, very few have it as a constant realisation, none have it perfected and fixed in all their being. As for going above it there are grades in the cosmic consciousness and one can go above the cosmic mental and rise as far as the overmind. But that also is still the cosmic consciousness. 15 September 1934

*

I sometimes wonder whether anyone here is attaining anything at all? Has anyone realised the Divine? Please don't ask me what I mean by the Divine.

Why shouldn't I ask? If you mean the Vedantic realisation, several have had it. Bhakti realisation also. If I were to publish the letters on sadhana experiences that have come to me, people would marvel and think that the Asram was packed full of great Yogis! Those who know something about Yoga would not mind about the dark periods, eclipses, hostile attacks, despairings, falls, for they know that these things happen to Yogis. Even the failures would have become Gurus, if I had allowed it, with circles of Shishyas! X did become one. Y of course. But all that does not count here, because what is a full realisation outside, is here only a faint beginning of siddhi. Here the test is transformation of the nature, psychic, spiritual, finally supramental. That and

nothing else is what makes it so difficult.

20 May 1936

*

Is it only for physical transformation that staying here is necessary? Otherwise sincere sadhana can be done elsewhere as well as here.

I don't suppose the later stages of the transformation including the physical would be possible elsewhere. In fact in those outside none of the three transformations seems to have begun. They are all preparing. Here there are at least a few who have started one or two of them. Only that does not show outside. The physical or external alone shows outside.

11 April 1937

*

People here — the Toms, Dicks and Harrys, who would be nowhere beside X in the outside world and who would simply have rotted in the gutter if they hadn't found shelter here — even such people criticise him.

The quality of the sadhaks is so low? I should say there is a considerable amount of ability and capacity in the Asram. Only the standard demanded is higher than outside even in spiritual matters. There are half a dozen people here perhaps who live in the Brahman consciousness — outside they would make a big noise and be considered as great Yogis — here their condition is not known and in the Yoga it is regarded not as siddhi but only as a beginning.

12 July 1937

*

What the deuce is "Brahman consciousness"? The same as cosmic consciousness? Does one come to that after your psychic and spiritual transformation?

Is it something like seeing Brahman in everybody and everywhere or what? It is not spiritual realisation, I suppose, I mean realisation of Self? You see I am a nincompoop in this business. Please perorate a little.

Eternal Jehovah! you don't even know what Brahman is! You

will next be asking me what Yoga is or what life is or what body is or what mind is or what sadhana is! No, sir, I am not proposing to teach an infant class the A-B-C of the elementary conceptions which are the basis of Yoga. There is X too who doesn't know what consciousness is, even!

Brahman, sir, is the name given by Indian philosophy since the beginning of time to the one Reality eternal and infinite which is the Self, the Divine, the All, the more than All, which would remain even if you and everybody and everything else in existence or imagining itself to be in existence vanished into blazes — even if this whole universe disappeared, Brahman would be safely there and nothing whatever lost. In fact, sir, you are Brahman and you are only pretending to be Y; when Z is translating X's poetry into Bengali, it is really Brahman translating Brahman's Brahman into Brahman. When X asks me what consciousness is, it is really Brahman asking Brahman what Brahman is! There, sir, I hope you are satisfied now.

To be less drastic and refrain from making your head reel till it goes off your shoulders, I may say that a realisation of the Self is the beginning of Brahman realisation; — the Brahman consciousness — the Self in all and all in the Self etc. It is the basis of the spiritual realisation and therefore of the spiritual transformation; but one has to see it in all sorts of aspects and applications first and that I refuse to go into. If you want to know you have to read the *Arya*.

Is living in that consciousness an ideal condition for receiving the supramental descent?

It is a necessary condition.

I ask because I heard that no one here was prepared for this supramental descent.

Of course not, this realisation of the Self as all and the Divine as all is only the first step.

Is that the height of realisation achieved here so far among sadhaks? What is the next step?

The next step is to get into contact with the higher planes above spiritual mind — for as soon as one gets into the spiritual Mind or Higher Mind, this realisation is possible.

Now the big question is: Is the realisation of the Self a state of perpetual peace, joy and bliss?

If it is thoroughly established, it is one of *internal* peace, freedom, wideness, in the inner being.

Is it a state surpassing all struggles, dualities and depressions?

All these things you mention become incidents in the external being, on the surface — but the inner being remains untouched by them.

Are all troubles of the lower nature conquered finally — especially sex?

No, sir. But the inner being is not touched.

Or is it that sex-desire rises up in the Yogis, but leaves them untouched, unscathed? No attraction for them? It must be so, otherwise how can they be called *siddhas*? No danger of a fall from the spiritual state?

It may be covered up in a way — so long as it is not established in all parts of the being. The old Yogis did not consider that necessary, because they wanted to walk off, not to change the being.

Why do you call it a beginning only? What more do you want to do except perhaps physical transformation?

I want to effect the transformation of the whole nature (not only of the physical) — that's why.

And lastly can you whisper to me the names of those lucky fellows, those “half a dozen people” [p. 667], so that I can have a practical knowledge of what that blessed thing — “the Brahman consciousness” — is like?

NO, SIR.

How can you have a practical knowledge of it by knowing who has it? You might just as well expect to have a practical knowledge of high mathematics by knowing that Einstein is a great mathematician. Queer ideas you have!

Are they *A? B? C? D? E? F?* — but he can't be for he is a Brahma himself, so keeps himself secluded like Him, no?

???????

18 July 1937

“Advanced Sadhaks”

X is an advanced sadhak? This word “advanced” has no sense, it merely feeds the egoism of those who apply it to themselves.

*

The Mother never speaks of advanced sadhaks — it is the sadhaks themselves who have invented the phrase. Whenever they used it in their letters to me, I have thrown ridicule on the phrase and said I have no knowledge of there being two classes in the Asram, one of advanced sadhaks and the other of non-advanced sadhaks. So the question about *X* does not arise. If a sadhak, whoever he may be, speaks or acts out of anger, rajasic violence or any other unYogic impulse, his speech or action is contrary to the spirit of the sadhana.

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Yes, you should learn not to be perturbed by talk of this kind from whomsoever it proceeds; I think I have already tried to put you on your guard against listening to “advanced sadhaks” or taking these pronouncements of theirs as authoritative statements of the aims and conditions of the Yoga. Why this claim

to be an advanced sadhak and what is the sense of it? it resolves itself into an egoistic assertion of superiority over others which is not justified so long as there *is* the egoism and the need of assertion — accompanied, as it always is, by a weakness and turbid imperfection which belie the claim of living in a superior consciousness to the “unadvanced” sadhaks. It is time these crudities disappeared from the Asram atmosphere. 3 February 1932

*

Wouldn't it be best if people did not think of themselves as being more advanced than others? It is enough to know that we are on the right path.

Yes, the talk about advanced sadhaks is a thing I have always discouraged — but people go on because that appeals to the vital ego. 13 May 1935

*

I understand your protesting against “great” or “big” sadhaks, but why against “advanced” sadhaks? Is it not a fact that some are more advanced than others? If we speak of X as an advanced sadhak, we don't mean anything else.

Advanced indeed! Pshaw! Because one is 3 inches ahead of another, you must make classes of advanced and non-advanced? Advanced has the same puffing egoistic resonance as “great” or “big”. It leads to all sorts of stupidities — rajasic self-appreciating egoism in some, tamasic self-depreciating egoism in others, round-eyed wonderings why X, an advanced sadhak, one 3 inches ahead of Y, should stumble, tumble or fumble while Y, 3 inches behind X, still plods heavily and steadily on, etc. etc. Why, sir, the very idea in X that he is an advanced sadhak (like the Pharisee, “I thank thee, O Lord, that I am not as other unadvanced disciples”,) would be enough to make him fumble, stumble and tumble. So no more of that, sir, no more of that. 25 September 1935

Discipline in the Ashram

Discipline Defined

What is discipline?

To act according to a standard of Truth or a rule or law of action (dharma) or in obedience to a superior authority or to the highest principles discovered by the reason and intelligent will and not according to one's own fancy, vital impulses and desires. In Yoga obedience to the Guru or to the Divine and the law of the Truth as declared by the Guru is the foundation of discipline.

12 June 1933

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What is discipline and how does it apply here, in our Yoga?

It is not the discipline of Yoga, but the discipline of an organisation, the exterior material discipline one has to accept if one is to be part of an organisation.

9 July 1933

*

What is discipline?

To live and act under control or according to a standard of what is right — not to allow the vital or the physical to do whatever they like and not to let the mind run about according to its fancy without truth or order. Also to obey those who ought to be obeyed.

July 1933

Need of Self-Discipline

In the outside world there is a mental and social control and also the absorption in other things. Here you are left alone with your own consciousness and have to replace the mental and outward

control by an inner self-control of the spirit. 1 December 1933

*

If there was a perception of the difficulties in the adhar, it ought to have moved you to a more strenuous effort, a deeper call on the help and Grace. To indulge in a bout of gross material self-indulgence was a quite imbecile solution. It is true that the Grace is there for all who aspire and, however one may stumble, if there is a sincere repentance and a will to atone, there need be no cause for despair.

But I must remind you that that is only the individual aspect. There is here an Asram, a group of seekers of the Divine Truth with a collective existence and aim; a work is being done for the Divine against great difficulties and in the midst of a hostile and censorious world which is only too glad of any pretext for assailing it and, if possible, injuring its fair fame and success. A conduct like this deals a wound to the work and the collective effort towards a higher life. Your proposed escape from your own fall by suicide would not have been a solution and would only do a still greater injury to the divine Work which is, as much as individual realisation, our spiritual endeavour.

I trust that you are sincere in saying that these things are finished for ever. If you had not confessed, the Mother would have been obliged to deal severely with you; but as you have confessed, this lapse may be considered as annulled, provided it is never repeated. A greater frankness and sincerity in laying yourself open to the Mother will help you avoid such aberrations in future.

There is no reason why you should not succeed in your sadhana if, having seen the defects of your lower nature, you take a firm resolve in future and keep it to be more strict with yourself, more trustful in the Divine Grace, more sincerely open to the Mother.

10 September 1933

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Some [*personal*] rules I have been following — not reading newspapers, not eating outside, and so forth — now seem like mental dogmas.

Rules like these are intended to help the vital and physical to come under the discipline of sadhana and not get dispersed in fancies, impulses, self-indulgences; but they must be done simply, not with any sense of superiority or ascetic pride, but as a mere matter of course. It is true also that they can be made the occasion of a too great mental rigidity — as if they were things of supreme importance *in themselves* and not only a means. Put in their right place and done in the right spirit, they can be very helpful for their purpose.

8 May 1934

*

I have read your letter. What you write is true; X has said these things in order to help you and put you in the right way. A certain inner and outer discipline is necessary in order that one may grow into the spirit of the Yoga and the natural impulses of the vital cannot be a guide to action there. One has to perceive what one should or should not do and impose this discipline on oneself; for that X's advice and guidance can be of great help to you.

20 October 1936

Importance of Obedience

In regard to obedience, X told Y, in a depreciatory way, that it was not that important, that asking for permission to do things was not necessarily surrender, but often was hypocritical.

It seems to me that one obeys rules because if one was to do the opposite, one would go out of your protection.

It is precisely that — one immediately goes out of the protection.

As far as I can see, right action and right movement (after asking you what is right) are rather the first bases of sadhana.

Yes, quite right.

Please cast some light on this, so that I can explain it to Y.

It is a deficiency of psychic perception and spiritual discrimination that makes people speak like that and ignore the importance of obedience. It is the mind wanting to follow its own way of thinking and the vital seeking freedom for its desires which argue in this manner. If you do not follow the rules laid down by the spiritual guide or obey one who is leading you to the Divine, then what or whom are you to follow? Only the ideas of the individual mind and the desires of the vital: but these things never lead to siddhi in Yoga. The rules are laid down in order to guard against certain influences and their dangers and to keep a right atmosphere in the Asram favourable to spiritual development; the obedience is necessary so as to get away from one's own mind and vital and learn to follow the Truth.

8 June 1933

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All your comments seem to rise from the fact that you object to discipline, rule and order. That seems to be the general mind of the Asram. Each must be allowed to follow his own inclination, convenience or "common sense". Those who insist on stemming the chaos of vital indiscipline and disorder are martinets like X or capricious and tyrannical like the Mother.

October 1933

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What most want is that things should be done according to their desire without check or reference. The talk of perfection is humbug. Perfection does not consist in everybody being a law to himself. Perfection comes by renunciation of desires and surrender to a higher Will.

5 August 1934

Rules in the Life of the Ashram

No Fixed Rules

The Asram, not being a public institution, has no prospectus or fixed set of rules. It is directed by the Mother according to what she sees to be necessary for each individual and for the work as a whole.

19 March 1930

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I request you to furnish me with the rules and regulations necessary for becoming a member of the Ashram.

Tell him that there are no public rules and regulations for the Asram, as it is not a public institution.¹ Only some of Sri Aurobindo's disciples who are considered ready or called to the Asram life are admitted. At present however no admissions are being made, as the accommodation capacity of the Asram is exhausted and there is no possibility just now of expanding it.

25 December 1934

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What seems to me of more importance is to try to explain how things are worked out here. Indeed very few are the people who understand it and still fewer those who realise it.

There has never been, at any time, a mental plan, a fixed programme or an organisation decided beforehand. The whole thing has taken birth, grown and developed as a living being by a movement of consciousness (Chit-tapas) constantly maintained, increased and fortified. As the Conscious Force descends in matter and radiates, it seeks for fit instruments to express and manifest it. It goes without saying that the more the instrument

¹ *Written by Sri Aurobindo to his secretary, who replied to the correspondent. — Ed.*

is open, receptive and plastic, the better are the results. The two obstacles that stand in the way of a smooth and harmonious working in and through the sadhaks are:

(1) the preconceived ideas and mental constructions which block the way to the influence and the working of the conscious force;

(2) the preferences and impulses of the vital which distort and falsify the expression.

Both these things are the natural output of the ego. Without the interference of these two elements my physical intervention would not be necessary.

You are quite right when you do not believe in “Mother likes”, “Mother dislikes”: it is quite a childish interpretation.

There is a clear precise perception of the Force and the Consciousness at work, and whenever this Force gets distorted or the Consciousness is obscured in its action, I have to interfere and rectify the movement. In most cases things are mixed up and there again I have to intervene to separate the distorted transcription from the pure one.

Otherwise a great freedom of action is left to all, because the Conscious Force can express itself in innumerable ways and for the perfection and integrality of the manifestation no ways are to be *a priori* excluded; a trial is very often given before the selection is made.

22 August 1939

The Ashram's Rules and Regulations

I would like to know precisely which people I should ask to read the Rules and Regulations of the Asram² and sign for them?

The members of the Asram. For the others you can submit the names — long resident visitors in the Asram itself would usually have to see the rules e.g. X.

12 April 1933

² The reference is to a typed set of “Rules and Regulations of the Asram”, issued in 1933 but incorporating several rules written earlier. — Ed.

General Rules and Individual Natures

It is a little difficult from the wider spiritual outlook to answer your question in the way you want and every mental being wants, with a trenchant “Thou shalt” or “Thou shalt not”, especially when the “thou” is meant to cover “all”. For while there is an identity of essential aim, while there are general broad lines of endeavour, yet there is not in detail one common set of rules in inner things that can apply to all seekers. You ask “Is such and such a thing harmful?” But what is harmful to one may be helpful to another, — what is helpful at a certain stage may cease to be helpful at another, — what is harmful under certain conditions is helpful under other conditions, — what is done in a certain spirit may be disastrous, the same thing done in a quite different spirit would be innocuous or even beneficial. I asked the Mother indeed what she would say to your question about pleasures and social expansiveness (put as a general question) and she answered, “Impossible to say like that; it depends on the spirit in which it is done.” So there are so many things: the spirit, the circumstances, the person, the need and cast of the nature, the stage. That is why it is said so often that the Guru must deal with each disciple according to his separate nature and accordingly guide his sadhana; even if it is the same line of sadhana for all, yet at every point for each it differs. That also is the reason why we say the Divine’s way cannot be understood by the mind, — because the mind acts according to hard and fast rules and standards, while the spirit sees the truth of all and the truth of each and acts variously according to its own comprehensive and complex vision. That also is why we say that no one can understand by his personal mental judgment the Mother’s actions and reasons for action; it can only be understood by entering into the larger consciousness from which she sees things and acts upon them. That is baffling to the mind because it loses its small measures, but it is the truth of the matter.

To come down to hard facts and it may make the dictum a little more comprehensible. You speak of retirement and you say that if it is good why not impose it — you couple together X, Y,

Z, A, B, C! Well, take that last name, C, and add to it D for he also “retired” and went headlong for an intense and solitary sadhana. X and Y profited by their seclusion, what happened to C and D? We forbade D to retire, — he was always wanting to give up work, withdraw from all intercourse and spend all his time in meditation; but he did it as much as he could — result, collapse. C never asked permission and I cannot say what his retirement was like, but I hear he boasted that by his intense sadhana he had conquered sex not only for himself but all the sadhaks! He had to leave the Ashram owing to his unconquerable attachment to his wife and child and he is there living the family life and has produced another child — what a success for retirement. Where the retirement is helpful and fits the mind or the nature, we approve it, but in the face of these results how can you expect us to follow what the mind calls a consistent course and impose it as the right thing on everybody? You have spoken of your singing. You know well that we approve of it and I have constantly stressed its necessity for you as well as that of your poetry. But the Mother absolutely forbade E’s singing? To music for some again she is indifferent or discourages it, for others she approves as for F, G and others. For some time she encouraged the concerts, afterwards she stopped them. You drew from the prohibition to E and the stopping of the concerts that Mother did not like music or did not like Indian music or considered music bad for sadhana and all sorts of strange mental reasons like that. Mother prohibited E because while music was good for you, it was spiritually poison to E — the moment he began to think of it and of audiences, all the vulgarity and unspirituality in his nature rose to the surface. You can see what he is doing with it now! So again with the concerts — though in a different way — she stopped them because she had seen that wrong forces were coming into their atmosphere which had nothing to do with the music in itself; her motives were not mental. It was for similar reasons that she drew back from big public displays like Udayshankar’s. On the other hand she favoured and herself planned the exhibition of paintings at the Town Hall. She was not eager for you to have your big audiences for your singing because she found

the atmosphere full of mixed forces and found too you had afterwards usually a depression; but she has always approved of your music in itself done privately or before a small audience. If you consider then, you will see that here there is no mental rule, but in each case the guidance is determined by spiritual reasons which are of a flexible character and look only at what in each case are the spiritual conditions, results, possibilities. There is no other consideration, no rule. Music, painting, poetry and many other activities which are of the mind and vital can be used as part of spiritual development or of the work and for a spiritual purpose — “it depends on the spirit in which they are done.”

That being established, that these things depend on the spirit, the nature of the person, its needs, the conditions and circumstances, I will come to your special question about pleasure and especially the pleasure in society of an expansive vital nature.

P.S. Of course there is a category of things that have to be eschewed altogether and of things that have to be followed by all, but I am speaking of the large number that do not fall into the two categories.

24 October 1936

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No, there is no obligation of gloom, harshness, austerity or lonely grandeur in this Yoga. If I am living in my room, it is not out of a passion for solitude, and it would be ridiculous to put forward this purely external circumstance — or X’s withdrawnness which is a personal necessity of his sadhana — as if it were the obligatory sign of a high advance in the Yoga or solitude the aim; these are simply incidents which none is called on to imitate. So you need not be anxious; solitude is not demanded of you, for an ascetic dryness of isolated loneliness cannot be your spiritual destiny since it is not consonant with your swabhava which is made for joy, largeness, expansion, a comprehensive movement of the life-force. And, as for stern gravity and the majesty of a speechless and smileless face, your transformation into that would be terrifying to think of! I may remind you that the Mother and myself always recommended to you a sunlit and

cheerful progress as the best; if we were inclined to complain of anything in you — which we are not, knowing that one does not choose one's difficulties, — it would not be that you have too much gaiety but that you are not always as gay and cheerful as we would like you to be! The storm, cloud, difficulty, suffering come, but they are no part of the Yogic idea; they belong to the Nature that is now, not to the divine Nature that is to be.

Disregarding the Rules of the Ashram

Is it a fact that some sadhaks enjoy the special privilege of having obtained either your or the Mother's sanction for eating meat or fish whenever they like?

No such sanction or privilege has been obtained by anybody from the Mother.

If so, can they cook these things in their residential quarters?

Certainly not, that is strictly forbidden.

Or does the permission apply only to their going out in town to eat these things?

When they do it outside in the town, they are taking a liberty — no liberty has been granted to them.

If no such sanction has ever been given, then how far are the principles of the Asram violated if a local well-wisher or a visitor to the Asram invites us to such feasts? Do they do the right thing by inviting us?

No, they don't do the right thing — if they know of the rule of the Asram.

Those sadhaks who wilfully indulge this vital desire, how do they stand in your estimation? Are they to be classed as especially progressed souls for whom no such bondage to rules and regulations apply?

Not in the least — any such claim is obvious bunkum.

When such sadhaks lead others to believe that they are above the Asram rules, does it not do harm to their own Buddhahood? Then what is the right attitude to take up?

That raises the general question of disregard of the rules of the Asram or of the standards of action in Yoga. As such disregard is widespread and common among the sadhaks, if dealt with radically, it could entail a Pride's purge or Communist purification which would leave in the Asram only a greatly reduced number of inmates. Certain things cannot be tolerated especially if done in the Asram. Apart from that we have been waiting for something to develop inwardly in individual sadhaks which will bring about a change. If it doesn't — well, I suppose a time will come or is coming *when everybody will have to choose*.

I am not aware that there are any Buddhas in the Asram.

The right attitude is to keep strictly oneself to the truth and to affirm it quietly whenever it is necessary to do so.

Would turning down such invitations amount to a breach of etiquette or hurting the feelings of the person inviting?

That too is rubbish. Etiquette cannot take precedence over a rule of life proper to the Asram or the Yoga. 10 November 1938

No Politics in the Ashram

It is supposed that all who come here come for the spiritual life and aspire to realise the Divine Truth, leaving all else behind them. If you have come here for the spiritual life, you have nothing to do with what others may be doing in the political field which you have left behind you. It is no part of your dharma.

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The rule for permanent residents of the Asram is that they must abstain from political activities altogether. Although this rule is not rigidly imposed on disciples at a distance, yet it is expected

that they should not do anything which would compromise the Asram, and, as a matter of fact, no disciple of Sri Aurobindo is at present participating in political agitation.

It is also the rule for permanent members of the Asram that they should put their property at the disposal of the Mother, and they do not spend anything of it for other purposes except with the sanction previously given by her. But as you are not a permanent member, this rule does not apply to you, and the Mother cannot undertake to direct you as to the persons and the purposes to which you should give or refuse financial assistance. As a rule we never interfere in the personal lives or affairs of others than whole-time sadhaks who have given up everything else for the spiritual life.

I would suggest that the difficulty about giving shelter to Congressmen arises only when there is an arrival of a batch of Salt Law Satyagrahis sent to break the Law. If such a batch arrives at your place and you give them shelter, then, as the law is now being administered, you run the risk of going to jail. It seems to me that, not being yourself a Satyagrahi, you are not bound to give this help or run this risk. Nothing prevents you from receiving a friend who is a Congressman under other circumstances.

The questions you put about financial help to Khaddar and Prohibition and to the National school, must be decided by yourself, I think. I will only ask you to note what I have written in the first paragraph of the letter.

24 May 1930

*

Is there no likelihood of any political work being done by us?

Not any! What is called politics is too rajasic, mixed and muddied with all sorts of egoistic motives. Our way is the pressure of the spirit upon the earth consciousness to change.

25 July 1933

*

What will be the use of a transformed vital in a new manifestation if there is nothing active like politics?

But surely politics is not the only activity possible for the vital — there are hundreds of others. Whenever there is something to be produced, created, organised, achieved, conquered, it is the vital that is indispensable. 26 July 1933

*

Is politics necessary for some people here? We would seem to have sufficient difficulties in sadhana without adding that. Why do people take mental interest in something not likely to help the divine manifestation unless it is given as a work to some?

No, it is not given as a work to anybody. People go on with that because it is a mental interest or habit they do not like giving up, it is like the vital habit of tea-drinking or anything else of the kind. Politics is not only not given as a work but the discussion of politics is discouraged as much as possible.

30 November 1933

*

A member of the Asram cannot belong to a political body or do political work. He is also not supposed to do any social propaganda. Educational work like the Gurukula is different; it can be done with the Mother's permission.

circa September 1938

*

I don't understand how X and others who are there are continuing to make proposals like these when I have clearly forbidden any publicity of the kind. You must make it perfectly and finally clear to them that the Asram is a non-political institution as well as non-sectarian and that therefore there can be no public commitment by its members and they cannot take any official position in institutions like this nor can their names be signed to any document involving a breach of this principle. Their proposals therefore cannot be accepted by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Whatever sympathy, support and guidance they receive from you or from anybody here must be personal and given

behind the scenes. Sri Aurobindo has sometimes made public utterances or taken publicly a political position, but that was on his own personal account and his action did not involve the Asram. His name also must not be published in this connection. They must be satisfied with the knowledge that his sympathy is entirely with your objects and that his spiritual force will be behind your work, but this must not be made public.

14 April 1947

Avoidance of Speech and Writing about Ashram Life

I do not know why you said all you did to Miss Maitland about the British police. We do not care in the least about the matter, and we have no intention of making any move to get rid of them.

Farther, you must try to remember that this Asram is not concerned with politics and the members are expected not to talk politics with people from outside like Miss Maitland. She came here from an interest in Yoga and is not in the least interested in politics. If you begin to talk to her about the freedom of India and the misdeeds of the British Government, she will inevitably think in the end that the Consul was right and the Asram is full of revolutionaries under the garb of Yoga. It is surprising that the members of this Asram seem always unable to use discretion in their speech or measure its consequences or understand how easily false impressions are created.

Finally, those who see Miss Maitland are expected not to quarrel or dispute with her about her views or mental impressions about India. She is returning soon to England and they can surely have patience for this short time and maintain harmony and good feeling in their relations with her.

1929

*

I am sending herewith a letter from a friend. Can I let him know some details about the Ashram?

It is an express rule of the Asram not to give inner information of the Asram life to people outside. If the correspondent is a seeker after Yoga (which does not seem to be the case here) he can be

told general things about the Yoga (not anything personal to the sadhaks or to Sri Aurobindo or the Mother).

19 November 1931

*

It is not very advisable to discuss either myself or the Asram or spiritual things with hostile minds or unbelievers. These discussions usually bring on the sadhak a stress of the opposing atmosphere and cannot be helpful to his progress. Reserve is the best attitude; one need not be concerned to dispel their bad will or their ignorance.

13 September 1932

*

Your mistake was to say something which implied a reflection on a fellow-sadhak to a visitor. That should not be done when it is unnecessary, especially if the Mother's name is brought in. If some sadhak of the Asram says things to a visitor against us or the Asram or the Yoga, for instance, and the visitor comes to you with a report of it, it is necessary to set right the wrong impression made or any perplexity he may feel, or other reasons may arise. But here there was no necessity. Your explanation of X's goings out from the Asram was in fact not correct, for he had wired refusal to go and had no wish to go and it was not out of a desire to attend a relative's marriage that he went; but even if it had been correct, the statement should not have been made. The internal affairs of the Asram and the sadhaks should not be spoken of — unless it cannot be avoided — to visitors or persons from outside.

There is no reason why you should stop receiving visits; you have the Mother's approval and it is helpful. But we would wish you to avoid anything which might be interpreted as reflections or personal judgments on other sadhaks or anything which can be interpreted as that; you see for yourself what reactions and bad currents any indiscretion of that kind can create.

Guidelines for Writing about the Ashram

It is not necessary to answer everything that appears in the newspapers. Nor is it advisable to take the outside public into confidence as to what is or is not going on in the Asram. It is only in exceptional cases that an answer is called for.

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Here is an article by X (with some necessary corrections).

I have glanced over your monster. He will have to be beheaded and his tail cut off. Beheaded because Mother has put a prohibition on publication of her name and what she has written. The *Conversations* are for private circulation, the *Prayers* only for disciples and those who are actively interested in spiritual experience. This rule has been hammered into Y and others; you also must fix it in your cerebellum for the future. The tail will have to be docked for a reason regarding myself. Your reason for including it shows a harrowing incomprehension of the purpose of these things. The object of such special issues³ is not to exhibit me to the public and show them all sides of me, i.e. to make me go through all my possible performances on a public stage. The object is to make the reading public better acquainted with the nature of this Yoga and the principle of what is being done in the Asram. The private matters of the Asram itself are *not* for the public — at most only so much as the public can see. *A fortiori* anything personal and private about me is also taboo. I come in only so far as it is necessary for the public to know my thought and what I stand for. You will notice that my life itself is so written as to give only the grey precise surface facts, nothing more. All propensity to make me figure in the big Barnum circus of journalistic “features” along with or in competition with Joe Louis the prize-fighter, Douglas Fairbanks, H. G. Wells, King George and Queen Mary, Haile Selassie, Hobbs, Hitler, Jack the Ripper (or any modern substitute of his) and Mussolini should

³ *Special issues of daily or weekly periodicals dealing with Sri Aurobindo and his work.*
—Ed.

be strictly banished from the mentality for evermore and the day after.

24 September 1935

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I cannot understand how some people here think that a few articles in magazines help the Mother's work. Do such articles help to remove the hostile impressions in people's minds which hamper the work or do they create interest among rich people and induce them to offer some money to help?

Up to now it has not. It has only brought useless letters and people wanting to "join" the Asram to "study" here. There is no specific utility in the publications, but only a sort of counteraction to false ideas and rumours about the Asram and a vague general effect on the public mind. I allow it not because it has any central value for the work, but there is in the play of forces a tendency towards pressure for a more favourable attitude towards the Asram in Pondicherry and elsewhere and some measure of respect in Europe also and this is helpful to a certain extent. Especially it relieves me from the necessity of putting out forces constantly to combat the possibility of hostile attacks from outside threatening the security of the work. The result is therefore rather defensive up till now than something positive — but I cannot say it is of no use at all.

8 October 1935

*

I shall see your article and decide. I fear the first part of it is not admissible. The Mother always insists on great reserve in writing publicly about the Asram, especially if it is done by inmates or sadhaks.

25 November 1935

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Asked by the *Indian Review*, I sent them an article entitled "Socialism and the Indian Ideal". They are asking for permission to print it in their review as well as in booklet form. Can the permission be given?

I think I had better make it clear once for all that I do not

approve of the publication of articles on controversial political subjects by members of the Asram. It involves the Asram and can prejudice the work of the Mother by raising quite uselessly unnecessary opposition and prejudice of which there is already more than enough. From a deeper point of view it pulls down the work to a lower region of mental and vital forces and the methods current on that lower plane. The work we have to do does *not* belong to that plane and cannot be done by current methods. It can only be done by rising to a higher spiritual plane and working silently from there on the forces in action so as to prepare a favourable field for the growth of the true consciousness and the true life-action. So long as that is not done, to engage in any activity which means opposition and struggle on the lower plane or to resort to its methods can only put it at a disadvantage and imperil its future. It is from the higher levels that things have to be worked out before the lower can be ready.

Your article is not at all conclusive except to people who are already disposed to be of the same way of thinking. It has besides the appearance of preaching a sort of spiritualised individualism and capitalism, but that is no more the object of our work than the “spiritual communism” which Motilal put into it. To allow that to pass as the economic gospel of this Yoga would not do at all. In the Gita I only explain the spiritual sense of the *cāturvarṇya*; I do not put that forward as my own economic or social teaching. Our aim is to rise to a higher spiritual consciousness and to create from there—to drag in mental forms from the present or past society could only spoil or hamper the purity and freedom of the future spiritual working.

29 September 1938

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It is because I thought I might serve you through such an article — a personal article I mean, the only type I feel free in — that I accepted the invitation to contribute something to *Asia*.

Well, what I am considering is just this, whether it would

not be wiser, as far as concerns England or America, to start impersonally with the philosophical side and the side of the Yoga, and leave the person a little behind the scene for the present, until people there are ready as individuals for the personal touch; that is the course we have been following up to now. In India it is different, for here there is another kind of general mentality and there is the tradition of the Guru and the Shishya. May 1943

No Propaganda or Proselytism

It is a rule of the Asram that resident sadhaks shall not engage in any kind of public or propagandist activity political, social or religious; it is only our special permission which could dispense any member of the Asram from conformity to this rule. The Asram exists solely for Yoga and for a purely spiritual purpose; it is not a political or social or religious institution and it abstains from all these activities, this abstention is necessary for its existence. If any member engages in them, it involves the Asram itself and gives it the appearance of entering into activities which are not proper to it, and if any such impression of that kind is created, it may have serious consequences.

It appears that you have been engaging without our permission or authorisation in public activities of various kinds for some time past. This must cease. If you intend to carry them on any farther, you must leave the Asram and go outside; you cannot be allowed to continue them from the Asram and as a member.

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You must not write to all these people encouraging them in the idea of coming here. It is only selected people who can come here. If anybody is encouraged, there would before long be 10,000 instead of 120 — and it would no longer be an Asram.

14 April 1933

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There is no necessity for a society for the translation of the

books. I have given my books outside always so that the Asram should not be entangled in these things and there should be no appearance of a propaganda inspired by me. 14 May 1933

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How far does the arrival of well-known people justify the flutter it causes? Is it a sign that the Truth is spreading?

No, not at all. Well-known or unknown has absolutely no importance from the spiritual point of view. It is simply the propagandist spirit; they think and say “O if Kalelkar comes, the whole of Gujarat will be ours” — as if we were a party or a church or religion seeking adherents or proselytes. One man who earnestly pursues the Yoga is of more value than a thousand well-known men. 16 January 1934

*

I think there is nothing solid about all these magazine articles — a temporary value.

There is no value at all in these things — people read and forget. As for propaganda I have seen that it is perfectly useless for us — if there is any effect, it is a very trifling and paltry effect not worth the trouble. If the Truth has to spread itself, it will do it of its own motion; these things are unnecessary.

5 September 1934

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It may be said generally that to be overanxious to pull people, especially very young people, into the sadhana is not wise. The sadhak who comes to this Yoga must have a real call, and even with the real call the way is often difficult enough. But when one pulls people in in a spirit of enthusiastic propagandism, the danger is of lighting an imitative and unreal fire, not the true Agni, or else a short-lived fire which cannot last and is submerged by the uprush of the vital waves. This is especially so with young people who are plastic and easily caught hold of by ideas and communicated feelings not their own — afterwards

the vital rises with its unsatisfied demands and they are swung between two contrary forces or rapidly yield to the strong pull of the ordinary life and action and satisfaction of desire which is the natural bent of adolescence. Or else the unfit *ādhāra* tends to suffer under the stress of a call for which it was not ready, or at least not yet ready. When one has the real thing in oneself, one goes through and finally takes the full way of sadhana, but it is only a minority that does so. It is better to receive only people who come of themselves and of these only those in whom the call is genuinely their own and persistent. 6 May 1935

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It is true that there is in most people here this running after those who come from outside especially if they are well-known or distinguished. It is a common weakness of human nature and, like other weaknesses of human nature, the sadhaks seem not inclined to get rid of it. It is because they do not live sufficiently within, so the vital gets excited or attracted when something important or somebody important (or considered so) comes in from outside. 29 November 1935

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No, X should not write to his friends to come here. That would not only be propaganda which we must avoid but done like that it would create a conflict and turmoil — and conflict and turmoil are the wrong atmosphere for the Truth to grow in. It has been the great mistake of schools and religions to fight for the possession of men's minds — that we must not do. We can protect ourselves by spiritual means from attacks from outside, but not enter into mental or outward conflict with others. If his friends are meant to come here, it must happen otherwise.

30 March 1936

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What Tagore or others think or say does not matter very much after all as we do not depend on them for our work but on the Divine Will only. So many have said and thought all sorts

of things (people outside) about and against us, that has never affected either us or our work in the least; it is of a very minor importance.

7 March 1937

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I am sure you have read the eulogies showered upon Duraiswami on his retirement and enjoyed them immensely, at the same time feeling proud of him and saying, "Ha, ha, here is the fruit of my Force!" It is indeed a great pleasure to see the prestige of the Asram elevated by at least one man, though I suppose you don't give a damn about prestige.

Queer idea all you fellows seem to have of the "prestige" of the Asram. The prestige of an institution claiming to be a centre of spirituality lies in its spirituality, not in newspaper columns or famous people. Is it because of this mundane view of life and of the Asram held by the sadhaks that this Asram is not yet the centre of spirituality it set out to be?

I want to see how far Duraiswami's character has been changed and moulded by the Force.

Lord, man, it's not for changing or moulding character that this Asram exists. It is for moulding spirituality and transforming the *consciousness*. You may say it doesn't seem to be successful enough on that line, but that is its object.

I suspect, however, that you are closing in your Supramental net and bringing in all the outside fish!

Good Lord, no! I should be very much embarrassed if all the outside fish insisted on coming inside.

What about X? When do you propose to catch him? . . . It would be a great enrichment of your Fishery. We are all watching with interest and eagerness that big operation of yours. But I don't think you will succeed till your Supramental comes to the field in full-fledged colours, what?

What big operation? There is no operation; I am not trying to

hale in X as a big fish. I am not trying to catch him or bring him in. If he comes into the true spiritual life it will be a big thing for him, no doubt, but to the work it means only a ripple more or less in the atmosphere. Kindly consider how many people big in their own eyes have come and gone (Y, Z, A to speak of no others) and has the work stopped by their departure or the Asram ceased to grow? Do you really think that the success or failure of the work we have undertaken depends on the presence or absence of X? or on my hauling him in or letting him go? It is of importance only for the soul of X — nothing else.

Your image of the Fishery is quite out of place; I fish for no one; people are not hauled or called here, they come of themselves by the psychic instinct. Especially, I don't fish for big and famous and successful men. Such fellows may be mentally or vitally big, but they are usually quite contented with that kind of bigness and do not want spiritual things, or, if they do, their bigness stands in their way rather than helps them. The fishing for them is X's idea — he wanted to catch hold of Subhas Bose, Sarat Chatterji, now Lila Desai etc. etc., but they would have been exceedingly troublesome sadhaks, if they ever really dreamed of anything of the kind. All these are ordinary ignorant ideas; the Spirit cares not a damn for fame, success or bigness in those who come to it. People have a strange idea that Mother and myself are eager to get people as disciples and if anyone goes away, especially a "big" balloon with all its gas in it, it is a great blow, — a terrible defeat, — a dreadful catastrophe and cataclysm for us. Many even think that their being here is a great favour done to us for which we are not sufficiently grateful. All that is rubbish.

30 June 1938

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Is it not natural for us to feel proud of the praises bestowed on Duraiswami or feel a little "embarrassed" when things are said against X?

If the praise and blame of ignorant people is to be our standard, then we may say good-bye to the spiritual consciousness. If the

Mother and I had cared for praise or blame, we would have been crushed long ago. It is only recently that the Asram has got “prestige” — before it was the target for an almost universal criticism, not to speak of the filthiest attacks. 2 July 1938

The Ashram and Religion

A Way, Not a Religion

I have no time to read books usually. I seldom had and none at all now. I have had no inspirations from the sadhana of Bejoy Goswami, though a good deal at one time from Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. My remarks simply meant that I regard the spiritual history of mankind and especially of India as a constant development of a divine purpose, not a book that is closed, the lines of which have to be constantly repeated. Even the Upanishads and the Gita were not final though everything may be there in seed. In this development the recent spiritual history of India is a very important stage and the names I mentioned had a special prominence in my thought at the time — they seemed to me to indicate the lines from which the future spiritual development had most directly to proceed, not staying but passing on. I do not know that I would put my meaning exactly in the language you suggest. I may say that it is far from my purpose to propagate any religion new or old for humanity in the future. A way to be opened that is still blocked, not a religion to be founded, is my conception of the matter.

18 August 1935

Islam, Hinduism, and the Integral Yoga

I want to do something to work for Islamic ideals here. I have a strong desire to do this, but somehow it cuts me off very much from the Ashram atmosphere and sadhana.

As to what you say about Islamic ideals, you should remember that whatever is necessary to keep from the past as materials for the future, will *of itself* and *automatically* be taken into the new creation when things are ready and the full Light and Power at work. It is not necessary for anybody to represent or stand for Islamic ideals or for Hindu or Christian ideals; if anybody

here thinks he must stand for one or other of these things, he is making a mistake and is likely to create unnecessary narrowness, clash and opposition. There is no opposition or clash between them in spiritual experience; it is only the external human mind that mistakenly puts them against each other. What we are here to make is a new creation in which there is a larger reconciling Truth than anything that went before in the past; but what will reconcile and create anew is the Power, the Light, the Knowledge that comes from above. The important thing therefore is to prepare yourself for that Power, Light and Knowledge; it is only when that descends that all will be done rightly. Nothing can be done rightly by the individual working without the Light and the Knowledge.

14 January 1932

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I want to ask if there is any likelihood of a fight between the Hindus and Mahomedans in India, and if the forces are nearly equal on both sides or one side is superior to the other.

It is to be hoped that in time the present mentality will pass away and both communities learn to live as children of the same Mother. If they fight, neither are likely to gain but both to lose, even perhaps giving an opening to a third party as has happened before in their history.

I also want to ask if Mahomedanism will retain its present form and terms in the future. At present its only strength and faith is in the most orthodox section, which does not and cannot change even a bit; for the least change would mean the end of its formation, and in that it has sufficient force and faith. What happens under such circumstances? Can it have a place in the supramental creation?

There is no place for rigid orthodoxy, whether Hindu, Mahomedan or Christian in the future. Those who cling to it, lose hold on life and go under — as has been shown by the fate of the Hindus in India and of the orthodox Mahomedan countries all over the world. It is only where there has been an opening to new light and inevitable change that strength is returning as

in Turkey and Persia. In the supramental creation fundamental truth will always find a place; but orthodoxy means a clinging to narrow limitations, and limitations of that kind cannot exist in the supramental creation. All that is permanently true will be taken up into the creation of the future. 23 February 1932

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I wish that Muslims might come here from outside and keep a more constant contact. It would create a nice atmosphere here. After all, it seems improbable that all the twelve crores of Mahomedans should be left quite out of contact with the Yoga.

These things that rise in you are certainly desires of the physical vital or else ideas of the physical mind giving a mental shape to desires. The sadhak has to see them when they rise and note them for what they are, but not allow them to move him to action.

If one is meant to be an intermediary between the Yogic Truth that is descending here and some part of the outside world, e.g. the Mahomedan world, it is necessary first that he should get a calm and complete balance, a full foundation in the higher consciousness and the permanent Light in his being, — otherwise he will not be able to do his work. If he tries before he is ready, he will fail — therefore let there be nothing done that is premature. 16 November 1932

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You write: “If one is meant to be an intermediary between the Yogic Truth and . . . the Mahomedan world”. I wish to ask if the Mahomedan world is such a separate thing here. For this phrase cannot be put thus: “between the Yogic Truth and the Hindu world”.

Of course it can — the orthodox Hindu world is quite separate, all the outside world is separate, until the Light that is growing here makes the connection.

I thought the attitude towards Mahomedans lay in the minds of the people here because of a subconscious influence and I took this to be an ignorance that can be overlooked for the time being. But if Sri Aurobindo also writes like this, I wish to know if the Mahomedan world is a separate block to be dealt with as one deals with strangers, foreigners, almost enemies.

I wish also to ask this: The Mother has often issued notices saying, "When a man comes here, he ceases to be a Hindu or a Mahomedan etc." Though there is sufficient pressure on the Mahomedans to cease to be Mahomedan, does anybody cease to be a Hindu? Is the idea even believed by any Hindu sadhak? So certain is everybody of its not being true that there is hardly any hope of such a thought ever entering the mind. Under these circumstances, God alone knows if it is right or sensible for me to live on and see the ruin without doing anything to bring in the Mahomedan influence here. When I surrendered, I had not ceased to be a Mahomedan as happened afterwards.

If there is anybody in this Asram who is a Hindu sectarian hating Mahomedans and not opening to the Light in which all can overcome their limitations and in which all can be fulfilled (each religion or way of approaching the Divine contributing its own element of the truth, but all fused together and surpassed), then that Hindu sectarian is not a completely surrendered disciple of Sri Aurobindo. By his narrowness and hatred of others he is bringing an element of falsehood into the work that is being done here.

When I spoke of the outside world, I meant all outside, including the Hindus and Christians and everyone else, all who have not yet accepted the greater Light that is coming. If this Asram were here only to serve Hinduism I would not be in it and the Mother who was never a Hindu would not be in it.

What is being done here is the preparation of a Truth which includes all other Truth but is limited to no single religion or creed, and this preparation has to be done apart and in silence until things are ready. It is in that sense that I speak of the rest of the world and all its component parts as being the outside world — not that there was nothing to be done or no connection to be

made; but these things are to be done in their own proper time.

Do you tell me that all the people here show the spirit you speak of against the Mahomedans or are you generalising from particular cases? If it is as you say, I am quite ready to intervene to put a stop to it. For such a spirit would be entirely opposed to the Truth I am here to manifest.

When I came here in the beginning, X told me that Sri Aurobindo said: "Mahomedanism was all right for the people of Arabia and those countries. I don't see why it should have come to India." Had Mahomedanism no message for India? Is this a teaching of the Ashram?

No, certainly not; it is a sheer misinterpretation of my views. I have written clearly that the coming of so many religions to India was part of her spiritual destiny and a great advantage for the work to be done.

17 November 1932

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If the sadhaks here remain Hindus, which in the end turns out to be their very aim and zest, what an utter fool I would be to allow myself to be changed and trust myself to be worked upon thus.

Again, when Sri Aurobindo writes about what he is going to manifest here, I wonder why such a great thing is partial. Why should that creation be formed in such a way as to exclude Mahomedans from it and put on them an all-round pressure which is experienced by nobody else. To give up one's past and forget it or to try not to think about it is one thing; to go through the humiliation of taking up the way of others is most difficult, almost shameful, and I have lost faith in it.

It is news to me that I have excluded Mahomedans from the Yoga. I have not done it any more than I have excluded Europeans or Christians. As for giving up one's past, if that means giving up the outer forms of the old religions, it is done as much by the Hindus here as by the Mahomedans. Every Hindu here — even those who were once orthodox Brahmins and have grown old in it, — give up all observance of caste, take food from Pariahs and are served by them, associate and eat with

Mahomedans, Christians, Europeans, cease to practise temple worship or Sandhya (daily prayer and mantras), accept a non-Hindu from Europe as their spiritual director. These are things people who have Hinduism as their aim and object would not do — they do it because they are obliged here to look to a higher ideal in which these things have no value. What is kept of Hinduism is Vedanta and Yoga, in which Hinduism is one with Sufism of Islam and with the Christian mystics. But even here it is not Vedanta and Yoga in their traditional limits (their past), but widened and rid of many ideas that are peculiar to the Hindus. If I have used Sanskrit terms and figures, it is because I know them and do not know Persian and Arabic. I have not the slightest objection to anyone here drawing inspiration from Islamic sources if they agree with the Truth as Sufism agrees with it. On the other hand I have not the slightest objection to Hinduism being broken to pieces and disappearing from the face of the earth, if that is the Divine Will. I have no attachment to past forms; what is Truth will always remain; the Truth alone matters.

17 November 1932

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Does the supramental victory mean the victory of the Hindu religion and culture over others? Will the supramental consciousness come into the body of a man whether or not he subordinates himself to Hinduism?

The Asram has nothing to do with Hindu religion or culture or any religion or nationality. The Truth of the Divine which is the spiritual reality behind all religions and the descent of the supramental which is not known to any religion are the sole things which will be the foundation of the work of the future.

The Hindu Religion and Its Social Structure

My friend Dhurjati writes: "I want to know the essential feature of Hinduism. Hinduism is inside me, but please bring it up on my conscious plane. The first step of my realisation must always be conceptual and propositional."

I am rather at a loss from which side to tackle the affair. Conceptually and propositionally is it possible to give Dhurjati something about the essential feature of Hinduism which he does not know already? I can say what to my view is the truth behind Hinduism, a truth contained in the very nature (not superficially seen of course) of human existence, something which is not the monopoly of Hinduism but of which Hindu spirituality was the richest expression. Perhaps I can try to bring out something on that line. I will see.

19 May 1936

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I send you Jawaharlal's *Autobiography*. I want to have your opinion on his reading of the Hindu religion. I agree with the bulk of his condemnation of religion. But it seems to me he is a little hazy in his ideas, expecting from it just what is beyond its *portée*. But of course I don't wonder, for religion is a most mysterious term, like our famous *kalpataru* of Indra's garden which promises to its worshippers any fruit they covet.

I fear that to accede to your request for a page and a half on the mystic soul of India is physically impossible now and psychologically a little difficult. I have once more the full flood of correspondence, in spite of the rules of time which have proved an insufficient dam. Each night is a race to get things done in time which I generally lose and that means an increasing mass of arrears which have to be dealt with whenever I get some exceptional leisure. On Sunday a mass of outside letters waiting for disposal because I have no time on other days and not enough on Sunday either. In these circumstances to produce a page on such a subject would be a feat of acrobacy not easily performable.

As for the subject, well in the days of the *Karmayogin* or of the *Defence of Indian Culture* I could have served you freely. Now I feel as if I have said all I could say on these things — they have gone back into the far recess of my mind and to pull them out for expression is not easy. That is a second obstacle.

I do not take the same view of the Hindu religion as Jawaharlal. Religion is always imperfect because it is a mixture of

man's spirituality with the errors that come in trying to sublimate ignorantly his lower nature. Hindu religion appears to me as a cathedral temple half in ruins, noble in the mass, often fantastic in detail, but always fantastic with a significance — crumbled and overgrown in many places, but a cathedral temple in which service is still done to the Unseen and its real presence can be felt by those who enter with the right spirit. The outer social structure which it built for its approach is another matter.

19 September 1936

Social Rules, Caste and the Ashram

You must not get upset like this over these things. After all when one comes to an Asram to do Yoga, one leaves social rules, caste, ceremonial purity etc. behind one. Also one tries to practise সমতা [*samatā*] to all people and all things, because the Divine is everywhere. Why not take that attitude instead of the old one?

No Public Worship

It seems that even when visitors are there, people come into the Reception Room and prostrate before the photograph. I thought the rule had been made that when visitors were there, no one was to go? This rule must be strictly enforced — inform the gate-keepers and let everybody know that if these things continue, the Reception Room will have to be closed and opened only when visitors come.

23 December 1933

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The reception hall is for visitors. It is only when there are no visitors that Sadhaks can go there — for a short meditation if they want. It should not be made a place of public worship.

27 December 1933

Inward Worship and Outer Forms

The Mother's prohibition is only against sadhaks being there and prostrating when visitors are in the Reception Room. This

room was originally meant for the reception of people from outside and the photo was put there to be shown to visitors who could not see me. The permission was at first given to one sadhak or another to sit and meditate there and afterwards it has become a common practice to go and make pranam, but it was understood that the sadhaks should not be there when there were visits. This rule has not been observed and people have used it as a place of public worship. It was this that was disapproved of by the Mother.

There is no restriction in this Yoga to inward worship and meditation only. As it is a Yoga for the whole being, not for the inner being only, no such restriction could be intended. Old forms of the different religions may fall away, but absence of all forms is not a rule of the sadhana. c. January 1934

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You have written [*in the preceding letter*] that the “old forms . . . may fall away”; but I think it would be proper if they fell away only after a true consciousness was established.

That is what I meant.

It would seem to me that there would be no impropriety if forms like Pranam, Dhup, Dip or Naivedya are continued even after a true inner consciousness is established.

I was thinking not of Pranam etc. which have a living value, but of old forms which persist although they have no longer any value — e.g. Sraddha for the dead. Also here forms which have no relation to this Yoga — for instance Christians who cling to the Christian forms or Mahomedans to the Namaz or Hindus to the Sandhyavandana in the old way might soon find them either falling off or else an obstacle to the free development of their sadhana. 3 January 1934

Human Relations and the Ashram

Right Relations between Sadhaks

The sadhaks of this Asram are not perfect — they have plenty of weaknesses and wrong movements. It is blindness not to be able to see that; only it should not lead to a criticising or condemnatory attitude on persons — it should be regarded as the play of forces which have to be overcome. 1933

*

To be turned wholly to the Mother and have nothing but friendly relations with the sadhaks, the same for all, is a counsel of perfection; but not many can carry it out, hardly one here and there. Yet to have that tendency is to have the real turn towards the one-pointedness of sadhana; but people take time to arrive at it. 12 July 1935

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The Mother has not laid stress on human fellowship of the ordinary kind between the inmates (though good feeling, consideration and courtesy should always be there), because that is not the aim; it is a unity in a new consciousness that is the aim, and the first thing is for each to do his sadhana to arrive at that new consciousness and realise oneness there. 31 October 1935

*

I don't think it is much use writing about personal relations in the true spiritual life (which does not yet exist here). None would understand it except as a form of words. Only three points —

(1) Its very base would have to be spiritual and psychic and *not* vital. The vital would be there but as an instrument only.

(2) It would be a relation flowing from the higher Truth, not continued from the lower Ignorance.

(3) It would not be impersonal in the sense of being colourless, but whatever colours were there would not be the egoistic and muddy colours of the present relations. 24 June 1936

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What you say is right. Those one lives with have always some ways and manners that do not agree with one's own and may grate on the mind. To observe quietly and not resent is part of the discipline of life, — not to be moved or affected at all but to see with equanimity the play of one Nature in all is the discipline of sadhana.

Helping Other Sadhaks

The best way to help X is to assist her by your own example and atmosphere to get the right attitude. Instead of the sense that she is very ill, she should be encouraged to have a bright and confident feeling, open to receive strength and health from us, contributing by her own faith to a speedy recovery. These ideas that they do not see the Mother, are outside the atmosphere, at a distance, are just the wrong notions and most likely to come in the way and block your sisters' receptivity; it is surprising that you should accept or echo them and not react against them at once. They are here in the Asram (a little nearer or farther makes no difference), in the Mother's presence and atmosphere, meeting her every day at the Pranam where everyone who is open can receive as much of her touch and her help as they can hold, — that is what they should feel and make the most of their opportunity and not waste it by a negative attitude.

For yourself, what you must have with other sadhaks (including your sisters) is a harmonious relation free from any mere vital attachment (indifference is not asked from you) and free from any indulgence in wrong vital movements of the opposite kind (such as dislike, jealousy or ill-will). It is through the psychic consciousness that you have found it possible to be in a true constant relation with the Mother and your aim is to make that the basis of all your life, action and feelings; all in you, all

you feel, say and do should be consistent with that basis. If all proceeds from that psychic union of your consciousness with the Mother's, dedicating everything to her, then you will develop the right relations with others. 10 February 1932

*

Can one person really help another? Sometimes it seems as if help is given, but in the end it looks to be rather vague.

It is a relative and partial help, of course, but it is sometimes useful. A radical help can only come from within through the action of the Divine Force and the assent of the being. It must be said of course that it is not everyone that thinks he is helping who is really doing it; also if the help is accompanied with the exercising of an "influence", that influence may be of a mixed character and harm as well as help if the instrument is not pure. 2 November 1935

*

A fully developed sadhak can be an instrument of the Mother for helping others, but a fully developed sadhak means one who is free from ego and he would never claim the work as his own. In this Asram all helping has recoiled on the helper by either making him egoistic or by his getting affected with the very things one is helping the other to get rid of. 9 June 1936

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It is indeed not possible for one human being to do another's sadhana for him, that each must do himself. The help that can be given is to lead or impel him by influence, example, speech, encouragement towards the point where he can directly open to the Divine, also to impart to him strength, comfort, right suggestion in his moments of difficulty and weakness. You had very serious difficulties at the time and therefore we entrusted X with this work and he did all he could to carry it out and in fact his help was effective. For he stood successfully against the forces that tried to carry you away from here and brought you through to the point at which you could feel the direct inner

contact. This was what we meant by bringing you to the Mother. If in doing it human weakness brought in a personal attachment between you which had its vital element, it was without his or your intending it. Now you are free from this element and wish to be entirely turned within to the Mother alone, and that is quite right. For X who behind an exterior of curt speech and strong dominating will has a heart of strong feelings and warm emotions, it may take a little more time to be entirely free of this element. We shall try to liberate him from what is left of it as soon as possible. Meanwhile what you have to do is to be his comrade in work, but reserve yourself within entirely for the Mother. If you keep to this attitude, as you have resolved, then it is bound to have its effect and he must before long come himself entirely to the same attitude.

What you say of sadhana is true. Sadhana is necessary and the Divine Force cannot do things in the void but must lead each one according to his nature to the point at which he can feel the Mother working within and doing all for him. Till then the sadhak's aspiration, self-consecration, assent and support to the Mother's workings, his rejection of all that comes in the way is very necessary — indispensable.

25 September 1936

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It is not really surprising that people should be able to draw help from you and feel themselves helped and this can happen even though you yourself may not consciously have the idea or the feeling of extending any help to them. You have a very strong vital with a great communicative and creative power which is not shut up in itself but expansive and naturally flows out on those around it. Even ordinarily in the world people easily turn to such a strong and expansive vital and draw upon it for strength and assistance. In your case this is enhanced by your psychic being having the habit of using your vital force for communication to the outside world as it has been habitually doing in your creative activities, poetry and other forms of writing or speech, song and music: apart from artistic qualities and appeal these have an appeal and influence which comes from that inner power

which has breathed itself into them and formed their substance. It has again been greatly increased by the practice of Yoga and the feeling of bhakti which comes out of you when you write your songs and sing them. In your work for us you have the knowledge that our force stands behind you; it is always there and can increase your power to help others, not only when you are doing the work but at other times or whenever they turn towards you with the idea or faith that the help they need can come from you.

11 July 1949

Inadvisability of Forming Special Relations

Write to him that these things are the creations of the mind and have no value. If the girl has a true call to Yoga, she can herself follow it; but it creates no special connection between her and him any more than with any sadhaka. To indulge imaginations of this kind will be dangerous for his sadhana. 7 January 1929

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All that you have written in this letter is quite correct. It is useless to go through the old kind of reconciliation with X — it will only bring back the same futile circle — for he will act in the same way always (until he changes spiritually in the vital and that means a turning away from all vital relations) and you would be flung back into the same reactions. To cut away is the only thing — the best for him, the best for you. As for the feelings excited in him — more hurt self-esteem than anything else — they will fade out of themselves. The first necessity of both is to free yourselves from the old relations and that cannot, it is very clear, be done by going back to any remnant of the old interchange.

For the rest keep to your resolution. Do not discuss him with anybody, do not interest yourself in what he does or does not do; let it be his own concern and the Divine's, not yours. Expect nothing personally from him — you may be sure that your expectations will only be disappointed. His nature is not yours and his mental view of what should or should not be done is quite different — incompatible with yours. By retaining

anything of the old feeling you will only invite pain and farther disillusionment — you gain nothing and pay a heavy price for that nothing. It is only by becoming one-minded in the sadhana that you can escape from this painful circle.

I hope that you will recover tomorrow the capacity for food and shake off the remnants of the physical depression which have been left behind by the attack. Let the physical consciousness as well as the rest of the nature turn wholly to the Light and the Divine and seek only the one true source of happiness and Ananda.

31 March 1933

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There is no sin in attachment. All human beings are full of attachments. But if one wants to do Yoga and reach the Divine, one must give up all earthly attachments. It is not easy to do so, even for a sadhak, but it must be attempted sincerely and, if it is sincerely attempted, then it can be done.

Attachment means that you desire or need or depend on a thing or a person so much that you cannot do without it or him, and are always trying to keep the thing or be with the person or somehow in touch with him. X says you are attached to him and that it is proved by your always seeking to find an excuse for your being with him; you want to learn from him and not from another, to read our answers with him and not with any other, to do the dispensary work and so be near him every day. He says also you told him if he did not satisfy you in these matters, you would go away to Gujarat or do worse, because you could not bear his disappointing you always. He thinks this proves that you came here for him and not for Yoga. If you want to show him that it is not so, the only way is not to insist on these things that bring you near to him and not say anything that he can understand in this sense.

You have come here for Yoga and not for X — you depend on the Mother and myself alone and not on X. We are quite ready to accept that, for that is what should be. But then you have no need to be upset by what X may say to you or how he may act with you or by his refusal to accede to your requests.

You can freely and calmly stand away from him and turn to the Divine alone.

17 July 1933

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The whole difficulty comes from the fact that you and X had a special relation to each other which was of the character of a mutual vital demand and dependence on each other and what is called in Yoga an attachment. (There is no question here of a sexual physical relation but of a vital attachment.) This was coming in the way of your making any progress in Yoga and it was coming in the way of X also. When X realised this and wanted to reduce the connection between you to a minimum, you were unwilling, you wanted to do all sorts of things that would keep you near him and keep him busy with you. X himself was not free from attachment and therefore in reacting against your pressure and his own remains of weakness, he became rude and violent — that was what he meant by cutting the connection altogether. But he is not yet free and that is why he still reacts violently whenever there is any talk of your going to him as he has done in his last letter. On your side you also are not free — if you were, it would not happen that every time there is any question of X you immediately lose the good condition you were getting and all the old thoughts occupy your mind and you fall back into the weeping and not eating etc. etc. It is the reason why the Mother does not care for you and X to meet so long as these old reactions are there either in him or in you. That is the plain fact of the matter. What other people think or say about it, is of no importance. What matters is the sadhana and besides it nothing else matters. Show that you are free, that what X does or does not do does not disturb or occupy your mind in the least and get into the true way of the sadhana as you were preparing to do — then it will be easier for us to deal with X and his defects and difficulties. This Asram is not intended to be a society like that of the outside world, and when Y or Z or anyone else talk and advise you from that standpoint, they are speaking things which have nothing to do with the work we are trying to do here — and if you listen to such advice, you

will only get out of the right way of looking at it. You will get into the right way only when you cease to think of these things and look at things from the point of view of sadhana only.

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Every sadhika has one or another special sadhika-friend but I find none like-minded enough. Why am I such an independent-minded loner?

It is not necessary to have special friendships, — to be in good relations is enough. For the rest, to be turned entirely to us is the best condition for spiritual progress.

Relations between Men and Women in the Ashram

How is it that when I am talking to a sadhika I don't feel anything but afterwards the memory or image brings the sex-sense? Why should a sadhak not be able to speak to a sadhika as he would to anybody else?

In an Asram or other religious institution men and women are not usually allowed to live together. Where they do, as among the Vaishnavas, these difficulties invariably arise. The difficulty lies in the enormous place given to sex in the lower Nature. But there is no reason if one fixes oneself firmly in the spiritual consciousness why one should not speak and act between men and women without the least reference to sex. 2 December 1933

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Can we not justify Buddha, Ramakrishna and others who advocated isolation from women? After all, is it not essentially the same principle here, because if vital relations are debarred, nothing remains except a simple exchange of words?

What about the true (not the pretended) psychic and spiritual — forgetting sex? The relation has to be limited as it is because sex immediately trots into the front. You are invited to live above the vital and deeper than the vital — then only you can use the

vital aright. Buddha was for Nirvana and what is the use of having relations with anybody if you are bound for Nirvana? Ramakrishna insisted on isolation during the period when a man is spiritually raw — he did not object to it when he became ripe and no longer a slave of sex. 26 January 1935

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Do not receive X *in your own room*. That may disturb the atmosphere of the Asram. What was meant when we said you need not avoid her or cut all relations was that if you meet in the ordinary way in the Asram, you need not avoid speaking to her if occasion demands it or if she speaks to you avoid replying etc. Any relations kept should be natural, but not *intimate*.

17 April 1943

Sexual Relations and the Ashram

In view of your last letter and of the disturbances in you which you hint there, we consider and you must yourself realise that it is better for you to return to your family life and not to stay here too long. The conquest of sexual desire can only be done if one is truly ready and has the spiritual call and is prepared, however difficult it may be, to give up for it everything else. There is no place for the sexual impulse and its desires in spiritual life and any sadhaka indulging it, either physically or vitally, is going against the law of the Asram life and injuring gravely his or her sadhana. The sexual desire must be either satisfied in the ordinary family life or it must be thrown aside. But you are not now able to conquer it. To remain here with the unsatisfied desire will only confuse your mind, bring wrong ideas, create a struggle in you and injure the basis of such sadhana as you can do. Make up your mind therefore to return to your family and do what you can there. It is always better to do what you can than to attempt prematurely something for which you are not ready. 16 April 1932

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Your daughter X¹ has now been here for a fairly long time and we think it due to you to let you know what we consider best for her. It appears from our observation of her that she is not at all ready for Asram life or for intensive sadhana; she has too much of the ordinary movements and the instinct of sexual desire is too strong in her and unsatisfied and this indicates the need of the social and family life, not a life of Yoga. The family life accompanied with whatever religious worship or practice of bhakti she can manage is her proper field at present. For one with these unsatisfied instincts to live in the Asram would on one side be bad for her, — it would raise up a vital struggle and a confusion of ideas adverse to spiritual progress — for she has not yet the necessary inner force or intensity of the spiritual call that would help her to overcome. On the other side it would be likely to create movements that would be disturbing to the Asram atmosphere. It is better for her therefore to return home and do what she can there. I trust our decision will not in any way disturb or disappoint you; for it was not, I think, your intention in bringing her here that she should remain for a long time. It is in her own interest that she should not be pushed towards an effort that is premature.

16 April 1932

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The whole of yesterday I felt a dark power hanging over me. When I asked the Mother if it was the same universal dark power that, through woman, binds the soul to the earth, she replied, “Why woman? Through *man* as well!” Yes, man as well — but is there not something which makes woman a more convenient, capacious and dangerous tool in its hand?

That is what man thinks; it is his experience. Woman’s experience is that man is the dangerous animal and instrument of all her sufferings and downfalls.

It is not man or woman; it is the Sex-Force which is the dangerous tool in the hands of the Ignorance.

17 September 1932

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¹ *The recipient of the preceding letter. — Ed.*

Why do you believe everything that people tell you? What I told X was that he had *once* progressed greatly, he had afterwards allowed himself to yield to the bad habits that rose from his lower nature and fallen from the psychic contact and that until he got rid of these things which were the cause of all his sufferings he would not progress or recover his contact with the Mother. We never told him that he was making progress now or that his coarse indulgence was a sign of (no doubt, miraculous, godlike and amazing) progress. God in Heaven, what things people put in my mouth and the Mother's!

25 November 1933

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While looking at pictures of women in magazines, I sometimes feel sexual sensations. Do you want me to avoid looking or to overcome this influence?

You had better get rid of the influence. It won't do not to be able to look at a woman or a picture of a woman without getting sexual sensations — you must get rid of that.

4 December 1933

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I am afraid X is not so forward in sadhana as you think. I suppose I had better tell you plainly that she is full of the sex difficulty — it is *her special difficulty* and it is so much in her nature that with all her struggles she is unable to escape from it. I am afraid she is throwing it upon you. Of course it is her imagination that yields to it; she would never consent to the act.

As for Y it is different. She has no sex desires, but before she opened to the Yoga, there was a certain kind of vital passivity in her to men and this kind of passivity is very attractive to the masculine sex instinct. As the movements in you are not mental but in sensation, it is possible that your subconscious vital has somehow felt this in her subconscious temperament and got the attraction. These movements are not vitally willed or mental — they belong to that shadowy region of submerged vital physical instinct which the psychoanalysts try to deal with in their jargon of complexes etc.

30 September 1934

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I consider the sex-movement to be something outside me, and leave it to the Mother for transformation.

Yes — so long as it does not come inside, that can be done.

26 October 1934

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Yesterday you wrote about the sex-movement, “so long as it does not come inside, that can be done.” I don’t know what you mean by “come inside”.

Coming inside means taking hold of you so that there is a push for satisfaction. Pressure from outside however strongly felt is not coming inside.

27 October 1934

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Why is it that in the past so much stress was laid on food, external cleanliness, asceticism, etc. and so little on brahmacharya or conservation of energies or inner development? And why all the prejudice of caste in the matter of food? Is there any truth in the popular belief that a man is not considered spiritual unless he is a vegetarian, cooks his own food, etc.?

The value of brahmacharya was fully understood in past times for Yogis; carefulness about food and cleanliness is also necessary as a minor matter for the body. The rest appertains to the social system (e.g. caste etc.) and does not concern spiritual living. The Sannyasi is not supposed to be bound by caste. Some may be unable to shake off these things — the grihastha Yogi may continue them because they are part of the social life in which he is.

I suppose the idea of inner detachment with regard to food and other vital enjoyments is not much understood in other beliefs.

The idea of inner detachment is perfectly well known to the Yogis as the Janaka ideal — but it is considered too difficult to practise for most men and therefore likely to be practised only in profession, not in fact.

And what is the reason for the popular opposition to materialism?

Materialism is of course incompatible with the spiritual aim. The spiritual control of matter is a different thing, it has nothing to do with materialism.

I would like to know if in the higher spiritual or Divine Life the sexual or vital play is to be altogether banned.

If you expect to indulge it in the Divine Life, you will never get rid of it — it will remain clinging under that excuse.

If there is to be no sex in the Divine Life, how is the human race to continue?

Why concern yourself with the continuity of the race? There will be plenty of people to continue it. If the supermind has to intervene in the continuity, it will surely do it in its own way, but what that way will be will be found out if and when there is a necessity.

What did Sri Ramakrishna mean by banning *kāminī* and *kāñcan* for a spiritual man?

He stressed the danger of sex and greed of money for the spiritual life and insisted on a total abstinence, at any rate in the whole period of sadhana and I suppose he considered that impossible without keeping aloof from the things that most aroused these passions. Some of his disciples say however that he said কাম কাঞ্চন [*kām kāñcan*], not কামিনী কাঞ্চন [*kāminī kāñcan*]. Anyhow he probably imposed it for the raw period of the sadhana — once siddha, when the contact with women could no longer rouse the sex-impulse, he would not have considered it so imperative for all. But he himself could not touch money.

What are the correct ideas with regard to *gārhasthya* life?

Gārhasthya life, meaning marriage and rearing of a family, is

a social institution based on ego. It can only be a stage in the evolution of a spiritual man.

13 November 1934

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Is there a region of Apsaras in the intermediate zone? Perhaps you discourage me from retiring because you feel I might go there and try to get in touch with them. But probably such a contact is not as dangerous as ambition, pride, egoism etc.

There may very well be, — though I don't know that anyone here came into contact with Apsaras; it is generally less attractive females from the vital world who are after them, usually in the shape of sadhikas, relatives etc. The sadhaks here don't seem to be so aesthetic as the ancient Rishis. It would be pretty dangerous, however, if they did contact it. Sex (occult) stands on a fair level of equality with ambition etc. from the point of view of danger, only its action is usually less ostensible i.e. the Hostiles don't put it forward so openly as a thing to be followed after in the spiritual life. They did that more in the beginning, e.g. X and others.

28 February 1935

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Touching is quite common in ordinary civilised society. It may not be pure, but it is so common that there is little reaction. Perhaps there are some who do not feel the sex sensation at all when they touch in public. But when it is done in secret, I suppose the reaction is almost always there. As for myself, I'm sure I would feel the effect later, even if the touching was done in public.

In ordinary society people touch each other more or less freely according to the manners of the society. That is quite a different matter because there the sex impulse is allowed within certain more or less wide or narrow limits and even the secret indulgence is common, although people try to avoid discovery. In Bengal when there is purdah, touching between men and women is confined to the family, in Europe there is not much restriction so long as there is no excessive familiarity or indecency; but in Europe sex is now practically free. Here all sex indulgence inner

or outer is considered undesirable as an obstacle to the sadhana — as it very evidently is. For that reason any excessive familiarity of touch between men and women has to be avoided, anything also in the nature of caressing, as it creates or tends to create sex tendency or even the strong sex impulse. Casual touching has to be avoided also if it actually creates the sex impulse. These are commonsense rules if the premiss is granted that sex has not to have any indulgence. 1 July 1935

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Before, when I had ordinary contact with women, I did not feel the sex-pull so much, nor did I have the sense that it was always behind. Now it shows itself so vividly: contact, imagination, sensation. I am in despair, and feel I should give up my efforts and go away.

Sex is your main difficulty — it is in fact the only very serious one and it is so because it is always behind and you have sometimes pushed it back, but never cut with it entirely. It is the physical vital that is weak and when the thing comes, becomes pliant to it in spite of the mental will's resistance. But even so; if the mental will made itself real and strong, these crises would be met and overcome, or at least pass without leading to indulgence in one form or another. The other possibility is the settled descent of the higher consciousness into the physical being. It is in these two ways that liberation from sex is possible. 5 April 1936

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You write [*in the preceding letter*], “you have . . . never cut with it entirely.” In what sense? Every time I have tried to cut off all contact with people, I have been overcome with imaginations. How does one cut off imaginations? Perhaps you will say that other people have conquered sex without seclusion or higher experience or much work. If so, I would like to know about them. Probably they were naturally sattwic.

There are people outside the Asram even who have got free from the sex without seclusion — even sleeping in the same bed with the wife. I know one at least who did it without any higher

experience. The work of these people is ordinary service or professional work, but that did not prevent their having the sex struggle nor did it help them to get rid of it. The thing came after a prolonged struggle because they were determined to be rid of it and at a certain stage they got a touch which made the determination absolutely effective. Possibly they were sattwic, but that did not prevent their having strong sex impulses and a hard and prolonged struggle.

I meant by cutting off a determined rejection of the inward as well as the outward movement whenever it comes. Something in the nature accepts and lets itself go helplessly and something in the mind allows it to do so. The mind does not seem to believe in its power to say No definitely to inward movements as it would to an outer contact — and yet the Purusha is there and can put its definite No, maintaining it till the Prakriti has to submit — or else till the confirming touch from above makes its determination perfectly effective.

5 April 1936

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Your diagnosis of the origin of the trouble in X agrees with what we have seen of it. But here a question arises. You say that one thing that has contributed is a suppressed sexuality which could not find satisfaction. Now it is obviously impossible for him to have that in the Asram — for the rule of life is against it and it is impossible to give any even limited expression to it without at once hurting the sadhana while at the same time it does not satisfy because of the restriction and wrong conditions of mind which attend it. It is only by going outside that it can be done. In X there is the constant push to go away and this along with a vital restlessness is likely to be the cause. The question then is whether it is necessary for the cure of his neurasthenia that he should satisfy it and therefore leave the Asram so that he may be free to follow his vital impulse?

18 April 1936

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Europe and America are full of free sex indulgence — they do not nowadays consider it a thing to be avoided but rather welcomed.

But this is an Asram and people are supposed to be doing a sadhana in which sex has to be surmounted. In the Asram there are many who mix freely with all the sadhikas — they are certainly not free from sex. Avoiding also is not a panacea; one can avoid and have sex imaginations and desires. But it is absurd to say that avoiding is the cause of sex imaginations and impulses or that mixing is a panacea for it.

13 April 1937

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To get rid of the vital difficulties one very necessary thing is to keep yourself fully open to us. It was because you did that, that it was possible to throw out the sex obsession. If anything rises from the vital, keep yourself detached and observe it and reject; on no account allow yourself to be caught and swept away by it.

21 June 1938

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About sex and Yoga — my teaching has been clearly written in the *Bases of Yoga* and everyone knows how strongly the Mother has discountenanced these things and considers purity from them a first requisite for success in the path of sadhana. But there are very queer things that have for long been inculcated in the Asram to newcomers and to visitors — e.g. that truthfulness is a superstition and the more you lie the better sadhak you are. That was the first thing taught to a sadhak who first came here many years ago and it is only recently that he has discovered it was not my view or the Mother's. It is not surprising that our work and the Yoga should make such slow progress when such perversities fill the atmosphere. Whatever can be done to clear them out will be so much help to the work of the Mother.

13 November 1938

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Is it true that there is the spiritual relation of husband and wife between sadhaka and sadhika?

Are you all becoming cracked in the head? How is it that after all this time such a question can be put? Have you not read my

letters and messages on the subject of sex? You have not gone through the *Bases of Yoga* where the subject of sex is treated through many pages and it is clearly insisted on that all sex impulse and sex relation must go. If any sadhak and sadhika want to establish this relation, they should immediately pack up their things and go — for it is forbidden here.

If there exists between a man and a woman the high spiritual relation of husband and wife, purusha and shakti, and the woman demands consummation, is the man bound to satisfy her?

You have not read the rule that conjugal relations are forbidden here? You do not know that X and Y and Z and A had to leave because they followed this way? Under no pretence or cloak whatever is sex to be indulged by anyone practising this sadhana. circa 1936–1938

*

There is with regard to sex no change whatever. Babies may be allowed in the Asram but the manufacture of babies there is an industry which has no sanction. Married people (that is not new) or families may be living here, but on the old condition of the complete cessation of marital activities. The ban on sex here stands, unchanged by an iota. 2 January 1945

Tantric Theories and the Ashram

Something in me has been persistently giving the suggestion that sex is not to be given up altogether and that some refined movement of sex may be an aid to the sadhana. This suggestion was supported by some vague ideas I have about Tantric methods.

Any suggestion about Tantric practices must certainly be a trick of the vital. The sex impulsions can be got rid of without them. They persist only because something still wants to reserve a place for them. So the best answer to the question about the sadhana

(What is the place of sex in our sadhana?) is “No place”. One must give up the sex-satisfaction and be satisfied with the Divine Love and Ananda.

*

Sometimes I get the idea that I should talk and laugh and mix with women and touch them and yet remain free. This alone could be called true conquest.

The idea you speak of is the Tantric idea and very dangerous. It must be so in the end, but it is difficult to do that until one is strong enough in the settled spiritual consciousness. The avoidance is sometimes the only way until the higher consciousness is settled in the vital and vital-physical. 22 October 1934

*

Someone said that if a yogi has his Shakti and if the Shakti demands physical contact the yogi has to fulfil it. Is that correct?

If the sadhak is a left-hand Tantrik or a Vaishnava of the Bengal school, then his theories may have some validity but they have none in this Asram.

Someone else also said that a special, though not sexual, relation can exist between sadhaka and sadhika.

The only relation permissible here is the same as between a sadhak and sadhak or between a sadhika and sadhika—a friendly relation as between followers of the same path of Yoga and children of the Mother. 5 September 1936

*

The subtle sex centre awoke after some years of Pranava sadhana. Afterwards I understood what the Tantras meant by the relation between sadhaka and sadhika. The reality behind it is the duality of united Shiva-Shakti. Man’s ordinary life is the wrong way of giving it expression. I am now able to transform this perception into Delight. Is this experience true?

This is not accepted in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.² Any such "sublimated" sex relation becomes a subtle but powerful bar to the full realisation and transformation and can derail the sadhana. There is an Ananda behind all things, otherwise they would not exist; but it does not follow that all things must be accepted in their delight-form as a part of the higher life.

The Question of Marriage

I have not your letter with me as I write but there were two questions which you put to us, as far as I can remember.

The first was about a complementary soul and marriage. The answer is easy to give; the way of the spiritual life lies for you in one direction and marriage lies in quite another and opposite. All talk about a complementary soul is a camouflage with which the mind tries to cover the sentimental, sensational and physical wants of the lower vital nature. It is that vital nature in you which puts the question and would like an answer reconciling its desires and demands with the call of the true soul in you. But it must not expect a sanction for any such incongruous reconciliation from here. The way of the supramental Yoga is clear; it lies not through any concession to these things, — not, in your case, through the satisfaction, under a spiritual cover if possible, of its craving for the comforts and gratifications of a domestic and conjugal life and the enjoyment of the ordinary emotional desires and physical passions, but through the purification and transformation of the forces which these movements pervert and misuse. Not these human and animal demands, but the divine Ananda which is above and beyond them and which the indulgence of these degraded forms would prevent from descending, is the great thing that the aspiration of the vital being must demand in the sadhaka.

The other question was about your difficulty in getting rid of the aboriginal in your nature. That difficulty will remain so long as you try to change your vital nature by the sole power of

² *Written by Sri Aurobindo to one of his secretaries, who replied to the correspondent.*
—Ed.

your mind and mental will, calling in at most an indefinite and impersonal divine Power to aid you. It is an old difficulty which has never been truly solved because it has never been met in the true way. In the former ways of Yoga it did not supremely matter because the aim was withdrawal from life. Either the vital was kept down by a mental and moral compulsion, or it was stilled and kept lying in a kind of sleep and quiescence, or it was allowed to run and exhaust itself if it could while its possessor professed to be untouched and unconcerned by it. When none of these solutions could be attained, the sadhaka simply led a double inner life, divided between his spiritual experiences and his vital weaknesses to the end. If you want a true mastery and transformation of the vital movements, it can be done only on condition you allow your psychic being, the soul in you, to awake fully, to establish its rule and open to the permanent touch of the divine Shakti and impose its way of devout aspiration and complete surrender on the mind and heart and vital nature. There is no other way and it is no use hankering after a more comfortable path. *Nānyaḥ panthā vidyate ayanāya.* 4 October 1927

*

I could not quite follow what the Mother said the other day about keeping a mate. What is the difference between keeping a mate and marrying?

The Mother said “maid”, not “mate”. You spoke of having wished to marry again because you needed someone to nurse you when ill, etc. etc. These are good reasons for keeping a servant, not for marrying. 30 September 1929

*

If she has the true call to the Yoga and not only an impulse due to the influence of others, the necessary conditions will be created. Even if the circumstances seem adverse, it will be only a test or ordeal and she will come through in the end. On the other hand, if she is not yet truly called or if her nature is not yet ripe, the marriage may take place and she may have to go

through the ordinary life before she can return to the spiritual. There was never any suggestion from here that the girl should come to Pondicherry; how is it that it has been raised over there?

25 April 1930

*

No member of the Ashram can while he is a member contract a marriage whether it is spiritual or sexual or bring in a woman to be his life-companion or establish such a relation with anyone outside. This is no part of the Ashram life. He can do it outside by leaving the Ashram, for then he is no longer a member and can order his life as he pleases; he is then responsible to himself alone for his action and its spiritual or other consequences concern only himself and that other person.

In the cases you cite there is no tie of spiritual marriage between the persons concerned: the sexual connection has been renounced, but no new inner tie has been formed—there is therefore no similarity with the action you propose. As special cases they are allowed to live in the same house for certain outward conveniences, but it is clearly understood that the old dependence of husband and wife on each other has to cease; they have to accustom themselves to be only sadhaks having no inner dependence on each other, but separately depending on the Mother alone, receiving spiritual help from her alone, offering to her alone the obedience of the disciple to the Master.

For your case to assimilate to theirs you would have to marry legally and socially with the consent of the father, live for twenty years or more together outside and then come for admission to the Ashram with the resolution to develop an inner life independent from each other and turned to the Divine alone. What you propose as described in your letter is something quite different—it might stand in a Vaishnava sadhana or in some form of Karma Yoga, but it has no place here. An old relation is one thing,—its root being cut, time may be given in special cases at the Mother's discretion to get free from some of its outer results and habits which are not of the first importance; to bring in a new marriage relation with the full intention of giving it free

play and making it a part of the sadhana is a very different thing.

I do not know what you mean by “true sadhana”. Each path of sadhana has its own way and procedure which may be quite different from that of other paths. For this path the Mother and I can alone determine what is necessary or not necessary, what is admissible or not admissible. If one has some other way of life which he finds necessary and considers part of the true sadhana, he is free to practise it elsewhere, but he has no claim to do it here and make it a part of this sadhana or of the life of the Asram if it is not sanctioned and approved by the Mother and myself.

13 May 1937

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There is only one answer to X’s question — marriage and Yoga are two different movements going opposite ways; if he follows one, he will be moving away from the other. So if he marries, either of two things will happen — he will sink into the ordinary life and go far away from us in spirit or he will find married life unsatisfactory, renounce his wife and return to the path that leads towards the Divine. Marriage with the first result would be only a stupidity; marriage for the second result would be an irrational inconsequence. So in either way —

Marriage, Service and Yoga

A letter from you dated July 25th of this year duly reached Sri Aurobindo, but at the time he was not in a position to give any definite answer. Latterly, he has read your letter again and instructs me to write the following reply.³

First, as regards your question about your married life. The sound principle in these matters is that so long as you feel the sense of duty, it is better to follow it out until you are liberated; you must not carry a scruple or a remorse or any kind of backward pull or attraction into the spiritual life. Equally,

³ *Sri Aurobindo wrote this letter by hand and gave it to his secretary to be copied and sent to the correspondent. — Ed.*

if you have any strong attraction towards the usual human active life, towards earning, bright prospects, the use of your capacities for the ordinary motives or on the ordinary plane of human consciousness, you ought not to leave everything behind you for what may after all be only a mental attraction towards spiritual ideals and Yoga. The spiritual consciousness and spiritual life are exceedingly difficult to attain; it needs a deep and strong call and the turning of all the energies towards the one object to arrive at any kind of full success (siddhi). Even those who have cut off all other ties, find it difficult not to live in a double consciousness, one inward and turned towards the spiritual change and the other which is still chained to the ordinary movements and pulls them down from their spiritual experience into the persistent and unchanged course of the lower nature. If you have not the entire and undivided call, it is better not to take the plunge, unless you are prepared for very bitter inner struggles, great difficulties and relapses and a hampered and doubtful progress. It is better in that case to prepare yourself by meditation and concentration while still living in the family and the usual human life, until the spiritual attraction is strong enough to overshadow and destroy all others.

Next, you speak of leading a higher life in order to fit yourself for service to others. But leading a higher life is a vague mental phrase and the object of Yoga is not service to others. The object of Yoga is to enter into an entirely new consciousness in which you live no longer in the mind and the ego but in the divine consciousness and grow into the true inmost truth of your being above mind and life and body. The aim in most ways of Yoga is to draw back altogether from life into this greater existence. In Sri Aurobindo's Yoga, the aim is to transform mind, life and body into an expression of this divine Truth and to make the outward as well as the inward life embody it — a much more difficult endeavour. To act out of this greater consciousness becomes the only rule of life, abandoning all other dharmas. Not to serve either one's own ego or others, but to serve the Divine Shakti and be the instrument of her works is the law of this life.

Your other question, — about the Asrama, arises only when

you have found your call and your true way, — if that leads you here. In all cases Sri Aurobindo prefers to be assured of the call and the capacity before he admits anyone to his Asrama. The first of these two questions however, you have to decide mostly for yourself; the second can be settled only if, supposing you decide in this sense, you are called here and personally tested with a view for the Yoga. circa 1927

Family Life and the Ashram

I hope you have not given any reason to your relatives to understand that it is by my *orders* that you do not correspond with them or return to family life! You have remained here and taken to the spiritual life by your own choice and it was at your prayer that your temporary stay was changed into a permanent one. When you make a choice, you must have the courage to take your stand upon it on your own responsibility before your family and the world. Otherwise each one here is at liberty to remain on the path or leave it as he chooses. I think you had better make that clearly understood by your people. 14 February 1930

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The accompanying letter is from my wife. Till now I have been guilty of writing to her without trying to know your opinion. I was keeping up the communication partly in order not to shock or pain her too much and partly with a desire to see that she might also take up the spiritual path some day. What attitude should I keep with respect to her?

I return the letter, but I leave the necessity of reply or otherwise to your own discretion. To keep any attachment is obviously inconsistent with the Yogic attitude, as also any *desire* of the kind you express; if she is to enter the spiritual life some day it should be as her own independent destiny and her being your wife is not relevant to it. Detachment is the main thing; if you have that, to write or not to write is a secondary matter.

12 June 1932

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Write to her that permission cannot be given this time. You will also explain to her that she cannot come here (permanently) merely because she is the wife of a sadhak staying here. All relations of that kind are to cease when one becomes a member of the Ashram. It is only if one makes progress in the sadhana and is considered fit for stay in the Ashram that permission can be given.

18 January 1933

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Neither the Mother nor Sri Aurobindo are in the habit of holding any correspondence except with the sadhaks and on matters proper to the sadhana. Sri Aurobindo sees no one except at the three Darshans and speaks with no one. The Mother except at the Darshan times sees only the sadhaks and receives them only or else, but rarely, people who come with a desire for sadhana.

As regards X

X chose the Ashram life because after several attempts he found that trying to do the sadhana at home was a failure and he only multiplied ties and obstacles while here he progressed swiftly and was able to live the spiritual life. It is impossible for us to order him to go back permanently or temporarily or to live here in circumstances and conditions which he feels disturbing to his sadhana so long as he himself does not wish it or decide from his own inner determination to go. The sadhana here is not a mere matter of pranam or darshan; it is a life that has to be lived so that one may always be conscious in the Divine.

As regards X's family

As for his wife and children they could only have lived here in a separate house and had the expenses met by the family, but this is no longer possible. The difficulty of doing anything more arises from the rules and the nature of the Ashram life.

(1) It is a strict rule that husband and wife living in the Ashram cannot keep up the old conjugal relations and conjugal life. They either live separately or, if together, which is sometimes but not often allowed, as sadhak and sadhika only, each turned wholly to the Divine.

(2) Children of a tender age, under 10, are not allowed to live in the Asram, they are even not allowed as a rule to enter the Asram precincts. Even in houses not belonging to the Asram but still in some way connected with it (like the private house of Y where Z is temporarily staying) they are allowed only in very exceptional cases when we are sure that they can accommodate themselves to the Asram life and atmosphere.

(3) Children of low age are not admitted first because there is no proper arrangement for them — either for their food or their upbringing or their education or medical treatment. All is arranged with an eye to the life of grown-up sadhaks with limited requirements and no special provision can be made for anyone. The Asram is not in a position to undertake the responsibility for the maintenance or upbringing of children.

(4) Children are not admitted for another reason, because it was found when exceptions were made that they could not keep their health here and, after one death occurred, the prohibition was made absolute. They are too young and delicate to bear the atmosphere which is full of a tension of strong forces and, in most cases, their consciousness is too undeveloped for them to receive and profit easily by the supporting and protecting force received here from the Mother by the sadhaks. Faith and responsiveness are needed and such things cannot be expected from little children unless they have a very exceptional mind and character.

The ill-health of the children and the dangerous illness of the second among them seem to be a clear warning that these children cannot prosper here.

The Mother consented with much reluctance to Z and her children remaining in a separate house but it was under conditions that have not been fulfilled. It was never contemplated that X would live with them or earn his living. That is impossible unless he ceased to be a member of the Asram and this he does not wish to do. The family were very kindly allowed by Mr. Y to put up in his house, but this was supposed to be only for a short time. If they were to stay here, the Mother does not know where to put them or how to keep them. Even if this difficulty

were solved in some way, they would be living in conditions quite unsuitable which they would probably not be able to bear.

If Z were alone, it would be possible to put her up, but with the children we do not see any way. If she will be persuaded to return until at least they have the proper age, that would be the most advisable course. To separate from them and live here as the other sadhakas of the Asram would be the other alternative, but that, we understand, she is quite unwilling to do.

It is not possible for the Asram to modify its rules and character and way of life so as to suit the ideas and ways of living and demands and needs of the ordinary life. The Asram has its own reason of existence which is the spiritual life alone and it could not do that without losing its object and true character.

These considerations are placed before you so that you may know the position and keep them in view in advising Z. For she does not seem to understand them and it is this that has created difficulties with X; he feels that he is being pressed to abandon the spiritual life and that is why he is not at ease in going there.

21 December 1934

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As for your friend, it is not possible to say that she can come here; for that depends on many things which are not clearly present here. First, one must enter this Path or it must be seen that one is called to it; afterwards there is the question whether one is meant for the Asram life here. The question about the family duties can be answered in this way — the family duties exist so long as one is in the ordinary consciousness of the grihastha; if the call to a spiritual life comes, whether one keeps to them or not depends partly upon the way of Yoga one follows, partly on one's own spiritual necessity. There are many who pursue inwardly the spiritual life and keep the family duties, not as social duties but as a field for the practice of karmayoga, others abandon everything to follow the spiritual call alone and they are justified if that is necessary for the Yoga they practise or if that is the imperative demand of the soul within them.

Correspondence with Relatives

I feel that some idea-vibrations of that letter from home are active still in my memory.

That is the reason why it is better to drop these things. People who go on corresponding with their people do not feel it as you do, but nevertheless it is a fact that they maintain and enforce vibrations which keep the old forces active in the vital and maintain their impressions in the subconscious.

22 September 1934

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Getting letters from relatives often opens the door to problems. Even if the people remain neutral and don't actually create difficulties, where is the common point of interest? We write to them about yoga and so forth, but I wonder whether any of that makes any difference to them.

That is why we are not in favour of correspondence with relatives etc. outside. There is no point of contact unless one comes out or down to their own level which is obviously undesirable from the point of view of Yoga. I don't think much inspiration can go through letters because their consciousness is not at all prepared. Words can at most touch only the surface of their minds; what is important is something behind the words, but to that they are not open. If there is already an interest in spiritual things, that is different. Even then it is often better to let people follow their own groove than pull them into this path.

17 April 1935

Women in the Ashram

I have heard from my mother that she is determined to go to you very soon without seeing to our many grievances. Now we are encumbered with many difficulties which we are unable to deal with without our mother. Please ask the Mother to tell her to return to us. We will let her go back to the Ashram within a year.

The Mother cannot give the advice you call on her to give to X. It is your mother's free choice alone and sense of inner need that should guide her. No one has a right to interfere with her spiritual progress or pull her back in order to satisfy their own selfish demands. Her children are not infants needing the care of a mother and ought to be able to face by themselves the difficulties of life — it is rather now their duty to put her need first and not theirs; for at her age, it is she and not themselves who should be their first consideration in their dealings with her. She has need of rest to restore her broken health and an atmosphere of peace for her soul's progress.

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I do not think it at all necessary for you to stay any longer with your son. He is now becoming old enough to trace his own path in life — the more he is independent, the better. You certainly did no wrong in coming here at this time; the opinion of society about it has no true basis whatever.

As for the attitude taken by your husband, it should rather be a help to you to make your choice decisively and once for all. You can write to him that since he presses, you will not delay long to make your decision and you will speak to him about it when you return — unless you feel it will put you more at ease to write now a definite answer.

14 March 1933

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The need of solitude, of going inward, of getting out of the ordinary atmosphere of human life is one of the most natural movements of spiritual life. One who cannot appreciate that movement, knows nothing about spirituality or Yoga. Your husband's letters are like the reasonings of the scientists and men of the world who know nothing about Yoga or spiritual experience; they only pass mental opinions and judgments on it from outside. It is not even worth while replying to such things — they are so far from the realities of the spirit.

Keep over there your separateness and for all that surrounds you there remain inwardly aloof and untouched — dealing with

it as something external to you which you will soon leave.

31 March 1933

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I return your husband's letters. I do not think we can build much on his desire to know about Yoga. He wishes for reasons of a mixed nature to dissuade you from leaving the domestic life and that is the main thing behind both the criticising and the conciliatory elements in his letters. Your own position is clear and it is what I suppose you have expressed already — you are sure of your own feeling and purpose and confidence in my leading, but you see no good in subjecting it to intellectual discussion. Yoga and spirituality rest on the soul's intuition and the need of the inner nature, not on the reasoning of the surface intelligence.

circa 1933

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Women are not naturally weaker than men, but in society they have not been trained and educated like men to have a strong will and control over themselves, so when these things [*vital problems*] come on them, they do not understand or react so easily against them. But there are men as helpless in these struggles who are subject to the same reactions. Once one is open to the Divine, women are no less able than men to become strong with the Divine Force and luminous and wise with the Divine Light and Knowledge.

27 October 1935

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The tendency you speak of, to leave the family and social life for the spiritual life, has been traditional in India for the last 2000 years and more — chiefly among men, it touches only a very small number of women. It must be remembered that Indian social life has subordinated almost entirely the individual to the family. Men and women do not marry according to their free will; their marriages are mostly arranged for them while they are still children. Not only so, but the mould of society has been long of an almost iron fixity putting each individual in his place

and expecting him to conform to it. You speak of issues and a courageous solution, but in this life there are no problems and issues and no call for a solution — a courageous solution is only possible where there is freedom of the personal will; but where the only solution (if one remains in this life) is submission to the family will, there can be nothing of that kind. It is a secure life and can be happy if one accommodates oneself to it and has no unusual aspirations beyond it or is fortunate in one's environment; but it has no remedy for or escape from incompatibilities or any kind of individual frustration; it leaves little room for initiative or free movement or any individualism. The only outlet for the individual is his inner spiritual or religious life and the recognised escape is the abandonment of the *samsāra*, the family life, by some kind of Sannyasa. The Sannyasi, the Vaishnava Vairagi or the Brahmachari are free; they are dead to the family and can live according to the dictates of the inner spirit. Only if they enter into an order or asram, they have to abide by the rules of the order, but that is their own choice, not a responsibility which has been laid on them without their choice. Society recognised this door of escape from itself; religion sanctioned the idea that distaste for the social or worldly life was a legitimate ground for taking up that of the recluse or religious wanderer. But this was mainly for men; women, except in old times among the Buddhists who had their convents and in later times among the Vaishnavas, had little chance of such an escape unless a very strong spiritual impulse drove them which would take no denial. As for the wife and children left behind by the Sannyasi, there was little difficulty, for the joint family was there to take up or rather to continue their maintenance.

At present what has happened is that the old framework remains, but modern ideas have brought a condition of inadaptation, of unrest, the old family system is breaking up and women are seeking in more numbers the same freedom of escape as men have always had in the past. That would account for the cases you have come across — but I don't think the number of such cases can be as yet at all considerable, it is quite a new phenomenon; the admission of women to Asrams is itself a novelty.

The extreme unhappiness of a mental and vital growth which does not fit in with the surroundings, of marriages imposed that are unsuitable and where there is no meeting-point between husband and wife, of an environment hostile and intolerant of one's inner life and on the other hand the innate tendency of the Indian mind to seek a refuge in the spiritual or religious escape will sufficiently account for the new development. If society wants to prevent it, it must itself change. As to individuals, each case must be judged on its own merits; there is too much complexity in the problem and too much variation of nature, position, motives for a general rule.

I have spoken of the social problem in general terms only. In the conduct of the Asram, we have had many applications obviously dictated by an unwillingness to face the difficulties and responsibilities of life — naturally ignored or refused by us, but these have been mostly from men; there have been recently only one or two cases of women. Otherwise women have not applied usually on the ground of an unhappy marriage or difficult environment. Most often married sadhikas have followed or accompanied their husbands on the ground of having already begun to practise Yoga; others have come after fulfilling sufficiently the responsibilities of married life; in two or three cases there has been a separation from the husband but that was long before their coming here. In some cases there have been no children, in others the children have been left with the family. These cases do not really fall in the category of those you mention. Some of the sadhaks have left wife and family behind, but I do not think in any case the difficulties of life were the motive of their departure. It was rather the idea that they had felt the call and must leave all to follow it. 27 June 1937

Children in the Ashram

In answer to your question about X and her children, I may say that it is best for the children to return, as they are too young and undeveloped to remain here for a very long time. For X herself, what she needs for the sadhana is to learn to live more inwardly,

and we think it is better for her to return home with her children at present. If over there she goes inward, feels her relation with us and the need of the inner life becomes imperative, then no obstacles will be able to prevent her coming here again. The difficulty you have spoken of in the way of her returning is precisely one of those outer considerations which are not of the first importance. When the thing has to be done, there will always be a way to do it. In so deciding, we are looking entirely at what we consider best for her spiritual future. 16 August 1932

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As to the children you must remember what the Mother told you that they are yet too young for the Power to act directly upon them, it must be through you. That is the reason why you must always remain quiet and open so that the Mother may work through you, not for you only, but for them also.

22 August 1932

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You will reply to him that for himself and X and Y permission can always be given whenever they want to come — but the children are too young. It is a rule of the Asram departed from only in rare cases, where there is something exceptional, that they cannot be admitted inside the Asram before they are 10 years old — for before that they are too young to bear or assimilate the forces of the atmosphere — at least under present conditions. When people on *their own responsibility* bring children and stay in a house outside the Asram then the Mother allows it, but she takes no responsibility for them and they are not allowed to come for Darshan or Pranam or even inside the Asram.

25 January 1934

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If he comes alone we can accommodate him in the Asram but with his wife and children it will not be possible. The Mother also does not think it advisable to bring very young children here — usually the pressure of the forces in the Asram is too strong for them and there is a danger of their being ill. It is only after

the age of 10 that they are allowed (except in very exceptional cases) to enter the Asram at all. 24 March 1934

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The child cannot be brought to the Darshan. Children below 10 years of age are not allowed at the Darshan or in the Asram—very rare exceptions are made but not for anyone below 5. So permission can only be given for the adult members. You might write explaining this to your nephew. 2 August 1934

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It is usually unsafe for children to undergo spiritual pressure when their minds are not yet ripe—it often overstimulates certain centres before the Adhar is ripe and there is often a disturbance or lesion somewhere as the result. 26 December 1934

*

X, who is sixteen or seventeen, can explain the Mother's *Conversations* and *Prayers* but is ignorant of even elementary mathematics and other subjects which every normal person ought to know. Perhaps Ramakrishna would not consider it to be ignorance so long as the person is turned towards the Divine?

But it is an unnecessary ignorance not to know elementary mathematics. To be able to explain *Conversations* and *Prayers* is very good, but I don't see why it should exclude the other. If one has a realisation like Ramakrishna, that is another matter altogether. These people who came too young to the Asram like X and Y refused because they are not forced as children are at home and in school to learn anything at all except what it pleases them to learn. I consider the result deplorable, the more so because they have a more than ordinary personality and intelligence and ought to learn more, not less than other children.

5 June 1935

*

I do not think we can accept your friend's proposal; the conditions would have to be very different before his object could be fulfilled by sending his son here. We are not satisfied with the effect of the Asram life on children. They do not get the society of other children which they need, they associate with their elders and contract the habits of older people which is not to their benefit. Also they are exposed to ideas and influences which are beyond their age and grow old in mind too quickly, while at the same time they do not get the discipline, education, preliminary formation of the lower nature which is necessary in the early period of life. The life of the Asram has not been formed with a view to these things. If there had been a number of children with regular arrangements for their education it might have been different, but, as it is, we do not wish to admit children except in some exceptional case.

4 March 1936

Relations with People outside the Ashram

To give oneself to an outsider is to go out from the atmosphere of sadhana and give oneself to the outer world forces.

One can have a psychic feeling of love for someone, a universal love for all creatures, but one has to give oneself only to the Divine.

24 May 1934

*

Do you believe that people here are more sensitive than people outside? Some people think that the Asram is a "rotten" place with jealousy and hatred rampant among the sadhaks.

Outside there are just the same things. The Asram is an epitome of the human nature that has to be changed — but outside people put as much as possible a mask of social manners and other pretences over the rottenness — what Christ called in the case of the Pharisees the "whited sepulchre". Moreover there one can pick and choose the people one will associate with while in the narrow limits of the Asram it is not so possible — contacts are inevitable. Wherever humans are obliged to associate closely, what I saw described the other day as "the astonishing

meannesses and caddishnesses inherent in human nature” come quickly out. I have seen that in Asrams, in political work, in social attempts at united living, everywhere in fact where it gets a chance. But when one tries to do Yoga, one cannot fail to see that in oneself and not only, as most people do, see it in others, and once seen, then? Is it to be got rid of or to be kept? Most people here seem to want to keep it. Or they say it is too strong for them, they can't help it!

3 April 1938

Work in the Ashram

Work and Sadhana

I have read in *The Synthesis of Yoga* and the Mother's *Conversations* that every act and movement, thought and word should be an offering. Even if this is a strictly mental effort without the heart's devotion, as it may be at first, it is sure to lead to devotion, provided the effort is sincere. This discipline is quite possible in acts of a more or less mechanical nature like walking or eating, but where the work involves mental concentration, as in reading or writing, it seems well-nigh impossible. If the consciousness has to be busy with the remembrance, the attention will get divided and the work will not be properly done.

It is because people live in the surface mind and are identified with it. When one lives more inwardly, it is only the surface consciousness that is occupied and one stands behind it in another which is silent and self-offered. 4 May 1933

*

Does this consciousness [*mentioned in the preceding letter*] come only by aspiration or can one have it by following a mental discipline?

One starts by a mental effort — afterwards it is an inner consciousness that is formed which need not be always *thinking* of the Mother because it is always conscious of her. 31 May 1933

*

We cannot approve of your idea — there are already enough intellectuals in the Asram and the room-keeping intellectual is not a type whose undue propagation we are disposed to encourage. Outside work is just what is necessary to keep the equilibrium of the nature and you certainly need it for that purpose. Also

your presence in the D.R. [*Dining Room*] is indispensable. For the rest instead of getting vexed with X or Y you should seek the cause of these things in yourself — that is always the true rule for a sadhak. You are sometimes at your best and then things go on very well; but sometimes you are not at all at your best and then these misunderstandings arise. The remedy therefore is to be at your best always — not to be in your room always, but to be in your best and therefore your true self always. 15 May 1934

*

I have often felt that *dhyāna* was a better way than *karma*, poetry etc. to reach the Divine — a shorter cut I mean. Am I right?

Meditation is one means of the approach to the Divine and a great way, but it cannot be called a short cut — for most it is a long and difficult though very high ascent. It can by no means be short unless it brings a descent and even then it is only a foundation that is quickly laid — afterwards meditation has to build laboriously a big superstructure on that foundation. It is very indispensable, but there is nothing of the short cut about it.

Karma is a much simpler road — provided one's mind is not fixed on the karma to the exclusion of the Divine. The aim must be the Divine and the work can only be a means. The use of poetry etc. is to keep one in contact with one's inner being and that helps to prepare for the direct contact with the inmost, but one must not stop with that, one must go on to the real thing. If one thinks of being a "literary man", a poet, a painter as things worth while for their own sake, then it is no longer the Yogic spirit. That is why I have sometimes to say that our business is to be Yogis, not merely poets, painters etc.

Love, bhakti, surrender, the psychic opening are the only short cut to the Divine — or can be; for if the love and bhakti are too vital, then there is likely to be a seesaw between ecstatic expectation and *viraha*, *abhimāna*, despair, which will make it not a short cut but a long one, a zigzag, not a straight flight, a whirling round one's own ego instead of a running towards the Divine. 10 December 1934

*

If I remember right, you wrote to me that work is only a means for the preparation of the spiritual life; otherwise it has no spiritual value.

[*Sri Aurobindo underlined "only", put a question mark above it, and wrote:*] Lord God! when did I make this stupendous statement which destroys at one fell swoop the two volumes of the *Essays on the Gita* and all the seven volumes of the *Arya*? Work by itself is only a preparation, so is meditation by itself, but work done in the increasing Yogic consciousness is a means of realisation as much as meditation is.

In your letter to X¹ you say that work helps to prepare for the direct contact with the inmost. In another letter you say that work prepares for the right consciousness to develop — which means the same thing.

I have not said, I hope, that work *only* prepares. Meditation also prepares for the direct contact. If we are to do work only as a preparation and then become motionless meditative ascetics, then all my spiritual teaching is false and there is no use for supramental realisation or anything else that has not been done in the past.

My own impression is that work is an excellent means as a preparation, but the major experiences and realisations are not likely to come in during work. My little experience corroborates me, because whatever drops of Ananda descended on me, were mostly during meditation. Only once did I have two minutes of Ananda during work.

I see. When the time for preparation is over, one will sit immobile for ever after and never do any work — for, as you say, work and realisation cannot go together. Hurrah for the Himalayas!

Well, but why not then the old Yoga? If work is so contrary to realisation! That is Shankara's teaching.

¹ *The letter of 10 December 1934 on page 743. — Ed.*

The main difference between the two is that in work the attention is bound to be diverted. While working with the hand, utter the name of Hari with the mouth — this attitude is quite possible, but only as a preparation. It is not enough to take us to the goal, which meditation alone can do; because there the whole being is absorbed in engrossing meditation on the Beloved.

In that case I am entirely wrong in preaching a dynamic Yoga — Let us go back to the cave and the forest.

You have said that 9/10 of your time is spent in doing correspondence, works etc., whereas only 1/10 is devoted to concentration.² One naturally asks, why should it not be possible for you to do concentration and work at the same time?

For me, correspondence alone. I have no time left for other “works etc”.

Concentration and meditation are not the same thing. One can be concentrated in work or bhakti as well as in meditation. For God’s sake be careful about your vocabulary, or else you will tumble into many errors and loosenesses of thinking.

If I devoted 9/10 of my time to concentration and none to work — the result would be equally unsatisfactory. My concentration is for a particular work — it is not for meditation divorced from life. When I concentrate I work upon others, upon the world, upon the play of forces. What I say is that to spend all the time reading and writing letters is not sufficient for the purpose. I am not asking to become a meditative Sannyasi.

Did you not retire for five or six years for an exclusive and intensive meditation?

I am not aware that I did so. But my biographers probably know more about it than I do.

² See the letter of 26 October 1934 on page 333. — Ed.

If the Supramental Divine himself differentiates between work and concentration . . .

Between concentration on correspondence alone and the full many-sided work — *not* between work and concentration.

and finds it difficult to radiate his Force among the few sadhaks contemporaneously with his work of correspondence etc., what about undivines and inframentals like us?

[*Underlining “contemporaneously with his work of correspondence”*:] It does not mean that I lose the higher consciousness while doing the work of correspondence. If I did that, I would not only not be supramental, but would be very far even from the full Yogic consciousness.

Say “by correspondence alone”. If I have to help somebody to repel an attack, I can’t do it by only writing a note, I have to send him some Force or else concentrate and do the work for him. Also I can’t bring down the Supramental by merely writing neatly to people about it. I am not asking for leisure to meditate at ease in a blissful indolence. I said distinctly I wanted it for concentration on other more important work than correspondence.

These are some of the doubts some of us are afflicted with.

The ignorance underlying this attitude is in the assumption that one must necessarily do only work or only meditation. Either work is the means or meditation is the means, but both cannot be! I have never said, so far as I know, that meditation should not be done. To set up an open competition or a closed one between works and meditation is a trick of the dividing mind and belongs to the old Yoga. Please remember that I have been declaring all along an integral Yoga in which knowledge, Bhakti, works — light of consciousness, Ananda and love, will and power in works — meditation, adoration, service of the Divine have all their place. Have I written seven volumes of the *Arya* all in vain? Meditation is not greater than Yoga of works nor works greater than Yoga by knowledge — both are equal.

Another thing — it is a mistake to argue from one's own very limited experience, ignoring that of others, and build on it large generalisations about Yoga. This is what many do, but the method has obvious demerits. You have no experience of major realisations through work, and you conclude that such realisations are impossible. But what of the many who have had them — elsewhere and here too in the Asram? That has no value? You kindly hint to me that I have failed to get anything by works? How do you know? I have not written the history of my sadhana — if I had, you would have seen that if I had not made action and work one of my chief means of realisation — well, there would have been no sadhana and no realisation except that, perhaps, of Nirvana.

I shall perhaps add something hereafter as to what works can do, but no time tonight.

Do not conclude however that I am exalting works as the sole means of realisation. I am only giving it its due place.

You will excuse the vein of irony or satire in all this — but really when I am told that my own case disproves my whole spiritual philosophy and accumulated knowledge and experience, a little liveliness in answer is permissible. 16 December 1934

*

A sense was coming down from above that I belong to the Above, but have come down upon earth for a mission to work out — deputed here as an instrument of the Above for the works of the Above.

The work is the work of the Divine and it is best to regard oneself as an instrument. The word mission is apt to accentuate the sense of ego and should be avoided. 5 January 1935

*

The higher consciousness keeps contact with me only through my passive self. If I do more work, it disturbs the higher working. I don't know what the cause of this is.

There is no special cause for it. It is always so with everybody

unless one feels the Mother's Force working through one in the action.

I find it hard to work while remaining in the Yogic consciousness. My inner state is too passive.

It is possible to work through the passive state even, provided one feels that one is not doing the work but it is being done through one.

You suggested another way — to keep the psychic in front. But I don't know how to bring the psychic forward.

It comes forward of itself either through constant love and aspiration or when the mind and vital have been made ready by the descent from above and the working of the Force.

13 March 1935

*

There are some sadhaks here who think that everyone should do Karmayoga only, without doing any meditation at all.

There are some who cannot meditate and progress through work only. Each has his own nature. But to extend one method to all is always an error.

16 May 1935

*

Why do people complain that they are not able to keep up the sadhana during work?

It is a question of doing work in the right attitude — as a means of sadhana. Most take the work as work only.

3 July 1936

*

Is it not a fact that most of the true Yogas demand passivity of the mind as the first important basis? Does your Yoga differ from them in this at least? If not, what is the purpose of allowing the sadhaks to keep their minds constantly active in learning languages? Or has it created for them such a climate

that they can keep their minds calm and quiet somehow behind and in spite of this mental activity?

One can go on without anything except a little rice daily and some water — without clothes even or a house to shelter. Is that what you call true Yoga and that should be followed in the Asram? But then there is no need of an Asram. A cave somewhere for each will do.

Why do you use a fountain pen? You can very well go on with an ordinary one. Why do you take these *cabiers* from the stores? Cheap paper would do. Why do you write? The mind should be passive.

If by passivity of the mind you mean laziness and inability to use it, then what Yoga makes that its basis? The mind has to be quieted and transformed, not made indolent and useless. Is there any old Yoga that makes it a rule not to allow those who practise it to study Sanskrit or philosophy? Does that prevent the Yogis from attaining mental quietude? Do you think that the Mother and myself never read anything and have to sit all day inactive in order to make our minds quiet? Are you not aware that the principle of this Yoga is to arrive at an inner silence in which all activities can take place without disturbing the inner silence?

24 March 1937

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For the sadhana, it is not true that some are here only because they give money and others because they are workers only. What is true is that there are many who can prepare themselves only by work, their consciousness not being yet ready for meditation of the more intense kind. But even for those who can do intense meditation from the beginning, sadhana by work is also necessary in this Yoga. One cannot arrive at its goal by meditation alone. As for your own capacity, it was evident when for a fairly long period an active sadhana was proceeding within you. Everybody's capacity however is limited — little can be done by one's own strength alone. It is reliance on the Divine Force, the Mother's Force and Light and openness to it that is the real capacity. This you had for a time, but as with many others it got

clouded over by the coming up of the physical nature in its full force. This clouding happens to almost everybody at that stage, but it need not be lasting. If the physical consciousness resolves to open itself, then nothing more is needed for progress in the sadhana. 10 July 1937

*

There is one thing everybody should remember that everything should be done from the point of view of Yoga, of sadhana, of growing into a divine life in the Mother's consciousness. To insist upon one's own mind and its ideas, to allow oneself to be governed by one's own vital feelings and reactions should not be the rule of life here. One has to stand back from these, to be detached, to get in their place the true knowledge from above, the true feelings from the psychic within. This cannot be done if the mind and vital do not surrender, if they do not renounce their attachment to their own ignorance which they call truth, right, justice. All the trouble rises from that; if that were overcome, the true basis of life, of work, of harmony of all in the union with the Divine would more and more replace the trouble and difficulty of the present.

Some Aspects of Work in the Ashram

The work here is not intended for showing one's capacity or having a position or as a means of physical nearness to the Mother, but as a field and an opportunity for the Karmayoga part of the integral Yoga — for learning to work in the true Yogic way — dedication through service, practical selflessness, obedience, scrupulousness, discipline, setting the Divine and the Divine's work first and oneself last, harmony, patience, forbearance etc. When the workers learn these things and cease to be egocentric, as most of you now are, then will come the time for work in which capacity can really be shown — although even then the showing of capacity will be an incident and can never be the main consideration or the object of divine work. 28 August 1931

*

When I was working in the Satyagraha movement, I worked with a zeal and energy I don't seem to have here. Is it because there is no fighting programme except against one's own self? How can I recover my interest and vigour in work?

The Satyagraha was one of those movements in which the vital part of the nature gets easily enthusiastic and interested—it meant a fight on the vital level (its only difference from other revolutionary activities being its “non-violent” character), with universal support and applause and approval, a nationwide excitement behind you, the sense of heroism and possible martyrdom, a “moral” ideal giving a farther support of strong self-approbation and the sense of righteousness. Here there is nothing that ministers to the human vital nature; the work is small, silent, shut off from the outside world and its circumstances, of value only as a field for spiritual self-culture. If one is governed by the sole spiritual motive and has the spiritual consciousness, one can take joy and interest in this work. Or if, in spite of his human shortcomings, the worker is mainly bent on spiritual progress and self-perfection, then also he can take interest in the work and both feel its utility for the discovery and purification of his egoistic mental and vital and physical nature and take joy in it as a service of the Divine. 11 August 1932

*

Recover yourself now and proceed on your way with a deeper and truer aim in you. Your efforts at sadhana up till now have been too exclusively on the vital plane; aspire for a full opening of the psychic, clear your movements of all ego and strive to make yourself open and aspire only to be a receptacle of the true consciousness and an instrument of the Divine.

As for outward things, what has been lacking in you has been discipline, order, self-consecration in your work. You have acted according to your impulse and fancy and been unable to do any work steadily and with devotion in the work. The Mother gave you library work to do and it has not been scrupulously done. She asks you for the sake of your own self-discipline to do that little carefully and scrupulously in the future. For the rest

you can go on with your music and your sadhana; but let all be done in a deeper spirit and as an offering to the Divine.

11 May 1933

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There is no reason why one should not offer to work if there is work to do. Often there is work to be done and no one offers, so it is not done. Most of the Asram work is done by a few people, while others do a little only or only what they please.

31 May 1933

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Each man has his defects — you and all others. So you should not allow that to destroy the harmony that should reign among workers. Remember that patience and equanimity and good feeling for all are the first needs of the sadhak. 12 November 1933

*

The Mother's withdrawal of you from the work had nothing to do with any relation between you and X or any other sadhika. What you have to do is to utilise it for becoming quiet within, silencing the vital movement and getting into the true attitude.

What you write shows that you had a wrong idea of the work. The work in the Asram was not meant as a service to humanity or to a section of it called the sadhaks of the Asram. It was not meant either as an opportunity for a joyful social life and a flow of sentiments and attachments between the sadhaks and an expression of the vital movements, a free vital interchange whether with some or with all. The work was meant as a service to the Divine and as a field for the inner opening to the Divine, surrender to the Divine alone, rejection of ego and all the ordinary vital movements and the training in a psychic elevation, selflessness, obedience, renunciation of all mental, vital or other self-assertion of the limited personality. Self-affirmation is not the aim, development of the personal self is not the aim, the formation of a collective vital ego is also not the aim. The merging of the little ego in union with the Divine, purification, surrender, the substitution of the Divine

guidance for one's own ignorant self-guidance based on one's personal ideas and personal feelings is the aim of Karma Yoga, the surrender of one's own will to the Divine Will.

If one feels human beings to be near and the Divine to be far and seeks the Divine through service of and love of human beings and not the direct service and love of the Divine, then one is following a wrong principle — for that is the principle of the mental, vital and moral, not the spiritual life. November 1933

*

All work is equal — those who write or embroider are in no way superior to those who cook or prepare the grains. To speak otherwise is ignorance. 7 December 1933

*

Active participation in an outside work is sometimes useful to a sadhak in the early stages of his sadhana so that he may learn equanimity; but the utility of it for a sadhak of the Asrama is not very clear. Personal or family work is not part of the divine Work unless as in X's case it is dedicated to the Divine — for he gives all its profits here. But in your case it is family property and that is not possible. We are therefore rather doubtful as to how this would fit in at the present stage of your sadhana.

25 April 1935

*

Work here and work done in the world are of course not the same thing. The work there is not in any way a divine work in special — it is ordinary work in the world. But still one must take it as a training and do it in the spirit of karmayoga — what matters there is not the nature of the work in itself but the spirit in which it is done. It must be in the spirit of the Gita, without desire, with detachment, without repulsion, but doing it as perfectly as possible, not for the sake of the family or promotion or to please the superiors, but simply because it is the thing that has been given in the hand to do. It is a field of inner training, nothing more. One has to learn in it three things,

equality, desirelessness, dedication. It is not the work as a thing for its own sake, but one's doing of it and one's way of doing it that one has to dedicate to the Divine. Done in that spirit it does not matter what the work is. If one trains oneself spiritually like that, then one will be ready to do in the true way whatever special work directly for the Divine (such as the Asram work) one may any day be given to do. 21 September 1935

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What is necessary is not to be troubled or upset by small things, to work pleasantly and quietly with the others, then they also will do the same and there will be no friction.

The Place of Rules in Work

We are supposed to take our tooth-sticks between 6 and 7 p.m. Yesterday I forgot to go. At 7.15 I remembered, but it was too late. I mentioned this to X. He told me to go anyway, since others go after 7. I told him I would obey the rule regardless.

It is a good discipline like that. Rules are made for the proper harmony and convenience of the work. If you disregard them you promote disorder, inefficiency and looseness of work and at the same time you yourself become or remain loose, negligent, undisciplined and imperfect. 25 June 1933

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Rules are indispensable for the orderly management of work; for without order and arrangement nothing can be properly done, all becomes clash, confusion and disorder.

It is the rule that as far as possible supervisors should foresee their needs and ask for the morning's needs the evening before and for the afternoon's needs in the morning. In special cases where the article is needed at a particular hour, that should be stated in the chit. Where such previous notice is not given, the office will send the articles asked for as soon as possible — i.e., in view of the other work to be done.

In this case the work had been fixed beforehand so it was

possible to send previous notice. Under the circumstances, although you could ask them to let you have your needs early in spite of absence of previous notice, you could not go and claim that as a right or threaten to report them for negligence to the Mother.

In all such dealings with others, you should see not only your own side of the question but the other side also. There should be no anger, vehement reproach or menace, for these things only raise anger and retort on the other side. I write this because you are trying to rise above yourself and dominate your vital and when one wants to do that, one cannot be too strict with oneself in these things. It is best even to be severe to one's own mistakes and charitable to the mistakes of others. 23 June 1935

*

A rule that can be varied by everyone at his pleasure is no rule. In all countries in which organised work is successfully done, (India is not one of them), rules exist and nobody thinks of breaking them, for it is realised that work (or life either) without discipline would soon become a confusion and an anarchic failure. In the great days of India everything was put under rule, even art and poetry, even Yoga. Here in fact rules are much less rigid than in any European organisation. Personal discretion can even in a frame of rules have plenty of play — but discretion must be discreetly used, otherwise it becomes something arbitrary or chaotic. 1 October 1936

Organisation and Discipline in Work

I hear you do not like the gate-keepers to do any writing, reading etc. when on duty. Is it true? Up till now I have been writing during that time.

It was because people were neglecting their duty in the absorption of reading and writing, allowing undesirable people to enter etc. If that does not happen, one can read or write — only when one is on duty, the duty comes first. 12 May 1933

*

In regard to my work at the office, I have the feeling that my position is neither one of working under another nor of working on my own. Is this the way it should be?

It is not necessary to work under anybody — it is a work of collaboration in which each is free to organise his work as he thinks best for the work. You can see how best to organise yours.

31 May 1934

*

The Mother has her own reasons for her decisions; she has to look at the work as a whole without regard to one department or branch alone and with a view to the necessities of the work and the management. The objection to buying much of this size was hers and not X's. Whatever work is done here, one has always to learn to subordinate or put aside one's own ideas and preferences about things concerning it and do for the best under the conditions and decisions laid down by her. This is one of the main difficulties throughout the Asram, as each worker wants to do according to his own ideas, on his own lines according to what he thinks to be the right or convenient thing and expects that to be sanctioned. It is one of the principal reasons of difficulty, clash or disorder in the work, creating conflict between the workers themselves, conflict between the workers and the heads of departments, conflict between the ideas of the sadhaks and the will of the Mother. Harmony can only exist if all accept the will of the Mother without grudge or personal reaction.

Independent work does not exist in the Asram. All is organised and interrelated; neither the heads of departments nor the workers are independent. To learn subordination and cooperation is necessary for all collective work; without it there will be chaos.

As for the Yoga aspect of these personal clashes, dislikes etc. and of the work itself, I have written about that before.

10 March 1936

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When people set a date by which a work must be completed, the usual result is that there is a huge haste, followed by a period in which people don't know what to do. Is it really necessary to fix dates? I wonder sometimes if doing so does not create a sort of occult resistance.

It is necessary to fix dates for the organisation of the work, but there must be a certain plasticity so that if necessary the time may be extended. As to particular cases it is a matter of judgment how much time is to be given. It is the system of the schedule, but whether the work can be done "according to schedule", as they say, has to be seen in practice. The occult resistance is a fact but it applies more to psychological than to physical things.

18 October 1936

Dealing with Paid Workers

In dealing with paid workmen, I sometimes behave in a very familiar way, sometimes in a neutral way and sometimes I get angry. How should I behave with them?

None of these ways is the right one; the first weakens the authority, the second is not dynamic, the last is obviously not helpful. In all work the nearer one gets to an entire equanimity (which does not mean indifference) in the mind and the vital feeling, the better. A calm detached attitude, with a fundamental sympathy in it but not of the sentimental kind, a clear unbiased eye observing their character and reactions, and a quiet and firm authority without harshness, capable both of kindness and of quiet severity, where severity is needed, would be the best attitude.

22 August 1932

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To be angry and speak harshly to the workmen injures both the work and the sadhana.

10 February 1933

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It seems to me that sadhaks could take up some of the work now being given to paid workers, electrical work for instance. I am ready to do this kind of work.

I suppose it will have to come to that in the end — for the conditions and cost of having workmen and even servants is likely to become prohibitive if the new laws are made operative in the [*French*] colonies. But for the moment it is not practicable. The majority of the sadhaks have not the mentality that would be needed for this kind of work — workman's work — nor the necessary capacity of working together. A few zealous and enthusiastic sadhaks would not be able to meet the necessity.

30 June 1936

Life and Death in the Ashram

Self-Control, Not Asceticism

What should be the true necessities of a sadhak? Should he buy things from outside? With what idea is pocket money given to us?

The idea, when the arrangement was made, was simply to see how and in what spirit the sadhaks dealt with money when they had any at their disposal.

The *necessities* of a sadhak should be as few as possible; for there are only a very few things that are real necessities in life. The rest are either utilities or things decorative to life or luxuries. These a Yogi has a right to possess or enjoy only on one of two conditions —

(1) if he uses them during his sadhana solely to train himself in possessing things without attachment or desire and learn to use them rightly, in harmony with the Divine Will, with a proper handling, a just organisation, arrangement and measure — or,

(2) if he has already attained a true freedom from desire and attachment and is not in the least moved or affected in any way by loss or withholding or deprivation. If he has any greed, desire, demand, claim for possession or enjoyment, any anxiety, grief, anger or vexation when denied or deprived, he is not free in spirit and his use of the things he possesses is contrary to the spirit of sadhana. Even if he is free in spirit, he will not be fit for possession if he has not learned to use things not for himself, but for the Divine Will, as an instrument, with the right knowledge and action in the use for the proper equipment of a life lived not for oneself but for and in the Divine.

7 March 1932

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I find it difficult to distinguish between true need and what might be called luxury. A part of me wants to have nice and

decent things and to take pleasure in them. Another side tells me so many things are not needed. I would like to return to the ascetic life I followed before coming here.

You must be prepared to live in either condition, attached neither to luxury nor to asceticism. It is good to be able to live with very few things, but you must also be able to live with nice and decent things and make right use of them. Never mind your true need, live with whatever the Mother has given you. 6 April 1932

*

An aspiration towards detachment has come upon me and the will to avoid luxury or desire or habit of any kind.

If that can be done (in a positive, not merely a negative way), then it would be an immense step forward. 18 November 1933

*

You have written [*in the preceding letter*] of detachment “in a positive, not merely a negative way”. Please explain this.

By negative I mean merely repressing the desires and wrong movements and egoism, by positive I mean the bringing down of light and peace and purity in those parts from above. I do not mean that these movements are not to be rejected — but all the energy should not be directed solely to rejection. It must also be directed to the positive replacement of them by the higher consciousness. The more this consciousness comes, the easier also will the rejection be. 19 November 1933

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Your condemnation of asceticism is often taken by the vital as giving sanction to the continuation of desire and its fulfilment — so at least I have noticed in some here.

That is a mistake many have made because the vital wanted to make it. Whether ascetic or non-ascetic, the Yogi, the sadhak must become free from vital desire and spiritually master of the movements of his nature — and for that he must be free from

ego and desire and duality. I have always made that quite clear — that indulgence of desire is no more part of this Yoga than it is of Sannyasa. One must be able to use and handle physical things and physical life, but from the spiritual consciousness, not from the level of the vital ego. 27 November 1935

*

It is surprising that you should miss, that so many here should miss the point that to be so much troubled about a trifling want or inconvenience is quite contrary to the spirit of Yoga. To be untroubled and unmoved by such things is an elementary step in Yogic self-discipline. Transcendence is a far bigger matter; but this should be possible by self-control, for that there is no need of transcendence. In the life here extreme asceticism in the sense of doing without everything but the barest needs is not enforced; but it is all the more necessary to be free within, to surmount desire and attachment, to be able to do without things in the sense of not hankering after things when they are not there, not being attached to them when they are there, not insisting on one's own demands, desires, wants, comforts, conveniences, being satisfied with what one is given. Sannyasa is not enforced, but the inner *tyāga* of non-desire, non-demand, non-attachment is indispensable. A thing like this, an inconvenience that is not remedied when one asks, should be welcomed as a test for this inner *tyāga*; all things of the kind should be welcome as such opportunities to the seeker after the inner perfection.

I don't know that wearing the Sannyasi dress would help for one can wear the dress and yet be full of desires. But I have no objection if it helps you as a symbol or a reminder. 7 March 1937

No Demands

A sadhak should not have demands and ask for things for his personal use from people outside, but if they of their own accord and without any request or suggestion send them to him, he can receive them. The most important point is that he shall not indulge any spirit of greed or desire under any excuse or colour

and should be unaffected in his vital being by the presence or absence of these things that satisfy desire. 5 March 1931

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All that is simply the unreasoning repetition of the old blindness. There can be no understanding if your mind insists on something that is radically untrue. This ignorant attitude assumes that you are here to be first, to be equal to any other in the Asram in the eyes of others, to enjoy position and privileges, to grab whatever you can for yourself, to have pleasure and enjoyment, to get everything that anybody else may have. All that is utterly false for the spiritual life. These are the aims that selfish, worldly and ambitious men seek in the ordinary life. The spiritual life has nothing to do with these things. One is here only for two things, to realise the Divine and to transform the consciousness and nature into the higher consciousness and nature. That is what the Power that works on you intends and nothing else. The influence upon you which struggles against it has to disappear and no more be a part of your nature. 8 June 1934

*

I was told that when we have surrendered completely to God, God will take care of all our true needs.

He may give all that is truly needed — but people usually interpret this idea in the sense that He gives all that they think or feel that they need. He may do that — but also He may not.

It is said that He supplies all our psychic needs.

In the end, yes; but here too people expect Him to supply them instantly, which does not always happen. 30 January 1936

*

It is true that the sadhaks have turned the idea of a divine life into an excuse for an unbridled spirit of demand and desire and this is increasing to a perilous extent. The whole world is in a financial and economic crisis; money difficult to get, prices rising

fantastically, people everywhere cutting down their standard of life and their expenses: here in the Ashram the standard of life is rising and the expenditure on comforts increasing continually. At this rate it will not be long before a halt will have to come and circumstances will force a reversion to a more abstemious way of life.

But the remedy is not asceticism; it is self-control, the elimination of desire and demand, the spirit which is easily satisfied with what it gets, makes the most of it, is careful of physical things and not subject to craving. The ideal of the Yoga is not asceticism, but to do with things or without things in the same spirit of equality and non-attachment — only in that spirit can one make a true and spiritual use of physical things and material life.

5 July 1937

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You must get a change of consciousness which makes these external things of no importance to you. A change of room will not bring it, on the contrary your stay in this room is the very opportunity that is given you for the inner change.

*

I have the idea of giving up the cot I was offered because I could not get a cot to my taste. Should I keep whatever comes, or should I do without?

Why keep up these vital desires, “a cot to my taste” etc.? I have always lain on any cot given to me, not asking whether it is to my “taste” or not. It seems to me the proper attitude for a sadhak.

Care of Material Things

Wanton waste, careless spoiling of physical things in an incredibly short time, loose disorder, misuse of service and materials due either to vital grasping or to tamasic inertia are baneful to prosperity and tend to drive away or discourage the Wealth-Power. These things have long been rampant in the society and, if that continues, an increase in our means might well mean

a proportionate increase in the wastage and disorder and neutralise the material advantage. This must be remedied if there is to be any sound progress.

Asceticism for its own sake is not the ideal of this Yoga, but self-control in the vital and right order in the material are a very important part of it — and even an ascetic discipline is better for our purpose than a loose absence of true control. Mastery of the material does not mean having plenty and profusely throwing it out or spoiling it as fast as it comes or faster. Mastery implies in it the right and careful utilisation of things and also a self-control in their use.

5 January 1932

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I may say, generally, that in the present condition of things it is becoming increasingly necessary to do the best we can with what we have and make things last as long as possible. There are many kinds of things hitherto provided, for instance, which it will be impossible to renew once the present stock is over. The difficulty is that most people in the Asram have no training in handling physical things (except the simplest, hardest and roughest), no propensity to take care of them, to give them their full use and time of survival. This is partly due to ignorance and inexperience, but partly also to carelessness, rough, violent and unseeing handling, indifference; there is also in many a feeling that it does not matter if things are quickly spoilt, they will be replaced; one worker was even heard to say to another, “why do you care? it is not your money.” To take one instance only. Taps in Europe will last for many years — here in a few months, sometimes in a few weeks they are spoilt and call for repairs or replacement. People ask for new provisions before the old are exhausted or even near exhaustion, not because they need them, but because they have a right (?) to a new supply; some have even been known to throw away what remains with them in order to have a new stock. And so on, ad infinitum. All this is *tamas* and the end of *tamas* is disintegration, dispersal of forces, failure of material. And in the end, as this is a collective affair, the consequences come upon everybody, the careful and the careless

together. Our ideal was a large, not a restricted life, but well-organised, free from waste and *tamas* and disorder. Now there has to be a tightness, a period of retrenchment till people learn and things get better. 17 January 1932

*

If things are constantly broken, X is perfectly right in enforcing economy. Very few of the *sadhaks* have any sense of responsibility in this respect; most seem to think that they are entitled to waste, destroy, spoil, use freely as if the Mother's sole business was to supply their wants and the Ashram had unlimited resources. But it is not possible for the Ashram to develop its wealth so long as the *sadhaks* and workers are selfish, careless, undisciplined and irresponsible. Lakshmi does not continue to pour her gifts under such conditions. 30 January 1933

*

Each supervisor is responsible for the maintenance intact and in good condition of the machinery, tools and apparatus in his charge. No one other than those in charge or using them for the work should touch or handle. 1940s

Consciousness in the Body

Sometimes during work, while issuing materials or counting money, the required amount comes up in the hand at the first attempt. This happens more frequently when the mind is quiet and at ease. Till now I thought it may be merely an accident. Is there anything in this?

The correct counting is not an accident; there is a sort of intuitive consciousness that comes in the body and makes it know the right thing or do the right thing. This growing of consciousness in the body is one of the most important results of Yoga turned to action and is especially important in this Yoga. 8 August 1932

Fund-Raising

How can I make myself fit for the Mother's divine work? Should I actively pull her power or open myself passively and wait for it to descend and work in and through me? What are the conditions that I must fulfil to allow the materialisation of this money power? If I have the capacity, as you had told me the last time, what shall I do to fulfil the capacity?

It is something in the inner being that has the power of which the Mother spoke, not the external human part. I think you are seeking the power in the external being, but that can only raise up difficulties. Awaken the psychic in you, let the inner being come out and replace the ego, then the latent power also will become effective. You can then do the work and the service to which you aspire.

23 February 1931

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If you say "you are unfit for the [*fund-raising*] work that you propose", that will suffice to break the existing deadlock.

It is not a question of fitness or unfitness, primarily, — there are many other considerations, e.g. the practicability of any such large collection under the present not very favourable circumstances, the conditions of your proposed attempt etc.

But if you are not sure of yourself (as to the persistence of your intention in the future), how can you be sure that it is your mission or a true inspiration and not the imagination or the strong impulse of a moment? In another letter you had said you could wait for years.

Anyhow, I cannot give a decision on so important a matter unless I see the way more clear than I see it now.

26 June 1931

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I wrote to you before [*in the preceding letter*] that I did not see my way clear in this matter. My main reason, or one of my main reasons, was that the time and present conditions are adverse to success. All the information I have received since entirely

confirms it; most have suffered by the long prevailing depression and few are either in a mood or a position to give largely. In these circumstances the idea of a mission to collect lakhs of money must be abandoned or at least postponed to better times.

There were other difficulties I saw, but these need not be discussed at present, since the mission itself is barred by the lack of all reasonable chance of success.

About work here and what has been said by you on that subject, I shall write in another letter. 26 August 1931

*

I should like to know (1) whether I can stay here even if no financial help comes forth.

Yes; since you are working for the Asram.

(2) whether it would be desirable to open up fresh correspondence with friends who may perhaps send something.

If you can get some help from your friends, it would be much better. You can understand that with 100 members almost, most of whom can contribute nothing to the expenses, the Asram needs all the help it can get for their and its maintenance.

14 December 1931

*

X wants to approach rich people for money, but does not know how to do it. He says that if people are approached directly, there may not be any response. His plan is to somehow make them take interest in our work so that they may themselves offer money without any asking. He asked me to take your advice in this matter.

If it is done in that way, X will have to wait for a result for years together. Even if they are interested, even if they are practising Yoga, people don't think of giving money unless they are asked, except a few who have a generous vital nature. It is all right to interest people in the work and the Yoga — but of itself that will be rarely sufficient, they must know that money is needed and

the idea of giving must be put into them.

13 March 1933

*

I have an earnest desire to be of some help to the Ashram but I don't know how. I know several rich people in Calcutta but I fail to make them respond generously to my request for donating to the Ashram. Please enable me to influence these people.

There are many men who are very pious, but they will give only to traditional institutions, temples, dharamshalas etc. Unless they are convinced, interested or somehow touched, they may not be so ready to give to the Asram. But the attempt can always be made.

13 March 1933

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The vital forces who hold the money power do not want to give or yield anything except for vital purposes, it is only under compulsion that they give for divine work.

15 May 1933

*

I am rather anxious to know the average monthly expenses of the Asram.

Over Rs. 6000 a month — including the building expenses and all other current expenditure. Of course buying of houses and such other non-current expenditure is not included. Each member of the Asram costs Rs. 50 a month, visitors about Rs. 40 (rent, electricity, food, servants etc. all included).

31 July 1933

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May I possibly know more about the financial condition of the Asram?

I think there is nothing more of importance, except that we need money for expansion and do not get it.

1 August 1933

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The expenses of each sadhak are reckoned as Rs. 50 a month — but it is not much use asking for that. The real need of money

here is of a bigger kind — for development of institutions in the Asram, a place for art, for music, a school for children, a place for science etc. Even the maintenance of the Asram needs larger sums, e.g. for houses to be bought instead of renting them at a heavy recurring expense.

Business

As usual you seem to have received some very fantastic and sensational reports about what you call the mill business. There was no “mill” in question, only X’s small foundry and Y’s equally small oil factory. X was in difficulties about her affair and came to the Mother for advice and offered to sell; the Mother was prepared to buy on reasonable or even on generous terms on certain conditions and use it, not on capitalistic lines or for any profit, but for certain work necessary to the Ashram, just as she uses the Atelier or the Bakery or the Building Department. The Ashram badly needs a foundry and the idea was to use Y’s machinery for making the soap necessary for the Ashram. The Mother told X that she was sending for Z and if he consented to run these two affairs, she might buy but not otherwise as the Mother herself had no time to look after these things. Z came but found the whole thing too small and not sufficient for the purpose or for some larger work he wanted to do; so X had to be told that nothing could be done. That is the whole affair. Where do you find anything here of capitalism and huge profits and slums and all the rest?

I may say however that I do not regard business as something evil or tainted, any more than it was so regarded in ancient spiritual India. If I did, I would not be able to receive money from A or from those of our disciples who in Bombay trade with East Africa; nor could we then encourage them to go on with their work but would have to tell them to throw it up and attend to their spiritual progress alone. How are we to reconcile A’s seeking after spiritual light and his mill? Ought I not to tell him to leave his mill to itself and to the devil and go into some Ashram to meditate? Even if I myself had

had the command to do business as I had the command to do politics I would have done it without the least spiritual or moral compunction. All depends on the spirit in which a thing is done, the principle on which it is built and use to which it is turned. I have done politics and the most violent kind of revolutionary politics, *ghoraṁ karma*, and I have supported war and sent men to it, even though politics is not always or often a very clean occupation nor can war be called a spiritual line of action. But Krishna calls upon Arjuna to carry on war of the most terrible kind and by his example encourage men to do every kind of human work, *sarvakarmāṇi*. Do you contend that Krishna was an unspiritual man and that his advice to Arjuna was mistaken or wrong in principle? Krishna goes farther and declares that a man by doing in the right way and in the right spirit the work dictated to him by his fundamental nature, temperament and capacity and according to his and its dharma can move towards the Divine. He validates the function and dharma of the Vaishya as well as of the Brahmin and Kshatriya. It is in his view quite possible for a man to do business and make money and earn profits and yet be a spiritual man, practise Yoga, have an inner life. The Gita is constantly justifying works as a means of spiritual salvation and enjoining a Yoga of works as well as of Bhakti and Knowledge. Krishna, however, superimposes a higher law also that work must be done without desire, without attachment to any fruit or reward, without any egoistic attitude or motive, as an offering or sacrifice to the Divine. This is the traditional Indian attitude towards these things, that all work can be done if it is done according to the dharma and, if it is rightly done, it does not prevent the approach to the Divine or the access to spiritual knowledge and the spiritual life.

There is of course also the ascetic ideal which is necessary for many and has its place in the spiritual order. I would myself say that no man can be spiritually complete if he cannot live ascetically or follow a life as bare as the barest anchorite's. Obviously, greed for wealth and money-making has to be absent from his nature as much as greed for food or any other greed and all attachment to these things must be renounced from his

consciousness. But I do not regard the ascetic way of living as indispensable to spiritual perfection or as identical with it. There is the way of spiritual self-mastery and the way of spiritual self-giving and surrender to the Divine, abandoning ego and desire even in the midst of action or of any kind of work or all kinds of work demanded from us by the Divine. If it were not so, there would not have been great spiritual men like Janaka or Vidura in India and even there would have been no Krishna or else Krishna would have been not the Lord of Brindavan and Mathura and Dwarka or a prince and warrior or the charioteer of Kurukshetra, but only one more great anchorite. The Indian scriptures and Indian tradition, in the Mahabharata and elsewhere, make room both for the spirituality of the renunciation of life and for the spiritual life of action. One cannot say that one only is the Indian tradition and that the acceptance of life and works of all kinds, *sarvakarmāṇi*, is un-Indian, European or Western and unspiritual.

Food

The food given from the Dining Room has the Mother's force behind it. It contains everything that is necessary to keep you in good health to do the sadhana. Keep that attitude and eat. Everything will go well.¹

circa 1927

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It is certainly not very Yogic to be so much harassed by the importunity of the palate. I notice that these petty desires, which plenty of people who are not Yogis at all nor aspirants for Yoga know how to put in their proper place, seem to take an inordinate importance in the consciousness of the sadhaks here — not all, certainly, but many. In this as in many other matters they do not seem to realise that, if you want to do Yoga, you must take more and more in all matters, small or great, the Yogic attitude. In our path that attitude is not one of forceful

¹ *This message has hung in the dining room of the Ashram for many years. — Ed.*

suppression, but of detachment and equality with regard to the objects of desire. Forceful suppression² stands on the same level as free indulgence; in both cases, the desire remains; in the one it is fed by indulgence, in the other it lies latent and exasperated by suppression. It is only when one stands back, separates oneself from the lower vital, refusing to regard its desires and clamours as one's own, and cultivates an entire equality and equanimity in the consciousness with respect to them that the lower vital itself becomes gradually purified and itself also calm and equal. Each wave of desire as it comes must be observed, as quietly and with as much unmoved detachment as you would observe something going on outside you, and must be allowed to pass, rejected from the consciousness, and the true movement, the true consciousness steadily put in its place.

But for that these things of eating and drinking must be put in their right place, which is a very small one. You say that many have left the Asram because they did not like the food. I do not know who are the many; certainly, those who came here for serious sadhana and left, went for much more grave reasons than that. But if any did go because of an offended palate, then certainly they were quite unfit for Yoga and this was not the place for them. For it means that a mutton chop or a tasty plate of fish was more important for them than the seeking of the Divine! It is not possible to do Yoga if values are so topsy-turvy in the consciousness. Apart from such extravagance, these things which ought to be only among the most minor values even in the human life, are promoted by many here to a rank they ought not to have.

At the same time it is better, if it is possible, to have well-cooked rather than badly-cooked food. The idea that the Mother wants tasteless food to be served because tasty food is bad for Yoga, is one of the many absurdities that seem so profusely current among the sadhaks in this Asram about her ways and motives. The Mother is obliged to arrange for neutral (plain and simple), not *tasteless* food, for the reason that any other course has been proved to be impracticable. There are ninety people

² Fasting comes under the head; it is of no use for this purpose. Abandon that idea altogether.

here, from different countries and provinces whose tastes are as the poles asunder. What is tasty food to the Gujarati is abomination to the Bengali and *vice versa*. The European cannot stand an avalanche of tamarind or chillies; the Andhra accustomed to a fiery diet would find French dishes tasteless. Experiments have been tried before you came, but they were disastrous in their results; a few enjoyed, the majority starved, and bad stomachs began to be the rule. On the other hand, neutral food can be eaten by all and does not injure the health, — that at least is what we have found, — even if it does not give any ecstasy to the palate.

Only, the food, if neutral, should not be tasteless. A certain amount of fluctuation is inevitable; no one can cook daily for 80 or 90 people and yet do always well. But if it is too much, a remedy is to be desired and the Mother is willing to consider any practicable and effective suggestion. If any practicable suggestion is made, it will be considered, — keeping always in view the difficulty I have pointed out of the ninety people and the three continents and half a dozen provinces that are represented here, apart from individual idiosyncracies and fancies, which, of course, it is absolutely impossible even to try to satisfy unless we want to land ourselves in chaos.

But what if people were to remember that they were here for Yoga, make that the salt and savour of their existence and acquire *samatā* of the palate! My experience is that if they did that, all the trouble would disappear and even the kitchen difficulties and the defects of the cooking would vanish. 28 August 1930

*

The Mother and I do not take meat or fish and it is not allowed to the members of the Asram. We cannot give the sanction you ask for. You should rise superior to passing ideas and desires; to allow them to take hold of the mind and push towards action is not good for your sadhana. 15 November 1932

*

I was invited by friends to go to a restaurant and accepted. Later I learned that you were opposed to the idea. What should

we — those of us who live outside the Ashram — do?

The Mother has made an arrangement with a view to all the occult forces and the best possible conditions for the protection of the sadhaks from certain forces of death and disease etc. It cannot work perfectly because the sadhaks themselves have not the right attitude towards food and kindred vital-physical things. But still there is a protection. If however the sadhaks go outside her formation, it must be on their own responsibility — the Mother does not and cannot sanction it. But this arrangement is for the Asram and not for those who are outside. 14 July 1933

*

Vegetarian food is a rule for the Asram, it is not incumbent on anyone outside. 30 October 1933

*

I was speaking to X about the dining hall, past and present. The rule *upabhogena na śāmyati* seems to be more solid looking at our experience here.

Much more solid. But people here do not seem to realise that desire consciousness and Yoga consciousness are two different things. They seem to want to make a happy amalgamation of the two. 1 June 1934

*

Mother meant that wrong food and the poisons created by wrong assimilation were a great obstacle to the prolongation of life. 14 January 1935

*

If animal food (e.g. eggs or soup) is absolutely for health in convalescence, it can be taken. But it is *samskāra* to suppose that vegetarian food makes people weak — if the food is nourishing and of the right kind, one can be as strong on vegetable food as on meat. 30 January 1935

*

If my physician asks me to take a diet of rice, meat, fish, eggs etc. (as I used to eat these before) and to cut off or dress my hair etc., should I follow his instructions?

You [*Sri Aurobindo's secretary*] can tell him that to live on fruits and milk, not to shave, not to take rice etc. is absolutely unnecessary for the sadhana. It does not depend on these things. In the Asram we take only milk and vegetarian diet, — but that rule is not imposed on those outside, it is left to their choice. If it is thought necessary for his health to take fish, meat or eggs he can do it.

Sadhana also does not depend on the dressing of hair or non-dressing. Sadhana in this Yoga at least is a matter of the inner consciousness mainly. One has to get over greed of food but not abandon food, to get over *tamas* and inertia, but not abandon all rest and sleep. To injure the body by excessive physical *tapasya* is forbidden in this Yoga. 29 October 1935

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It is not you but I who look on the Asram as a failure [*in regard to food*]. I was speaking not of you in person, but of the general spirit of the sadhaks with regard to food which is as unYogic as possible. In regard not only to food, but to personal comforts it differs in no way from that of ordinary men; it is an attitude of demand, claim and desire and of anger, vexation, grudging, complaint if they do not get their desire. They justify their position by saying that this is not an ascetic Yoga. But neither is it a Yoga of the satisfaction of desire. In this Yoga quite as much as any other, one must be free from servitude to the mind, the vital and the body. It is to be done by the growth of an inner consciousness free from demand and desire, not by the principle of an outer suppression of the objects of desire. It is to be done by having a perfect equality with regard to food as to other things. But this very few seem to recognise. 17 March 1936

*

I am afraid you have spoiled your stomach and made it nervous by irregular eating. The food of the Asram is quite plain and

healthy and unless one eats too much it ought not to give indigestion.

Exercise and Sports

Does exercise help to overcome inertia or physical tamas?

It is quite true that physical exercise is very necessary to keep off the tamas. I am glad you have begun it and I trust you will keep it up.

What should I do when I descend into physical tamas or when there is an attack of inertia?

Physical tamas in its roots can be removed only by the descent and the transformation, but physical exercise and regular activity of the body can always prevent a tamasic condition from prevailing in the body. 28 May 1934

*

I suppose walking is one of the best forms of exercise. Can I take it up with profit? Kindly let me know how many miles a day and with what speed I should do it.

Yes, certainly, it is very good. The amount and speed depend on your capacity and time. A brisk long walk is always very healthful. 23 October 1934

*

Certainly, Mother does not want only sportsmen in the Ashram: that would make it not an Ashram but a playground. The sports and physical exercises are primarily for the children of the school and they also do not play only but have to attend to their studies: incidentally, they have improved immensely in health and in discipline and conduct as one very valuable result. Secondarily, the younger sadhaks are allowed, not enjoined or even recommended, to join in these sports, but certainly they are not supposed to be sportsmen only: they have other and more important things to do. To be a sportsman must necessarily be

a voluntary choice and depends on one having the taste and inclination. There are plenty of people around the Mother herself, X for instance, who would never dream of frequenting the playground or engaging in sports and the Mother also would never think of asking them to do it. So equally she could not think of being displeased with you for shunning these delights. Some, of course, might ask why any sports at all in an Ashram which ought to be concerned only with meditation and inner experiences and the escape from life into the Brahman; but that applies only to the ordinary kind of Ashram to which we have got accustomed and this is not that orthodox kind of Ashram. It includes life in Yoga, and once we admit life, we can include anything that we find useful for life's ultimate and immediate purpose and not inconsistent with the works of the Spirit. After all, the orthodox Ashram came into being only after Brahman began to shun all connection with the world and the shadow of Buddhism stalked over all the land and Ashrams turned into monasteries. The old Ashrams were not entirely like that; the boys and young men who were brought up in them were trained in many things belonging to life; the son of Pururavas and Urvashie practised archery in the Ashram of a Rishi and became an expert bowman, and Karna became disciple of a great sage in order to acquire from him the use of powerful weapons. So there is no *a priori* ground why sports should be excluded from the life of an Ashram like ours where we are trying to equate life with the Spirit. Even table-tennis or football need not be rigorously excluded. But, putting all persiflage aside, my point is that to play or not to play is a matter of choice and inclination, and it would be absurd for Mother to be displeased with you any more than with X for not caring to be a sportsman. So you need not have any apprehension on this score; that the Mother should be displeased with you for that is quite impossible. So the idea that the Mother wanted to punish you for anything done or not done or that she wished to draw far away from you or to be cold and distant was a misinterpretation without any real foundation since you have given no ground for it and there was nothing farther from her mind. She has herself explained that it

was just the contrary that has been in her mind for some time past and it was an increasing kindness that was her feeling and intention. The only change she could expect from you was to grow in your psychic and spiritual endeavour and inner progress and in this you have not failed, quite the contrary. Apart from that, the notion that she could be displeased because you did not change according to this or that pattern and that we could ever dream of sending you away on any such account is a wild idea; it would be most arbitrary and unreasonable. 10 July 1948

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As to your idea about the sports, your idea that the Mother looks on you coldly because you are not capable of taking delight in sports, that is entirely without foundation. I must have told you already more than once that the Mother does not want anybody to take up the sports if he has no inclination or natural bent for them; to join or not to join must be quite voluntary and those who do not join are not cold-shouldered or looked down upon by her for that reason. It would be absurd for her to take that attitude: there are those who do her faithful service which she deeply appreciates and whom she regards with affection and confidence but who never go to the playground either because they have no turn for it or no time, — can you imagine that for that reason she will turn away from them and regard them with coldness? The Mother could never intend that sports should be the sole or the chief preoccupation of the inmates of the Ashram; even the children of the school for whose physical development these sports and athletic exercises are important and for whom they were originally instituted, have other things to do, their work, their studies and other occupations and amusements in which they are as interested as in these athletics. The idea that you should “throw up the sponge” because you do not succeed in sports or like them, is surely an extravagant imagination: there are other things more important, there are Yoga, spiritual progress, bhakti, devotion, service. . . .

I do not understand what you mean by my giving time to sport; I am not giving any time to it except that I have written at

the Mother's request an article for the first number of the *Bulletin* and another for the forthcoming number.³ It is the Mother who is doing all the rest of the work for the organisation of the sports and the *Bulletin* and that she must do, obviously, till it is sufficiently organised to go on of itself with only a general supervision from above and her actual presence once in the day. I put out my force to support her as in all the other work of the Ashram, but otherwise I am not giving any time for the sports.

4 March 1949

*

As for the rest, I think I need only repeat emphatically that there is no need for anyone to take up sports as indispensable for Yoga or for enjoying the Mother's affection and kindness. Yoga is its own object and has its own means and conditions; sport is something quite different as the Mother herself indicated to you through X when she said that the concentration practised on the playground was not meditation and was used for efficacy in the movements of the body and not for any purpose of Yoga.

14 March 1949

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Much less than half the Ashram, the majority of them boys and girls and children, have taken up sports; the rest have not been pressed to do so and there is no earthly reason why any pressure should be put upon you. The Mother has never intended to put any such pressure on you and if anybody has said that, there is no foundation whatever for what they have told you.

It is also not a fact that either the Mother or I are turning away from Yoga and intend to interest ourselves only in sport; we have no intention whatever of altering the fundamental character of the Ashram and replacing it by a sportive association. If we did that it would be a most idiotic act and if anybody should have told you anything like that, he must be off his head or in a temporary crisis of delirious enthusiasm for a very upside-down

³ See "Message" and "Perfection of the Body" in *Essays in Philosophy and Yoga*, volume 13 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 517–35. — Ed.

idea. The Mother told you very clearly once through X that what was being done in the playground was not meditation or a concentration for Yoga but only an ordinary concentration for the physical exercises alone. If she is busy with the organisation of these things — and it is not true that she is busy with that alone — it is in order to get finished with that as soon as possible after which it will go on of itself without her being at all engrossed or specially occupied by it, as is the case with other works of the Ashram. As for myself, it is surely absurd to think that I am neglecting meditation and Yoga and interested only in running, jumping and marching! There seem to have been strange misunderstandings about my second message in the *Bulletin*. In the first, I wrote about sports and their utility just as I have written on politics or social development or any other matter. In the second, I took up the question incidentally because people were expressing ignorance as to why the Ashram should concern itself with sports at all. I explained why it had been done and dealt with the more general question of how this and other human activities could be part of a search for a total perfection of all parts of the being including the body and more especially what would be the nature of the perfection of the body. I indicated clearly that only by Yoga could there come a supreme and total perfection of all the instruments of the Spirit and the ascent of the whole being to the highest level and a divine life on earth and the assumption of a divine body. I made it clear that by human and physical means such as sports only a limited and precarious human perfection could come. In all this there is nothing to justify the idea that sport could be a means for jumping into the Supermind or that the Supermind was going to descend into the playground and nowhere else and only those who are there will receive it; that would be a bad look-out for me as I would have no chance!

I write all this in the hope of clearing away all the strange misconceptions with which the air seems to have become thick and by some of which you may have been affected.

27 April 1949

I continue my letter.

I hope I have been able to persuade you that all these ideas about sport and the Yoga are misconceptions and that those who suggest them are wholly mistaken; certainly, we are not putting Yoga away or in the background and turning to sport as a substitute, such an idea is absurdly impossible. I hope also that you will accept from me and the Mother our firm asseveration that our love and affection for you are undiminished and that there has been no coldness on the Mother's part and no least diminution in my constant inner relation with you.

In view of what I have written, you ought to be able to see that your idea of our insistence on you to take up sport or to like it and accept it in any way has no foundation; you can be as averse to it as you choose, we do not mind that. I myself have never been a sportsman or, apart from a spectator's interest in cricket in England or a non-player member of the Baroda cricket club, taken up any physical games or athletics except some exercises learnt from Madrasi wrestlers in Baroda such as *dand-baithak*, and those I took up only to put some strength and vigour into a frail and weak though not unhealthy body, but I never attached any other importance or significance to these things and dropped the exercises when I thought they were no longer necessary. Certainly, neither the abstinence from athletics and physical games nor the taking up of those physical exercises have for me any relevance to Yoga. Neither your aversion to sport nor the liking of others for it makes either you or them more fit or more unfit for sadhana. So there is absolutely no reason why we should insist on your taking it up or why you should trouble your mind with the supposition that we want you to do it. You are surely quite free, as everybody is quite free, to take your own way in such matters.

28 April 1949

*

I then come to the main point, namely that the intention attributed to the Mother of concentrating permanently on sports and withdrawing from other things pertinent to sadhana and our spiritual endeavour is a legend and a myth and has no truth

in it. Except for the time given to her own physical exercise and, ordinarily, two hours or sometimes three in the evening on the playground, the Mother's whole day from early morning and a large part of the night also has always been devoted to her other occupations connected with her work and with the sadhana — not her own but that of the sadhaks, pranam, blessings, meditation and receiving the sadhaks on the staircase or elsewhere, sometimes for two hours at a time, and listening to what they have to say, questions about the sadhana, reports of their work or other matters, complaints, disputes, quarrels, all kinds of conferences about this or that to be decided or done, there is no end to the list: for the rest she had to attend to their letters, to reports about the material work of the Ashram and all its many departments, decisions on a hundred matters, correspondence and all sorts of things connected with contacts with the outside world including often serious troubles and difficulties and the settlement of matters of great importance. All this has certainly nothing to do with sports and she had little occasion to think of it at all apart from the short time in the evening. There was here no ground for the idea that she was neglecting the sadhaks or the sadhana or thinking of turning her mind solely or predominantly to sport and still less for imputing the same preoccupation to me. Only during the period before the first and second December this year the Mother had to give a great deal of time and concentration to the preparation of the events of those two days because she had decided on a big cultural programme, her own play "Vers l'Avenir", dances, recitation from *Savitri* and from the *Prayers and Meditations* for the 1st December and also a big and ambitious programme for the 2nd of sportive items and events. This meant a good deal more time for these purposes but not any interruption of her other occupations except for one or two of them just at the end of this period. There was surely no sufficient ground here either for drawing the conclusion that this was to be for the future a normal feature of her action or a permanent change in it or in the life of the Ashram ending in a complete withdrawal from spiritual life and an apotheosis of the deity of Sport. Those

who voiced this idea or declared that sport would henceforth be obligatory on all were indulging in fantasies that have no claim to credibility. As a matter of fact the period of tension is over and after the second December things have returned to normal or even to subnormal in the activities of the playground and as for the future you may recall the proverb that “once is not for ever”.

But there seems to be still a survival of the groundless idea that sportsmanship is obligatory henceforth on every sadhak and without it there is no chance of having the Mother’s attention or favour. It is therefore necessary for me to repeat with the utmost emphasis the statement I made long ago when this fable became current for a time along, I think, with the rumour that the Supermind was to descend on the playground and the people who happen to be there at the time and nowhere else and on nobody else — which would have meant that I for one would never have it!! I must repeat what I said then, that the Mother has never imposed or has any idea of imposing any such obligation and had no reason for doing so. The Mother does not want you or anybody else to take to sports if there is no inclination or turn towards it. There are any number of people who enjoy her highest favour, among them some of her best and most valued workers, some most near to her and cherished by her who do not even set foot on the playground. Nobody then could possibly lose her favour or her affection by refusing to take up sport or by a dislike of sport or a strong disinclination towards it: these things are a matter of idiosyncrasy and nothing else. The idea, whether advanced or not by someone claiming to have authority to voice the Mother’s intentions, that sport is now the most important thing with her and obligatory for sadhana is absurd in the extreme. Again, how could you ever imagine that the Mother or myself would turn you away or ask you to leave us for any reason, least of all for such a fantastic one as this? All this is indeed a maze of fantasies and you should drive them from your mind altogether. Your place in our hearts is permanent and your place near us must be that also; you should not allow anything to cloud that truth in your mind or

lend credence to anything or anyone telling you otherwise.

7 December 1949

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The realisation of the Divine is the one thing needful and the rest is desirable only in so far as it helps or leads towards that or when it is realised, extends and manifests the realisation. Manifestation and organisation of the whole life for the divine work, — first, the sadhana personal and collective necessary for the realisation and a common life of God-realised men, secondly, for help to the world to move towards that, and to live in the Light — is the whole meaning and purpose of my Yoga. But the realisation is the first need and it is that round which all the rest moves, for apart from it all the rest would have no meaning. Neither the Mother nor myself ever dreamed or could dream of putting anything else in its place or neglecting it for anything else. Most of the Mother's day is in fact given to helping the sadhaks in one way or another towards that end, most of the rest is occupied with work for the Ashram which cannot be neglected or allowed to collapse, for this too is work for the Divine. As for the gymnasium, the playground and the rest of it, the Mother has made it plain from the beginning what place she assigned to these things; she has never done anything so imbecile as to replace essential things by these accessories. 4 April 1950

Medical Treatment

The Mother's advice to X was given more for his period of stay in the Asram than as an absolute rule for the future. If a sadhak can call down the force to cure him without need of medical treatment, that is always the best, but it is not always possible, so long as the whole consciousness mental, vital, physical down to the most subconscious is not opened and awake. There is no harm in a Doctor who is a sadhak carrying on his profession and using his medical knowledge; but he should do it in reliance on the Divine Grace and the Divine Will; if he can get true inspirations to aid his science, so much the better. No doctor

can cure all cases; he has to do his best with the best result he can. 18 October 1932

*

I am afraid wherever you go there will be difficulties with your state of health — and nerves. There can be no proper provision for chronic illness in an asram. 9 May 1933

*

X had some trouble with his ear for some months; it went away only after a short “action” upon it. I do not believe in this action theory — at least here in the Ashram. I believe that if one compiled statistics of those who took an active approach and those who believed in *laissez faire*, there would be less disease and mortality in the latter group.

It depends on the person and the circumstances. “Action” of X’s kind can be taken — only it often means a struggle with the contrary forces; if the action is sufficient, it is all right, otherwise it takes time and trouble. What you say is also true. Not to be conscious about the body, not to be always thinking of it, just to say to one’s illness “Nonsense” and go about one’s business is often very effective. When we first had the Asram there was no Doctor, no dispensary, no medicines, people hardly got ill and, if any did, he simply got well again. If at any time somebody got dysentery, he just swallowed a lot of rice and whey and got well again. If he had fever he lay in bed a day or two and got up again. There was no serious illness and no lasting illness. Now with doctors and dispensaries and cupboards full of medicines illnesses gambol about like tigers in a jungle. But in those days people had a faith in the mind and even one might say in the body, “What is illness going to do to me here” and that attitude imposed its own result. यो यच्छ्रद्धः स एव सः 6 February 1935

*

I [*a non-practising doctor*] have been going through some medical books. After all these years I find it rather interesting — at least in terms of solid intellectual jugglery.

Very interesting no doubt — and under present circumstances inevitable. The disadvantage is that it creates an illness atmosphere. When we had no dispensary and no doctors (at least no practising doctors) we had no illnesses or only slight ones which walked off at once because they were not hospitably attended to when they came!

23 March 1935

*

X [*a doctor*] has as yet written nothing; he is waiting, I suppose, for the urine examination he wants to make. We can say nothing until he writes. We do not ourselves like anybody being under medical treatment except when it is necessary in moments of emergency. It seems to me if you get back your sleep and are able to get quiet in the nerves, the rest would set themselves right by the descent of peace and strength in the body.

5 April 1935

*

We cannot afford to turn the Asram into an institute for the care of chronic invalids. As it is I do not think there is any Asram in India where people could get the standard of life, conveniences and comforts they get here. Elsewhere X would be expected to lead an ascetic life, whether sick or well, and medical care and nursing would be conspicuous by their absence. However we are accustomed to people abusing us for what we do for them and accusing us for what we do not and cannot do.

29 November 1935

*

When illness and attacks come to the body, does that mean that the work of purification in the mind and vital is finished and that the body is being worked on?

I don't know whether it can be put like that. Illnesses and attacks on the body can come during the period of the vital purification. But it is true that when the mind and vital have progressed and the main action of the sadhana is in the physical, then attacks fall more on the body. In the early days of the Asram when the working was on the mind, nobody got ill except for

slight touches that cured without medicine; as the working came lower down, illness increased while now that the working is in the physical and subconscious, illness is almost constant in the Asram and sometimes of a serious or violent kind. 1 May 1936

*

If increase in the number of inmates stands in the way, if doctors and medicines shake the faith, well, it is very easy to solve both the problems, isn't it?

Increase of numbers brought in all sorts of influences that were not there in the smaller circle before. Doctors did not matter so long as faith was the main thing and a little treatment the help. But when faith went, illness increased and the doctor became not merely useful but indispensable. There was also the third cause, the descent into the physical consciousness with all its doubt, obscurity and resistance. To eliminate all that is no longer possible.

We have also an impression, considering the sudden wave of diseases, that it is due to some Force descending, so that wherever there is resistance there will be a rushing up.

What Force?

Since the action is to go on in the subconscious physical at present with the Supramental descending, all sorts of physical troubles will be rampant now.

Rubbish! You repeat always this imbecile absurdity that the Supramental is descending into the sadhaks — as X thought it had descended into him! The sadhaks are miles away from the Supramental. What I spoke of was not the descent of the Supramental into the sadhaks but into the earth consciousness. If the Supramental had descended into the sadhaks, there would not be all sorts of troubles, but all sorts of helps and progresses.

9 October 1936

*

I dreamt that the Mother was building a very big hospital.
Dream of a millennium in advance?

It would be more of a millennium if there were no need of a hospital at all and the doctors turned their injective prodding instruments into fountain-pens — provided of course they didn't make a misuse of the pens also. 19 July 1937

*

Why furious about injective instruments, sir? They are supposed to be very effective.

That doesn't make an increase of hospitals, illnesses and injections the ideal of a millennium.

But why the deuce are those instruments to be replaced by fountain-pens?

I was simply adapting the saying of Isaiah the prophet, "the swords will be turned into ploughshares", but the doctor's instrument is not big enough for a ploughshare, so I substituted fountain-pens. 20 July 1937

Death

I firmly believed that death was impossible here. Since the death of S⁴ shows that it is possible, it means that hostile forces have become victorious.

There have been three deaths since the Asram began — one, of a child in a house that was not then part of the Asram and the other of a visitor. This is the first death in the Asram itself.

You have said, I hear, that you have conquered Death, not only personally but for others as well.

I am unaware of having made any such statement. To whom did I make it? I have not said even that personally I have conquered

⁴ In this group of letters, "S" stands for a sadhak who died on 25 March 1935. — Ed.

it. All these are the usual Asram legends.

The conquest of Death would mean the conquest of illness and of the psychological and functional necessity of Death of the body — that is one of the ideals of the Yoga, but it can be accomplished only if and when the supramental has driven its roots into Matter. All that has been acting here up to now is an Overmind force which is getting gradually supramentalised in parts — the utmost that it can do in this respect is to keep death at a distance and that is what has been done. The absence of death in the Asram for so many years has been due to that. But it is not impossible — especially when death is accepted. In S's case there was a 5 percent chance of his survival on certain conditions, but he himself knew the difficulty in his case and had prepared himself for his departure from the body. 25 March 1935

*

Though you may say that death is possible because illness hasn't been conquered, I take it as a principle. X and myself firmly believe that those whom you have accepted are absolutely immune to death.

[*Underlining "accepted":*] Too comfortable a doctrine. It brings in a very tamasic syllogism. "I am accepted by Sri Aurobindo. I am sure of supramentality and immune from death. Therefore I need not do a damned thing. Supramentality will of itself grow in me and I am already immortal, so I have all time and eternity before me for it to happen — of itself." Like that, does it sound true? 27 March 1935

*

How is one to look at the death of D? Is it a defeat of the healing force or the absence of receptivity on her side?

It is a defeat of the healing force due to absence of receptivity in the body to the healing force.

I have heard that she had said she would not and could not give up her attachment to X. Perhaps her receptivity to Mother's

force was very little because of this attachment. But whether that should be so little as to lead to the dissolution of the physical is a question.

Perhaps the attachment to X was only one side of the same thing that stood in the way of her receiving.

Four or five days ago I felt so strongly that she was to die that I found it difficult to find arguments against it.

Yes, the chances were all along adverse and at the end it was a fight against the inevitable.

Today I had a peculiar feeling — that nothing dies and that there is nothing like death; that death is an illusion. “She is” — that’s the only fact.

Of course, that is the real fact — death is only a shedding of the body, not a cessation of the personal existence. A man is not dead because he goes into another country and changes his clothes to suit that climate.

4 October 1936

*

What you said about the immunity from death was quite correct. Immunity from death by anything but one’s own will to leave the body, immunity from illness are things that can be achieved only by a complete change of consciousness which each man has to develop in himself, — there can be no automatic immunity without that achievement. What had been established was a general protection and a defence against the entry of death while the sadhana was going on — but this could not be absolute. There had been since I came here in 1910 and since people began to gather afterwards, only two deaths on the outskirts of the Asram — one in X’s family (a baby) when they had not yet become resident sadhaks and one of Y’s mother who had come for a visit. But this comparative immunity was broken recently by S’s death and now by D’s. Formerly when there were only thirty or forty sadhaks and there was a universal faith, then without medicines or doctors the Asram was free from illness except for

passing colic etc. cured in a day or merely brief fevers. If one had fever, one simply lay down for a day or two and got up well. Now, since the numbers increased and the struggle with old Nature is on the material plane, illness has increased in frequency and violence. But if there were the same solid mass of living faith, the old relative immunity might still return. But absolute immunity can be only by sadhana. 5 October 1936

*

I have seen your letters to X and Y. Comparing the latter⁵ to the one you wrote to me after the death of S,⁶ I find a lot of difference. Your views have changed immensely. In your letter to me there was a very optimistic, almost a certain tone regarding the conquest of death. Now you say that death is possible because of the lack of “a solid mass of living faith”.

In what does this change of views consist? Did I say that nobody could die in the Asram? If so, I must have been intoxicated or passing through a temporary aberration.

As for the conquest of death, it is only one of the sequelae of supramentalisation — and I am not aware that I have forsworn my views about the supramental descent. But I never said or thought that the supramental descent would automatically make everybody immortal. The supramental descent can only make the best conditions for anybody who can open to it then or thereafter attaining to the supramental consciousness and its consequences. But it would not dispense with the necessity of sadhana. If it did, the logical consequence would be that the whole earth, men, dogs and worms, would suddenly wake up to find themselves supramental. There would be no need of an Asram or of Yoga.

But my letters to X and Y had nothing to do with the conquest of death — they had to do with the conditions of the sadhana in the Asram. Surely I never wrote that death and illness could not happen in the Asram which was the point Y was

⁵ *The letter of 5 October 1936 on pages 790–91. — Ed.*

⁶ *The letter of 25 March 1935 on pages 788–89. — Ed.*

refuting and on which I confirmed him.

A “solid mass of living faith” [p. 791]! Surely that is a very Himalayan condition you impose. Do you expect old tottering Z to have that solid mass in his liquid body?

Z was not old and tottering when he came and if he had kept the living faith he would not have been tottering now.

Or do you hope that by his sadhana he will have the conquest?

That depends on whether he is still alive and not quite liquefied and able to open physically when the conditions change.

Your letter to Y has struck terror into many hearts, I am afraid, and henceforth we shall look upon death as quite a possibility, though not as common as it is outside.

The terror was there before. It came with the death of D and the madness of A and not as the result of my letter. It was rushing at the Mother from most of the sadhaks at Pranam every day.

The physical condition of many sadhaks and sadhikas is not cheering in the least —

Far from it.

You know best about the condition of their sadhana.

Very shaky, many of them.

However, it is my impression that you have changed your front.

It is not mine.

Formerly I thought you said — faith or no faith, sadhana or no sadhana, you were conquering death, disease, i.e. everything depended on your success; now it seems a lot depends on us poor folks, in this vital matter.

[*Underlining "this vital matter":*] Why vital? What is vital is the supramental change of consciousness — conquest of death is something minor and, as I have always said, the last physical result of it, not the first result of all or the most important — a thing to be added to complete the whole, not the one thing needed and essential. To put it first is to reverse all spiritual values — it would mean that the seeker was actuated not by any high spiritual aim but by a vital clinging to life or a selfish and timid seeking for the security of the body — such a spirit could not bring the supramental change.

Certainly, everything depends on my success. The only thing that could prevent it, so far as I can see, would be my own death or the Mother's. But did you imagine that that [*my success*] would mean the cessation of death on this planet, and that sadhana would cease to be necessary for anybody?

9 October 1936

*

What is the difference between a death in the Ashram and a death outside? Does one get more benefit in the form of development of the mental, vital etc. on their own planes so that one may get a better new birth?

I am not aware of any "development" of the mental etc. in their planes; the development takes place on earth. The mental and other planes are not evolutionary.

The one who dies here is assisted in his passage to the psychic world and helped in his future evolution towards the Divine.

14 December 1936

Miscellaneous Matters

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

Household Questions

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

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

As for tiffin baskets, if too many have to be carried, it becomes inconvenient for the Departments concerned — the Dining Room arrangements are framed to minimise the inconvenience and make service possible. A minimum number of exceptions can be made, but if everybody who asks is allowed, there will be chaos.

The door is coming off because the sill has been removed, for it was only the sill that upheld it. X's dealings with the door *qua* door were scientifically impeccable — the only thing he forgot was that one of the uses of a door is that people (of various sizes) should pass through it. If you regard the door from the Russellian point of view as an external thing in which you must take pleasure for its own sake, then you will see that it was quite all right; it is only when you bring in irrelevant subjective considerations like people's demands on a door and the pain of stunned heads that objections can be made. However, in spite of philosophy, the Mother will speak to X in the morning and get him to do what has (practically, not philosophically) to be done. 1932

*

You had promised that the bullocks would not be beaten, but we have been told by more than one eye-witness that they have been beaten by yourself and the servants, and badly beaten too. We strongly disapprove, we are entirely against this kind of maltreatment. It is not by beating, but by patience and a persistent will without getting into a nervous irritation that work can be taught to animals. They are far more intelligent than you believe. 25 April 1932

*

You had better put up a notice on the slate that whoever has walked off in X's wooden sandals is asked to rectify the mistake by returning them to her. 31 October 1932

*

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

You have full authority to interview the bugs and demand an explanation of their conduct. Y and yourself are officially informed; you can demi-officially inform Z. 15 December 1932

*

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

5 January 1933

*

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

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

29 January 1934

*

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

Pondicherry houses do not leak! Well, that is news. Every house I have lived in leaked. The Govt. House leaks; the Govt. offices leak and our former Mahomedan landlord told me in the Govt. Secretariat they had to run about carrying tables and chairs to any place in the rooms which happened not to be wet. Z's roof made only a year ago leaks. Vigie House leaks and when A went to him Vigie showed him his own house leaking from many places and said "Every house here leaks! what do you expect?"

It was because of this character of Pondicherry houses that the Mother tried tectine and the first supply was very successful. The Meditation House roof made by *B* used to leak like a sieve till the tectine was put on, and for years we were dry. Only when new beams had to be put the tectine got displaced and there were cracks over the walls, then there was some leakage, but that was put right and the old tectine up till now has protected us. Unfortunately afterwards a bad supply of almost liquid tectine was sent which could not endure so well and it was this which was used on the NS [*New Secretariat*] which is leaking because of cracks in the cement, the usual malady of these terrace roofs. People ought to know the facts before making comments, as if it were only our tectined roofs that crack in Pondicherry — and so there must be something wrong with the Asram engineer's brain. It is rather surprising that *X* should speak like that, for he knows that it was Mother's personal order that the remnants of the old tectine should be used this time as there was an emergency. After all the tectine fad, if it is one, was not *Y*'s; it was the Mother who introduced the tectine as a trial (and, as I say, it was quite successful at first) along with other new things like solignum, Silexore. Some of them succeeded, some failed because of climatic conditions and the inexperience of the masons and painters; the tectine succeeded, then failed because in answer to a complaint that too much had to be used, the firm sent us a bad supply. In all this where is the fad and where is the fault of *Y* and where is the "terrible patience"? 20 October 1935

*

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

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

for the Golden Grape; you must use it only for the hair.

1 February 1936

*

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

24 May 1936

*

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

9 August 1936

*

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

Well, if it is done really according to old methods, an Ayurvedic building can stand many earthquakes. I remember at the time of the Bengal earthquake all the new buildings in the place where the Provincial Conference was held went down but an old house of the Raja of the place was the sole thing that survived unmoved

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

*

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

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

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

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

*

X and I receive one blade between us every two months. As it does not last us for two months, would it be possible to have one blade each every month?

Do you send the blade for sharpening to the Atelier? If not, it will soon get blunt and useless. If it is sharpened, it can last for months.

26 September 1938

*

We shall get the dhotis in January, I hope.

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

The Behaviour of Ashramites

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

10 August 1932

*

It appears that there are complaints against you from all sides that you are quarrelling with the servants, upsetting the work,

putting others to inconvenience in order to put your own convenience and arrange things according to your own fancy. This kind of selfishness and quarrelsomeness will not do. You have to consider the convenience of others before yours — especially as you have been given the management of the house. A manager has to consider the convenience of others first and his own last.

5 March 1933

*

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

All these clashes which arise whenever you mix with X come from his weakness and yours. I have not imposed on you any rule of not meeting with him; but I have advised you not to give any field for the weakness which you yourself have admitted and which is evidently there in you. Both you and X are to me disciples and I have to deal with each in the way best for him or her. I have not pressed on your weaknesses and defects, I have given you time to find them out yourself and overcome them, for that is the best way. I have pointed out his to X when he was ready to recognise them. It is a pity that you should clash whenever you meet together a little, but you know yourself why

it is so. So long as any vital weakness remains it cannot be otherwise. Certainly it cannot be remedied by “submitting to his demands and his ego”.

16 November 1935

*

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

28 November 1935

*

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

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

1 July 1936

*

I would like to add two questions:

1. Why do people in the Asram (budding supermen) get

furious against anything merely because it is new and unfamiliar? That is common and natural in animals; but human beings ought to have more open minds.

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

Avoiding Gossip

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

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

6 July 1933

*

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

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

10 May 1933

*

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

16 September 1936

*

The difficulty you experience exists because speech is a function which in the past has worked much more as an expression of the vital in man than of the mental will. Speech breaks out as the expression of the vital and its habits without caring to wait for the control of the mind; the tongue has been spoken of as the unruly member. In your case the difficulty has been increased

by the habit of talk about others, — gossip, to which your vital was very partial, so much that it cannot even yet give up the pleasure in it. It is therefore this tendency that must cease in the vital itself. Not to be under the control of the impulse to speech, to be able to do without it as a necessity and to speak only when one sees that it is right to do so and only what one sees to be right to say, is a very necessary part of Yogic self-control.

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

6 December 1936

Minor Medical Questions

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

2 February 1933

*

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

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

31 December 1934

*

Bug bites are not usually red — red swellings usually come from

some small flying insects which come into the rooms here and have a rather poisonous bite. 27 January 1934

*

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

*

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

26 July 1935

*

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

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

Cooking

A half-boiled egg means simply an egg boiled in water in the shell but for only a very short time — not for a longer time like the hard boiled egg — so that the yolk may remain liquid. It

is the simplest thing in the world to do. What you speak of is something different which is much more difficult.

*

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

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

1 April 1933

*

How to make potatoes and brinjals with sauce?

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

Add this sauce so made to the vegetable.

Mother, how to make onion sauce?

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

9 April 1933

Visiting the Ashram

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

¹ But here the flour must be thicker, less watery; the onions must be cut and prepared in the same way. *No saffron.*

to stay here, for the present, for four days. I request you to grant permission to attend Pranam and Soup. I also request you to allow food free, because as a sannyasi, I am unable to pay for it.

You should make the following points clear to the Swami.

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

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

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

This is what would have been explained to him already if there had been time for writing a letter before he came. As he came all that way, darshan was given to him; but this does not mean that his other requests can be granted. 21 February 1930

*

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

Reply to him that he can come to Pranam daily. I suppose the meals can be arranged somehow; you will ask Dyuman. He will have to pay as. 8 [*half a rupee*] a day. 5 November 1932

*

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

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

inside and upstairs in the Asram houses.

1933

*

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

31 December 1935

*

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

24 March 1937

Section Two

The Practice of Yoga in the Ashram and the Outside World

The Ashram and the Outside World

Pressure of the Environment

Is it possible that thoughts and suggestions come to sadhaks from people in the town who think about us in a critical or hostile way?

It is not only likely but certain that it happens. The pressure of the environment is always there and it becomes more effective for suggestion if there are any in the Asram itself who are accustomed to mix and receive freely the impacts of the people there.

20 May 1933

*

Some boys in the neighbourhood have become a systematic nuisance — jeering and throwing things — and something decisive needs to be done. I know you do not like violence, but how else can one deal with this sort of thing?

It is in the nature of things that the ignorance and smallness of these low minds should push them to these petty manifestations of malevolence and ill-will. The best thing is to remain unmoved. As for violence that is out of the question. No doubt you do not mind about yourself — but you represent the Asram and we must not give a handle to those in power — many of whom are not now favourable to us — to get a handle to do anything against the Asram. That is the primary consideration at the present moment and under the present conditions — which will not always remain as they are now.

21 December 1933

Contact with the Outer World

The protection and help will be there as they were here. You have only to keep yourself open to them and live inwardly seeking

to become more and more conscious so that you may feel the Divine Presence and Power.

As to the Bombay atmosphere, keep inwardly separate from it, even while mixing with others. See it as a thing outside and not belonging to the inner world in which you yourself live. If you can achieve this inward separateness, it will not be able to cloud you, whatever its daily pressure. 18 May 1930

*

It is not good that X [*a visitor*] should spend so much time with you. The Yogic atmosphere is not easy to keep when one is in constant contact with people who are living in another consciousness — it is only when one has got a complete foundation in the outer as well as the inner consciousness that one can do it completely in all surroundings. That is why the Mother has always insisted on keeping the Asram and the sadhaks as much as possible out of contact with the outer world. 9 August 1933

*

In *The Synthesis of Yoga* you write of the love of the Divine in all beings and the constant perception and acceptance of its workings in all things. If this is one of the ways of realising the Divine, why do we have to restrict our contact with people?

That is all right in the ordinary karmayoga which aims at union with the cosmic Spirit and stops short at the Overmind — but here a special work has to be done and a new realisation achieved for the earth and not for ourselves alone. It is necessary to stand apart from the rest of the world so as to separate ourselves from the ordinary consciousness in order to bring down a new one.

It is not that love for all is not part of the sadhana, but it has not to translate itself at once into a mixing with all — it can only express itself in a general and when need be dynamic universal goodwill, but for the rest it must find vent in this labour of bringing down the higher consciousness with all its effect for the earth. As for accepting the working of the Divine in all things that is necessary here too in the sense of seeing it even behind our struggles and difficulties, but not accepting the nature of man and the

world as it is — our aim is to move towards a more divine working which will replace what now is by a greater and happier manifestation. That too is a labour of divine Love. 22 October 1933

*

It seems as if we avoid the world much more than the Mayavadin sannyasis. Some of them start hospitals and schools and do famine relief; some even joined the Satyagraha Movement. Similarly it may be that one would find more true ahimsaks among fighters and warriors than among those who shout “non-violence”.

Very probably. You are right about the Mayavadins (I mean the present-day ones) and ourselves. The former Mayavadins were often more consistent, except that they wrote books and preached and disputed and founded institutions which seems a waste of energy if all is Maya. All the energy ought to have gone to getting out of Maya. As for our own position it is that ordinary life is Maya in this sense, not that it is an illusion, for it exists and is very real, but that it is an Ignorance, a thing founded on what is from the spiritual point of view a falsehood. So it is logical to avoid it or rather we are obliged to have some touch with it but we minimise that as much as possible except in so far as it is useful for our purpose. We have to turn life from falsehood into spiritual truth, from a life of ignorance into a life of spiritual knowledge. But until we have succeeded in doing that for ourselves, it is better to keep apart from the life of Ignorance of the world — otherwise our little slowly growing light is likely to be submerged in the seas of darkness all around it. Even as it is, the endeavour is difficult enough — it would be tenfold more difficult if there were no isolation. 20 June 1935

Work Outside and as Part of Sadhana

In work done outside, the ego remains often concealed and satisfies itself without being detected — but when there is the pressure of sadhana, it is obliged to show itself: then what has to be done is to reject it and free oneself and make the object of the work the Divine alone.

Yoga Centres and Movements

Centres

We have the idea of concentrating our activities and joining ourselves more closely to the Pondicherry Ashram by starting a lodge someplace in Gujarat where we can meet at least once a month.

No “Lodge” or formal society; these methods are not suitable for this sadhana. If they like to meet or meditate together of their own accord and without starting any fixed association or propaganda, that is another matter.

*

You might write to Rangpur (to X or Y—the one who wrote about the friction with Z, I don’t remember which it was) that it is not at all clear from his letter or A’s why this friction should at all have taken place. Each has the right to go on his own way according to his lights and there should be no sectarian spirit. This does not mean that one should allow several different influences at the same time; for that only brings confusion. Those who take this Yoga must follow only the path which leads to the supramental realisation and accept no other influence than that of myself and the Mother, otherwise they will not go in a straight line to the goal but are likely to be confused or divided, to wander into circuits or bypaths and lose the guidance. But they need not try to oppose the convictions of others, who are not following this way but another. Religions quarrel and collide with each other, but we are not creating a religion, we are following a path of spiritual realisation, into which those only need come who are drawn to it and have the call.

4 January 1932

*

Write to X that it was his own mistake. He must not mix up the things of Yoga with activities that have nothing to do with Yoga. What have the coming in front of the psychic being and the supramental to do with the founding of a school Samiti, a magazine and the rest of it? These are ordinary outward activities. The psychic being and the supramental are matters of a profound and difficult Yoga. These terms ought not to be cheapened by being tacked on to these small superficial things.

No doubt all activities can be carried on with a spiritual consciousness, but it is the Yogi alone who can do that. To invite people who have no spirituality in them and are no Yogis to get the psychic being in front and aspire to the supramental has no meaning whatever and is merely a mental propaganda which is unrealisable and hopelessly out of place.

16 May 1933

*

Should not the Sadhanbari be regarded as the seed-type of an Asram in the making? The question arises from the fact that there is a tendency in almost all here at the Sadhanbari — and in others in Chittagong at large — to think that it (the Sadhanbari) is merely a resting-place — a temporary foothold — and that the sooner one leaves for the Yogasram at Pondicherry the better. What really is the immediate and ultimate use of mofussil centres?

It is quite a mistake to suppose that everybody has eventually to come and join the Pondicherry Asram. That is not the Mother's intention, nor is it physically possible. The work to be done is not supposed to be confined to Pondicherry.

On the other hand cannot this tangential turn of thought prove to be an index of aspiration to live physically near the Mother, which under certain conditions is productive of great results — results which cannot be achieved anywhere else?

Where that is necessary, it will be done — but it does not follow that everybody has to come and stay here permanently.

How can sadhaks profit psychically when they live spiritually in close contact with each other?

It depends on themselves. If they grow psychically and spiritually and live within and above, instead of in the mind and vital and body, then there can be a psychic and spiritual solidarity created useful for the divine work. At present that does not exist, except in future potentiality. 18 April 1935

*

For some time there have been a lot of clashes here in our centre. [*Details given.*] The other day X called me aside and told me that if people had no confidence in him, he would rather not associate with us, but remain alone. Most people here are against X, who is filled with self-praise, and always criticises the Sadhanbari.

There is absolutely no hope of mutual harmony and confidence in Chittagong and it is idle to talk of it when the hearts of the sadhaks are full of all kinds of egoism, mutual dislike, jealousy, rivalry, suspicion, fault-finding and all sorts of uncleanness. It is only through the psychic and in a psychic atmosphere that harmony can come; a sadhana based entirely on the vital ego cannot create it. X is right in drawing back and keeping to himself. When things have gone so far that the sadhaks of the Sadhanbari are forming visions of him as a dangerous devil, it is absurd to want to go on as if there were nothing.

Some people here feel that X has been bringing impurity of thought and action into our centre. I give you some examples. . . .

All these are simply self-created vital formations due to the atmosphere of suspicion and dislike which Y's campaign has created around X. In such an atmosphere it is not truth that manifests but the feelings of the vital that take form in shapes and images.

You may recall that you refused to let Z stay with X, as you thought it might not be good for Z's sadhana.

I can say nothing and am not willing to say anything in these matters. I discouraged X from allowing Z to stay with him because I did not think the results will be good in view of what had happened at Rangpur — that was the reason why X refused to lodge him without an express order from here. But, seeing the results of my intervention, I refuse to intervene in any other matter. The Chittagong sadhaks must themselves settle their own affairs. 30 October 1936

Association Not a Necessity

I am feeling the want of association with co-sadhaks here. I am trying to adapt myself to the new place but I do miss my friends, especially as I can't discuss spiritual matters with anyone here.

You must be able to stand alone with only the force of the Mother supporting you. The association should not be a necessity, but only instrumental for action. 8 September 1934

Group Meditations

(1) It is not advisable to sit with others; for if any force is brought down, it may very easily be a mixed force. The difficulties in his nature may be prematurely raised and he may add to them the difficulties of those with whom he sits.

(2) Indications given by letter may not be rightly grasped or rightly practised; even if mentally understood, they may not be very helpful. The important thing is to open to the Influence. That indeed was the reason why in the old systems personal initiation by the Guru was considered indispensable. The best thing will be for him to come here for a short time, say in November (the 24th) and receive the direct touch and influence.

(3) Meanwhile he can try to prepare himself by personal meditation if he likes. The method is to quiet the mind and,

in order to do so, to concentrate on an aspiration for faith in the Divine Power, peace and calm in the mind, single-minded sincerity in the heart, and a conscious opening to the Light and Truth and Power.

14 September 1928

*

An acquaintance has written a letter asking for the Mother's permission to join our group meditation here.

Is he practising Yoga — does he do meditation by himself? It would as a rule be better if people tried by themselves first and joined the collective meditation only when they had begun to have experiences or some kind of opening.

This is not an absolute rule, however. If the other sadhaks find no inconvenience, he may come as a trial and see if it helps him, and if the others find it does not disturb the harmony of the atmosphere or bring in any inertia, he can continue.

3 February 1932

*

You [*Sri Aurobindo's secretary*] can write conveying the permission to meditate with X and the others. You can also write briefly to her explaining the principle of this Yoga (its practice) which is to open oneself to the Divine Power which is always secretly there above, aspire and call down its peace, calm, purity, wideness into one's own consciousness and its working which will change the nature and fill it with a higher light and Ananda. One's own part is to so aspire and open oneself and to reject all that belongs to ego, desire and the lower nature.

21 December 1932

Group Movements

The Mother does not think that a group movement of that kind could be effective for the purpose or produce any serious impression on the welter of strong blind forces that are now at work in the world. It can only be a mental ripple on the surface like so many other mental idealistic efforts of the day. All these

suffer from the fundamental defect that they work within the existing plan of things with no superior force that can dominate their disharmonies or oblige them to transform themselves by any irresistible compulsion of Light from above. Even if the meditation of these groups became less mental, that defect would not disappear. Individuals among them might rise to the spiritual heights just above mind, others might be helped to rise nearer towards them; but nothing fundamental would change in the world as a whole.

The Mother does not think any intervention or farther organisation of these groups would be helpful. Publicity of the kind suggested would be disastrous, — it would be sure to lead to vulgarisation and corruption, what purity or virtue there is in the movement would disappear. It is better to let it go on in silence with the momentum you gave to it and observe where that leads it. If there are any elements of utility in it for future work, those will be taken up when the time comes; if not, it must be left to fade away of itself. But it should be in the quiet and silence you first assigned to it — not as a public movement, for then it would soon cease to be at all pure and genuine.

28 November 1936

Part Five

Mantras and Messages

Section One

Mantras

On Mantras

Mantras in the Integral Yoga

The idea of your friend that it is necessary to receive a mantra from here and for that he must come is altogether wrong. There is no mantra given in this Yoga. It is the opening of the consciousness to the Mother from within that is the true initiation and that can only come by aspiration and rejection of restlessness in the mind and vital. To come here is not the way to get it. Many come and get nothing or get their difficulties raised or even fall away from the Yoga. It is no use coming before one is ready, and he does not seem to be ready. Strong desire is not a proof of readiness. When he is inwardly ready, then there will be no difficulty about his coming.

*

As a rule the only mantra used in this sadhana is that of the Mother or of my name and the Mother. The concentration in the heart and the concentration in the head can both be used — each has its own result. The first opens up the psychic being and brings bhakti, love and union with the Mother, her presence within the heart and the action of her Force in the nature. The other opens the mind to self-realisation, to the consciousness of what is above mind, to the ascent of the consciousness out of the body and the descent of the higher consciousness into the body.

13 October 1934

*

OM is the mantra, the expressive sound-symbol of the Brahman Consciousness in its four domains from the Turiya to the external or material plane. The function of a mantra is to create vibrations in the inner consciousness that will prepare it for the realisation of what the mantra symbolises and is supposed

indeed to carry within itself. The mantra OM should therefore lead towards the opening of the consciousness to the sight and feeling of the One Consciousness in all material things, in the inner being and in the supraphysical worlds, in the causal plane above now superconscious to us and, finally, the supreme liberated transcendence above all cosmic existence. The last is usually the main preoccupation with those who use the mantra.

In this Yoga there is no fixed mantra, no stress is laid on mantras, although sadhaks can use one if they find it helpful or so long as they find it helpful. The stress is rather on an aspiration in the consciousness and a concentration of the mind, heart, will, all the being. If a mantra is found helpful for that, one uses it. OM if rightly used (not mechanically) might very well help the opening upwards and outwards (cosmic consciousness) as well as the descent.

16 October 1935

*

I humbly request Sri Aurobindo and you to send me some *mūla-mantra* which I can repeat in meditation and concentration and as *nāma-smaraṇa*. Coming from the Mother and Sri Aurobindo, it will have a potency to lead me quickly on the path.

We do not usually give any mantra. Those who repeat something in meditation call on the Mother.

27 June 1936

*

Is there any difference between the Force that helps when I call the Mother in sleep and the Force that comes when I repeat “Sri Aurobindo–Mira”?

There is not necessarily any difference of Force. Usually the Mother’s name has the full power in it; but in certain states of consciousness the double Name may have a special effect.

29 August 1936

*

I find no harm if I repeat the name of Sri Krishna, whose very

being has taken the form of our Lord Sri Aurobindo and his Parashakti, the Mother.

There is no harm in that; it is not incompatible or inconsistent with this Yoga.

Traditional Mantra Japa

In the Upanishads (Mandukya chiefly) the upasana of ॐ (OM) is recommended. It is said in the Pranava Upasana that the *praṇava deha* — or the *mantra deha* of *Praṇava deva* — comes successively into the *sthūla*, *sūkṣma* and *kāraṇa deha* of the sadhaka. It projects itself into the sadhaka first, then it engulfs him. It creates a divine rhythm and harmony and at last becomes one with every particle of his triple body (*sthūla*, *sūkṣma*, *kāraṇa*). Does this process include the transformation of the physical consciousness which Sri Aurobindo's yoga aspires to achieve? Or if it is different, in what way does it differ?

I do not believe a mantra can change the physical consciousness. What it does, if it is effective, is to open the consciousness and to bring into it the power of that which the Mantra represents.

*

It is said that Mantra Japa leads to a certain mechanisation of the sadhana, as the sadhaka becomes dependent on Nature to the extent that he has to awaken the Mantra in order to touch and identify himself with the Divinity. Is this charge against Japa true?

It depends on the way in which the japa is done.

If rightly done, the mantra is a means of opening to the light and knowledge etc. from above and it ceases as soon as that is done.

*

It is very good news that you got rid of the attack and it was the japa that helped you to do it. This and past experience also shows that if you can overcome the old association of the japa

with sterility and sorrow, it can do its natural function of creating the right consciousness — for that is what the japa is intended to do. It first changes the vibrations of the consciousness, brings into it the right state and the right responses and then brings in the power or the presence of the Deity. Several times before you wrote to me that by doing japa you got rid of the old impulse and recovered calm and the right turn of the consciousness and now it has helped you to get rid of the invasion of sorrow and despondency. Let us hope that this last will also soon lose its strength like the impulse and calm and serenity begin to establish itself in the whole nature.

8 October 1936

Use of a Mantra in Special Circumstances

This is not a case of ordinary madness, but, as your brother himself feels, an attack of evil forces. When the light descended into him, there was something in his brain that was not prepared or able to bear the descent and this gave the opportunity for the attack and the overthrow of the equilibrium.

It may be possible to set matters right without any personal contact. He should repeat as a *mantram* the words contained in the enclosed paper (which he should not reveal to others) after concentrating on the sign above it. He should repeat three times a day (the three Sandhyas), twelve times in all, and also whenever attacked.

Information should be sent from time to time about his condition.

Mantras Written by Sri Aurobindo

Sanskrit Mantras

ॐ आनन्दमयि चैतन्यमयि सत्यमयि परमे
OM anandamayi chaitanyemayi ~~parame~~

ॐ आनन्दमयि चैतन्यमयि सत्यमयि परमे

OM anandamayi chaitanyamayi [satyamayi parame]¹

circa 1927

*

¹ Sri Aurobindo wrote this mantra around 1927 as one of several miscellaneous notations connected with Record of Yoga. See Record of Yoga, volume 11 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, page 1352. Note that he did not complete the transliteration in Latin script. The text was first published as a message in November 1955. Still later the Mother completed the transliteration in her own hand; see the facsimile below. — Ed.

ॐ आनन्दमयि चैतन्यमयि सत्यमयि परमे
OM anandamayi chaitanyemayi
satyamayi parame

OM Tat Sat Jyoter Aravinda
 ॐ तत् सत् ज्योतिररविन्द

OM Satyam ^{Jnānam} Jyoter Aravinda
 ॐ सत्यं ^{ज्ञानं} ज्योतिररविन्द

OM Tat Sat Jyotir Aravinda

ॐ तत् सत् ज्योतिररविन्द

OM Satyam Jnānam Jyotir Aravinda

ॐ सत्यं ज्ञानं ज्योतिररविन्द

circa 1927

*

तत्सवितुर्वरं रूपं ज्योतिः परस्य
 धीमहि ।
 यन्नः सत्येन दीपयेत् ॥

तत्सवितुर्वरं रूपं ज्योतिः परस्य धीमहि ।
 यन्नः सत्येन दीपयेत् ॥

Let us meditate on the most auspicious (best) form of Savitri,
 on the Light of the Supreme which shall illumine us with the
 Truth. 19 March 1933

*

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय । तमसो
 मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्मांसमृतं
 गमय ॥ ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥
 तथास्तु

ॐ असतो मा सद्गमय ।
 तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय ।
 मृत्योर्मांसमृतं गमय ॥
 ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥²

तथास्तु

21 August 1933

² One of Sri Aurobindo's disciples wrote this quotation from the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (I.3.28) in his notebook. Below it Sri Aurobindo wrote तथास्तु (tathāstu): "So be it!" — Ed.

English Mantras*OM Sri Aurobindo Mira**Open my mind, my heart, my life
to your Light, your Love, your Power. In all
things may I see the Divine.*

In 1935 I asked for a mantra and you suggested that I could take any combination of your name with the Mother's and make of it a mantra. Accordingly I submitted the combination "OM Sri Mira Sri Arvindaya Namah" for your sanction, and you gave it. I have tried this combination for some time now, but I feel like asking for another combination of your names with some aspiration or prayer joined to them so that it might become a sort of constant aspiration or prayer in course of time, or at least so that it will demand some concentration and not become something mechanical. Besides, I feel that if you would kindly make a combination for me I shall have more faith in it.

I have written for you a brief prayer with the names in the form of a mantra. I hope it will help you to overcome your difficulty and get an inner foundation.

OM Sri Aurobindo Mira

Open my mind, my heart, my life
to your Light, your Love, your Power. In all
things may I see the Divine.

16 July 1938

*

I feel very grateful for the mantra and the prayer. Especially the last line of the prayer — "In all things may I see the Divine" — has made me very glad since it expresses my very own deepest aspiration to which I have been partial for many years. Have I to consider the names and the prayer as one mantra?

Yes.

18 July 1938

Let my Peace be always with you. Let
^{your} ~~the~~ mind be calm and open; ^{Let your} ~~the~~ vital nature
 be calm and ^{responsive} ~~open~~; let ^{your} ~~your~~ physical consciousness be
 a quiet and exact instrument, calm in
 action and in silence. Let there be ^{my} Light
^{Power and} and Peace upon ~~these~~ you; Let there be
^{Power and} ever Light and Peace.

Let my Peace be always with you. Let your mind be calm and open; let your vital nature be calm and responsive; let your physical consciousness be a quiet and exact instrument, calm in action and in silence. Let there be my Light and Power and Peace upon you; let there be ever Power and Light and Peace.

*

In the night as in the day be always
 with me.

In sleep as in waking let me feel in me
 always the reality of your presence.

Let it sustain and make to grow in me
 Truth, consciousness and bliss constantly and
 at all times.

In the night as in the day be always with me.

In sleep as in waking let me feel in me always the reality of your presence.

Let it sustain and make to grow in me Truth, consciousness and bliss constantly and at all times.

Section Two

Messages

Messages Written for Special Occasions

Darshan Messages

The Divine gives itself to those who give themselves without reserve and in all their parts to the Divine. For them the calm, the light, the power, the bliss, the freedom, the wideness, the heights of knowledge, the seas of Ananda. 15 August 1929

*

It is not by your mind that you can hope to understand the Divine and its action, but by the growth of the true and divine consciousness within you. If the Divine were to unveil and reveal itself in all its glory, the mind might feel a Presence, but it would not understand its action or its nature. It is in the measure of your own realisation and by the birth and growth of that greater consciousness in yourself that you will see the Divine and understand its action even behind its terrestrial disguises.

24 November 1929

*

To bring the Divine Love and Beauty and Ananda into the world is, indeed, the whole crown and essence of our Yoga. But it has always seemed to me impossible unless there comes as its support and foundation and guard the Divine Truth — what I call the Supramental — and its Divine Power.¹

15 August 1931

¹ *These two sentences are the opening of a letter written by Sri Aurobindo on 13 August 1931. Typed copies, individually signed by Sri Aurobindo, were distributed as “darshan messages” on 15 August 1931. — Ed.*

Birthday Messages for Disciples

For Duraiswami

Let the new birth become manifest in your heart and radiate in calm and joy and take up all the parts of your being, mind and vision and will and feeling and life and body. Let each date in your life be a date of its growth and greater completeness till all in you is the child of the Mother. Let the Light and Power and Presence envelop you and protect and cherish and foster, till all in your inner and outer existence is one movement and an expression of its peace and strength and Ananda.

23 January 1929

For Kantilal

Live always as if you were under the very eye of the Supreme and of the Divine Mother. Do nothing, try to think and feel nothing that would be unworthy of the Divine Presence.

16 April 1930

For K. Krishna Rao

Go below the surface of the consciousness deep within, for there you will find the soul's profound quietude, luminous silence, freedom and spiritual wideness, there the direct touch and presence of the Divine.

13 October 1938

For Madanlal

My blessings.

Efface the stamp of ego from the heart and let the love of the Mother take its place. Cast from the mind all insistence on your personal ideas and judgments, then you will have the wisdom to understand her. Let there be no obsession of self-will, ego-drive in the act, love of personal authority, attachment to personal preference, then the Mother's force will be able to act clearly in you and you will get the inexhaustible energy for which you ask and your service will be perfect.

27 November 1940

For Satyendra

A veil behind the heart, a lid over the mind divide us from the Divine. Love and devotion rend the veil, in the quietude of the mind the lid thins and vanishes. 9 September 1936

*

May the inner Sun tranquillise and illumine the mind and awaken fully the heart and guide it. 9 September 1937

*

In a quietude of the mind open to the presence of the Divine in your heart and everywhere; in a still mind and heart the Divine is seen like the sun in still water. 9 September 1938

*

Rise into the higher consciousness, let its light control and transform the nature. 9 September 1939

*

By the heart's self-giving the Presence and the Influence will be there even in the inconscience and prepare the nature for the true light and consciousness through the whole range of the being. 9 September 1940

*

Put stress always on the aspiration within; let that get depth and steadiness in the heart; the outer obstacles of mind and the vital will recede of themselves with the growth of the heart's love and aspiration. 9 September 1941

*

Keep the mind and heart open and turned inward and upward so that when the touch comes from within or the flow from above, you may be ready to receive it. 9 September 1942

*

To persevere in turning towards the Light is what is most demanded. The Light is nearer to us than we think and at any time its hour may come. 9 September 1943

*

To keep the soul ready for the Divine Grace so that it may be ready to receive it when it comes. 9 September 1944

*

A persistent will for the work to be done in us and in the world is what is most needed; there is a sure spiritual result, the growth of the consciousness and the soul's readiness for the touch of the Divine Light and Power. 9 September 1945

*

When the Light enters into the Inconscience which hedges in all our being and prevents or limits the manifestation of the true consciousness in us, when it inhibits the habits and recurrences and constant repetition of the same stimuli which besiege us and rise from the subconscious, then only can the nature be wholly free and respond only to the Truth from above.

9 September 1946

*

Clarity of knowledge and inner self-vision, subjugation of the ego, love, scrupulousness in selfless and dedicated works, are the four wheels of the chariot of Yoga. One who has them will progress safely on the path. 9 September 1947

For Kamala

In faith and confidence and joy on the quiet and sunlit path towards the home of Light and Ananda. 11 February 1936

*

My blessings on Kamala for the year of her life that begins today. 11 February 1938

*

My blessings on your birthday. May you grow in spirit with this new year of life. 11 February 1941

*

My blessings for the day and the year. Grow in faith, grow in light, grow in consciousness. 11 February 1942

*

My blessings for your birthday. May this year be a step forward in consciousness and towards union with the Divine. 11 February 1943

*

My blessings for the year. May it bring to you growth in consciousness towards the Divine. 11 February 1944

*

My blessings on your birthday. May this be a year of more and more progress both in your inner and your outer being. 11 February 1945

*

Fidelity, devotion, self-giving, selfless work and service, constant aspiration are the simplest and most effective means by which the soul can be made ready and fit to be in the abiding presence of the Divine. 11 February 1946

*

To light always and keep alight the psychic fire within, the fire of aspiration, devotion and self-giving — not to stifle it with the damp smouldering logs of vital desire and egoistic reactions. If that becomes permanent and continuous, then it will be easy to bring down the spiritual transformation. 11 February 1947

*

Devotion to the Divine, fidelity to his work and obedience to his will are the first supports of the Yoga. On these pillars all the rest can be supported. 11 February 1948

For Champaklal

Tranquillise and widen your consciousness; go deeper into your soul. 2 February 1940

*

A clarified consciousness with strength to reject all inconscience and receive all that comes from the Light, this should be the aim before you. 2 February 1941

*

Aspire always to grow more and more conscious so that all the small obstacles shall disappear from the physical consciousness and the obscurer parts of the vital nature. 2 February 1942

*

Keep yourself ready by faith and self-opening to receive the Light when it comes. 2 February 1943

*

Let the mind be quiet and receive the Light; let the vital be quiet and receive the Force that delivers. 2 February 1944

*

Let the year that is beginning mark a definitive stage in the growth of your psychic being and its power over your nature and your life. 2 February 1945

*

Continue to open yourself and the psychic consciousness will grow in you and the Light refine and illumine whatever is left of the shadows in the mind and vital being. 2 February 1946

*

An increasing advance on the road to the entire psychic change is what is most important in the sadhana, for that is the straight road to the spiritual transformation. Devotion, harmony

and scrupulousness in work, a growing inner perception and consciousness, more and more fading of the more vehement movements of the vital ego are among the more prominent landmarks on the road.

2 February 1947

*

Matter, blind to the Light, deaf to the call, the material consciousness and material life are the last and most obstinate refuge of the Inconscient and its resistance. There, the nearer the light, the higher it raises its wall of resistance. When that is overcome, the decisive transformation can have an open way.

2 February 1948

Prayers for a Sadhak

Deliver me from anger, ingratitude and foolish pride. Make me calm, humble and gentle. Let me feel your divine control in my work and in all my action.

5 November 1938

*

I pray to be purified from self-will and self-assertion so that I may become docile and obedient to the Mother and a fit instrument for her work, surrendered and guided by her Grace in all I do.

5 November 1942

*

May I henceforth with a firm determination cast away from me my faults and defects and may I do it with energy and perseverance till I succeed entirely. May I get rid of all arrogance, quarrelsomeness, self-esteem and vanity, disobedience and revolt against the Mother, hatred and rancour against others, violence of speech and conduct, falsehood, self-assertion and demand, discontent and grumbling. May I be friendly to all and without malice against anyone. May I become a true child of the Mother.

5 November 1943

Miscellaneous Messages

It is the lesson of life that always in this world everything fails a man — only the Divine does not fail him, if he turns entirely to the Divine. It is not because there is something bad in you that blows fall on you — blows fall on all human beings because they are full of desire for things that cannot last and they lose them or, even if they get, it brings disappointment and cannot satisfy them. To turn to the Divine is the only truth in life.

21 April 1933

*

You must make grow in you the peace that is born of the certitude of victory.

14 June 1933

*

Keep firm faith in the victory of the Light and face with calm equanimity the resistances of Matter and human personality to their own transformation.

21 December 1933

*

Our blessings are with you always. Persevere and have full confidence.

16 October 1934

*

I am about to complete one year of my stay here. The past year has been one of hard and painful struggle for me. I have not done much during the year but hope to do better in the next. And although my heart seems to have become a stranger to all higher and finer emotions I promise you this: that I shall endeavour with all the strength I can command to obey you.

Blessings for the new year. May all struggle cease and a quiet ascent begin.

11 February 1936

*

The time for your turning to the spiritual life depends upon your own aspiration. A sincere aspiration brings always its response, and if there is continuity in the will, the result cannot fail.

*

So the Light grows always. As for the shadow it is only a shadow and will disappear in the growing Light.

*

It is not a hope but a certitude that the complete transformation of the nature will take place.

*

Keep faith quietude openness to divine power. Ashirvada.

*Keep faith quietude openness to divine power.
Ashirvada.*

Note on the Texts

Note on the Texts

LETTERS ON HIMSELF AND THE ASHRAM consists of letters written by Sri Aurobindo between 1926 and 1950 in which he referred to his life and works, his sadhana or practice of yoga, and the sadhana of members of his ashram. The letters have been selected and arranged by the editors in four parts dealing with four broad subject areas: (1) Sri Aurobindo's outer life, his writings, his contemporaries, and contemporary events; (2) his inner life before and after his arrival in Pondicherry; (3) his role as a spiritual leader and guide; and (4) his ashram and the sadhana practised there. A fifth part contains mantras and messages that Sri Aurobindo wrote for the benefit of his disciples.

The title chosen for this volume might seem to suggest that Sri Aurobindo deliberately set out to write a large number of letters about his life. In fact, he rarely wrote about himself on his own initiative. He wrote many of the letters in the present volume in answer to questions about himself. He also occasionally referred to himself in passing to illustrate a point under discussion. He explained such references in a letter of 30 October 1935: "I can't write such things by themselves as an autobiographical essay — it is only if they turn up in the course of something that I can do so" (page 232).

The letters included in this volume have been selected from the large body of letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to his disciples and others between November 1926, when his ashram was founded, and November 1950, shortly before his passing. Letters from this corpus appear in seven volumes of *THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO*: *Letters on Poetry and Art* (Volume 27), *Letters on Yoga* (Volumes 28–31), *The Mother with Letters on the Mother* (Volume 32), and the present volume. The titles of these four works specify the nature of the letters included in each, but there is some overlap. For example, Part Four of the present volume contains many letters on yoga. These differ from those published in *Letters on Yoga* in that the ones published here are framed historically by events and conditions in the Sri Aurobindo

Ashram between November 1926 and November 1950. The questions provided along with some of the letters in this volume refer to some of these events and conditions.

Many of the letters in the present volume appeared earlier in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* (1953) and *On Himself: Compiled from Notes and Letters* (1972). Those books contained, along with letters from the 1926–1950 period, historical and biographical material such as Sri Aurobindo’s corrections of statements made by biographers, public messages, and letters from the years before 1927 to family members, colleagues, and others. These documents and early letters are now published in *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*, Volume 36 of THE COMPLETE WORKS.

The Writing of the Letters

Sri Aurobindo wrote most of the letters included in this volume to members of his ashram, the rest to correspondents living outside. For the history, purpose and nature of the correspondence, see pages 450 to 478.

Ashram members wrote to Sri Aurobindo in notebooks or on loose sheets of paper that were sent to him via an internal “post” once or twice a day. Letters from outside that Sri Aurobindo’s secretary thought he might like to see were sent at the same time. Correspondents wrote in English if they were able to. A good number, however, wrote in Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, or French, all of which Sri Aurobindo read fluently, or in other languages that were translated into English for him. Most letters were addressed to the Mother, even though most correspondents assumed that Sri Aurobindo would reply to them.

Sri Aurobindo generally replied on the sheets of paper (bound or loose) on which the correspondents wrote their comments or questions, writing below them or in the margin or between the lines. Sometimes, however, he wrote his answer on a separate, small sheet of “bloc-note” paper. In some cases he had his secretary prepare a typed copy of his letter, which he revised before it was sent. In other cases, particularly when the correspondent was living outside the Ashram, he addressed his reply not to the correspondent but to his secretary, who quoted,

paraphrased or translated Sri Aurobindo's reply and signed the letter himself. In such indirect replies, Sri Aurobindo often referred to himself in the third person.

While going through Sri Aurobindo's replies, the reader should keep in mind that each one was written to a specific person at a specific time, in specific circumstances and for a specific purpose. Each subject taken up was one that arose in regard to a particular correspondent's inner or outer needs, or in answer to a particular correspondent's questions. Sri Aurobindo varied the style and tone of his replies in accordance with his own relationship (or, in the case of people writing from outside, lack of relationship) with each correspondent. With those he was close to, he sometimes employed humour, irony or even sarcasm.

Although the letters were written to specific recipients, they contain much of general interest. This justifies their inclusion in a volume destined for the general public. But it is important for the reader to bear in mind some remarks that Sri Aurobindo made during the 1930s about the proper use of his letters:

I should like to say, in passing, that it is not always safe to apply practically to oneself what has been written for another. Each sadhak is a case by himself and one cannot always or often take a mental rule and apply it rigidly to all who are practising the Yoga. (Page 473)

It is not a fact that all I write is meant equally for everybody. That assumes that everybody is alike and there is no difference between sadhak and sadhak. If it were so everybody would advance alike and have the same experiences and take the same time to progress by the same steps and stages. It is not so at all. (Page 475)

Sri Aurobindo wrote all the letters included in this volume between November 1926 and November 1950, the great majority between 1931 and 1937. He sometimes dated his answers, but most of the dates given at the end of the letters in this volume are those of the letters or notebook entries to which he was replying.

The Typing and Revision of the Letters

Most of the shorter items in this volume, and many of the longer ones, were not typed or revised during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, and are reproduced here directly from his handwritten manuscripts. But a good number of the letters were, as mentioned above, typed for Sri Aurobindo and revised by him before sending. Other letters were typed by the recipients for their own personal use or for circulation within the Ashram. Circulation was at first restricted to members of the Ashram and others whom Sri Aurobindo had accepted as disciples (see pages 476–78). When letters were circulated, personal references were removed. Persons referred to were indicated by initials, or the letters X, Y, etc.¹ Copies of these typed letters were kept by Sri Aurobindo's secretaries and sometimes presented to him for revision. The typed copies were sometimes filled with "gross errors" (page 476). Sri Aurobindo corrected many of these errors while revising.

The typed copies sometimes also contained intentional textual alterations. Recipients of letters sometimes omitted passages that seemed to them to be of no general interest. In a few cases, recipients added words or phrases that they believed made Sri Aurobindo's intentions clearer. Some such alterations remained intact when the letters were revised.

Sri Aurobindo's revision amounted sometimes to a complete rewriting of the letter, sometimes to making minor changes here and there. He generally removed personal references if this had not already been done by the typist. He also, when necessary, rewrote the openings or other parts of the answers in order to free them from dependence on the correspondent's question. As a result, some letters now read more like brief essays than personal communications.

The Publication of the Letters

Around 1933, Sri Aurobindo's secretary began to compile selections of letters to be published in small books. A total of four such volumes came out during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime: *The Riddle of This World*

¹ This practice continues in the present volume. See pages 857–58 for details.

(1933), *Lights on Yoga* (1935), *Bases of Yoga* (1936), and *More Lights on Yoga* (1948). Sri Aurobindo revised the typescripts and proofs of most of these books before publication. During this revision, he continued the process of removing personal references. A letter he wrote in August 1937 alludes to this approach to the revision:

I had no idea of the book being published as a collection of personal letters—if that were done, they would have to be published whole as such without a word of alteration. I understood the book was meant like the others [*i.e.*, *like Bases of Yoga, etc.*] where only what was helpful for an understanding of things Yogic was kept with necessary alterations and modifications. . . . With that idea I have been not only omitting but recasting and adding freely. Otherwise as a book it would be too scrappy and random for public interest. In the other books things too personal were omitted—it seems to me the same rule must hold here—except very sparingly where unavoidable.

By the mid-1940s, a significant body of letters had been collected, typed and revised, and plans were made for the publication of a multi-volume collection of Sri Aurobindo's letters. At that time, typed or printed copies of letters, some revised, some not, were presented to Sri Aurobindo for approval or further revision. The resulting material was compiled by an editor in four volumes, which were published as *Letters of Sri Aurobindo* in 1947 (Series One), 1949 (Series Two and Three) and 1951 (Series Four). Most of the letters in Series One, Two and Four were later included in *On Yoga II* (1958) and *Letters on Yoga* (1970). Most of the letters in Series Three were later included in *Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art* (1972).

During the early 1950s, the principal editor of Sri Aurobindo's letters conceived and organised two volumes containing Sri Aurobindo's letters on the Mother and on himself. The first of these, *Letters of Sri Aurobindo on the Mother*, was published in 1951. The second, *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, was published two years later. The editor arranged the contents of *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* in three parts: (1) Sri Aurobindo on Himself: Notes and Letters on His Life; (2) Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother;

and (3) Sri Aurobindo on the Mother. The material comprising Parts Two and Three is published in volume 32 of THE COMPLETE WORKS, *The Mother with Letters on the Mother*. This material is discussed in the Note on the Texts of that volume.

The editor of *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* subdivided Part One into seven sections: (I) Life before Pondicherry; (II) Beginnings of Yoga; (III) His Path and Other Paths; (IV) Sadhana for the Earth-Consciousness; (V) The Master and the Guide; (VI) The Poet and the Critic; (VII) Reminiscences and Observations. More than half of Section I consisted of corrections of statements made in biographies and in newspaper articles, the rest of letters in which Sri Aurobindo spoke of his early life in passing or in answer to questions. Sections II–V consisted of letters or extracts of letters in which Sri Aurobindo spoke of his own practice of yoga, the path of yoga that he developed for others, and his work as a spiritual guide. Section VI consisted of letters on poetry. (In THE COMPLETE WORKS these and similar letters on poetry, literature and art are included in volume 27, *Letters on Poetry and Art*, and are discussed in the Note on the Texts of that volume.) Section VII consisted of miscellaneous letters in which Sri Aurobindo spoke of happenings in his past and made observations on various subjects.

The letters in *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother* were published along with edited versions of the correspondents' questions if these were available and the editor thought that they would help readers understand Sri Aurobindo's replies. The letters were preceded by editorial headings and followed by their dates, if known. The editor restored some personal references that Sri Aurobindo had omitted from collections of letters published during his lifetime, because the very purpose of the book was to present aspects of Sri Aurobindo's life.

In 1972, Parts One and Two of *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, both considerably enlarged, were published as *On Himself*.

The Scope and Contents of *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*

Between the publication of *On Himself* in 1972 and the launch of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO in 1995, a good deal of

material of a biographical and historical nature came to light. This necessitated the creation of two different volumes: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* and *Autobiographical Notes and Other Writings of Historical Interest*.² The editors placed material in one or the other volume according to the following scheme: *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* contains letters written between November 1926 and November 1950 that deal with any of the four subject areas listed in the first paragraph of this Note. *Autobiographical Notes* consists of various sorts of documentary material, including life sketches and corrections of statements made by biographers and others; letters written by Sri Aurobindo to family members, professional and political associates, newspaper editors, early disciples, and others before the founding of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926; some letters written after 1926 that form parts of series that began before 1926; letters to or for the attention of public figures, regardless of date; late letters on political questions, most of which were released for publication as messages; and public messages on current events or about Sri Aurobindo's ashram and method of yoga.

Letters on Himself and the Ashram includes most of the contents of Sections II, III, IV, V and VII of Part One of *On Himself*, as well as items in Section I that originated as letters and not as corrections. It also contains a fairly large number of letters that had earlier been included in *Letters on Yoga*, a few letters that had earlier been included in *Letters on the Mother*, and many items newly selected by the editors from the corpus of Sri Aurobindo's 1926–1950 letters.

In deciding whether a given letter (whether previously published or not) should go into *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* rather than *Letters on Yoga*, the editors considered whether the letter ought to be framed historically or not. They placed in *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* any letter the subject of which fell into one of the four subject areas listed in the first paragraph of this Note. In addition, they placed in this volume some letters that could not properly be understood without reference to the correspondents' questions. Many letters that

² Part One of *On Himself* (1972) comprised 439 text pages. *Autobiographical Notes* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram* comprise together 1398 (553 + 845) text pages. The new volumes thus contain over three times as much material as the older one.

appeared in the 1970 edition of *Letters on Yoga* without questions, including almost all the letters making up Part Two, Section IX of that book (“Sadhana in the Ashram and Outside”), have been shifted to Part Four of *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. The questions of the correspondents have been provided for many such letters.

When all the above is taken into consideration, it becomes clear that the present volume is a compilation and does not represent an organic division of Sri Aurobindo’s letters. It is however a lineal descendant of *Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother*, first published more than fifty years ago. It brings together in a single volume letters from the 1926–1950 corpus in which Sri Aurobindo referred directly or indirectly to his inner and outer life, his works, his contemporaries, and his ashram. These letters, together with the documents published in *Autobiographical Notes*, constitute nearly all the surviving biographical and historical source materials that Sri Aurobindo wrote.

The Selection, Arrangement and Editing of the Letters

What has been called the 1926–1950 corpus of Sri Aurobindo’s correspondence consists of tens of thousands of replies that he wrote to hundreds of correspondents. Most of the replies, however, went to a few dozen disciples, almost all of them resident members of his ashram. A smaller number of disciples, no more than a dozen, received more than half of the entire body of published letters. In compiling the volumes of Sri Aurobindo’s correspondence published in THE COMPLETE WORKS, the editors have gone through all known manuscripts, typed or photographic copies of manuscripts, and printed texts. From these sources they have selected those letters that seemed suitable for publication. This selection includes most letters consisting of more than a few words that deal with topics of general interest. The editorial staff produced electronic texts of all selected letters and checked them against all handwritten, typed and printed versions.

The selection and arrangement of the material in the book is the work of the editors. Whenever possible they retained the divisions and categories found in *On Himself*; however, the great increase in the number of items in the present volume obliged the editors to add new

parts, sections, chapters and groups. In a note of February 1936, Sri Aurobindo wrote that the placing of letters in group categories was possible in the case of “letters about sadhana”, which could “very easily fall under different heads”.

Letters on Himself and the Ashram consists of almost 1500 separate items, an “item” being defined as what is published between one heading or asterisk and another heading or asterisk. Many items correspond exactly to individual letters; a good number, however, consist of portions of single letters, or two or more letters or portions of letters that were joined together by earlier editors or typists and revised in this form by Sri Aurobindo. The editors of the present volume have sometimes reunited portions of letters that had been separated by previous editors. In some cases, however, they considered the separation justifiable and have retained it.

Whenever possible, letters by Sri Aurobindo are reproduced to their full extent. In some cases, however, the editors, following a pattern set by the editors of previous books, omitted portions of Sri Aurobindo’s letters that are of no general interest. A number of Sri Aurobindo’s letters begin with personal comments unrelated to the more substantial remarks that follow. The editors have left out many such personal openings. Sri Aurobindo often marked the transition from one part of a letter to another with a phrase such as “As to . . .”. Many such phrases now stand at the beginning of abbreviated letters.

In some cases the editors have published texts of a given letter in more than one volume of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO. Much of this doubling of letters occurs between *Letters on Yoga* and *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*. In many cases, the editors have placed Sri Aurobindo’s revised version of a letter in *Letters on Yoga* and retained the original handwritten version, along with the recipient’s question, in *Letters on Himself and the Ashram*.

As in previous collections of Sri Aurobindo’s letters, names of members of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and of disciples living outside the Ashram have been replaced by the letters X, Y, Z, etc. In any given letter, X stands for the first name replaced, Y for the second, Z for the third, A for the fourth, and so on. An X in a given letter has no necessary relation to an X in another letter. Names of Ashram members who were referred to by Sri Aurobindo not as sadhaks but as holders

of a certain position — notably Nolini Kanta Gupta in his position as Sri Aurobindo's secretary — are given in full, as are names of people who played a role in the history of the period.

The editors have included the questions to which Sri Aurobindo replied, or the portions of the correspondents' letters on which he commented, whenever these are available and helpful for understanding his replies or comments. As a rule, only as much of a correspondent's letter has been given as is needed in order to understand the response. In some cases the questions have been lightly revised for the sake of clarity. Mistakes of grammar, spelling and punctuation due to some correspondents' imperfect grasp of English have been corrected. Questions written in languages other than English have been translated. When the question is not available, only Sri Aurobindo's reply is printed.

Readers should note that Sri Aurobindo almost always spelled the word "Asram" without an "h", though some of his correspondents wrote "Ashram". Both spellings have been reproduced here following the manuscripts. By the late 1940s, when "Ashram" had become the standard spelling in the Ashram's publications, Sri Aurobindo was no longer writing letters himself but dictating them to a disciple, who tended to write "Ashram". This spelling thus occurs in letters of the last period, as well as in headings and other editorial matter throughout the book.