

LIGHT
AND
LAUGHTER

Some Talks at Pondicherry

Amal Kiran
and
Nirodbaran

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AMAL KIRAN
AND
NIRODBARAN

Second revised Edition
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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

The first edition of this book in May 1972 under the title *Some Talks at Pondicherry* proved a best-seller. It was so popular that it had soon to be translated into several Indian languages. The original English version was exhausted in a very short time. There has been a persistent demand for a re-issue.

While the first edition was brought out by a follower of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, who resided in Jaipur, the second comes from the Ashram itself with a new caption suggested by Amal Kiran. We are reproducing in it the introduction to the first — "A Few Words" by K.L. Gambhir — which provides in brief the background information needed by the reader as well as testifies to the happy spontaneous enthusiasm these Talks can evoke.

The second edition has been revised in a few places by both Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran. Besides making minor corrections the former has added some necessary matter to his sixth talk. He has emended in the interests of exactitude his account of a relative's dream of the Mother and has given a further statement by the Mother which had slipped his memory at the time he had reported an interview with her.

We are sure that *Light and Laughter* will receive a warm welcome not only in India but abroad for the sense it often gives of a deep sea sparkling with the noon-day sun.

A FEW WORDS

Amal Kiran (K.D. Sethna) and Nirodbaran (Dr.) are two veteran Sadhaks of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga. They joined the Sri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry more than four decades ago. They are associated intimately with the Ashram's activities and have had the privilege of close contact with their Gurus, Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. During the years 1970 and 1971, they gave a few talks at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry. These talks appeared in *Mother India*, a monthly magazine published by the Ashram. They are nine in number and are replete with reminiscences told in their authors' inimitable ways, with abundant splashes of wit and humour of the highest order. Being a subscriber of *Mother India*, I enjoyed them all immensely and read and re-read them, every time deriving fresh light and delight.

Some most abstruse aspects of the Integral Yoga have been explained by them in an astonishingly simple manner enabling even a novice like me in this subject to understand them to some extent. The essence of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has been brought out in these talks in a homely and charming way. If Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are Modern Avatars and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram a Modern Ashram, then these two Sadhaks can surely qualify as Modern Yogis!

I was seized by an urge to compile and publish their talks in the form of a book so that my friends and others interested could also read them and share my feelings of uplift and exhilaration. Amal Kiran and Nirodbaran have kindly allowed me to fulfil my urge. The result is in your hands. To derive benefit from the same is now left to the readers.

The Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, publishers of *Mother India*, has given its permission for the present publication.

The Mother has been graciously pleased to bless it.

My son, Kamal, readily accepted to see it through his press with a sense of dedication.

K. L. G.

CONTENTS

TALKS BY AMAL KIRAN

1

To the Students of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education

Talk One (August 26, 1970).....	1
Talk Two (August 28, 1970).....	17
Talk Three (February 24, 1971).....	32
Talk Four (February 27, 1971).....	45
Talk Five (March 3, 1971).....	59
Talk Six (October 20, 1971).....	72

2

To the Youth Camp

Talk Seven (October 9, 1971).....	96
-----------------------------------	----

TALKS BY NIRODBARAN

To the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

Talk One (June 12, 1971).....	103
SRI AUROBINDO — THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN	
Talk Two.....	114
SRI AUROBINDO — THE MODERN AVATAR	

TALKS BY AMAL KIRAN

TALK ONE

August 26, 1970

Introduction by Nirodbaran

Dear friends, I am in a dilemma. The speaker does not want me to introduce him, but some of the students do — and naturally the preference goes to the students. I hope he will have no objection if I address a few words, particularly to the younger generation who do not know much about him.

Well, he is our distinguished, (*Amal covers his ears — laughter*) renowned, celebrated Amal Kiran, poet, critic, philosopher, journalist, historian, etc., etc., whom, I am sure, you have seen hopping about with his stick in the Ashram (*laughter*) most conspicuously, and whom I have the privilege to count as a cherished friend. He can talk Relativity with an Einsteinian like Jugal, he can talk politics and communism with my colleague Manoj Das, he can talk history with our Sisir, and certainly he can perorate on philosophy with Arindam and Kireet, and even with Dr. Agarwal he can hold his own (*laughter*) — and with me on Supermind. (*laughter*) The other day my friend Champaklal remarked, “When these two persons get together they start talking about the Supermind as though they have put the Supermind into their pockets!” (*laughter*) Well, that is the position. In short, our guest is a versatile genius. Still he said he felt shy to address you: that is why I make this introduction — so that the younger generation may know something of his versatility and that my words may help in breaking his nervousness. Geniuses are always a bit shy; only, I wonder how with so much knowledge packed in his brain the Supermind will find room in it! (*laughter*)

Now, the particular subject — I won't take much time (*laughter*) — I want him to speak about is his association with Sri Aurobindo on which surely he can dwell at great length. Out of a few of us on whom Sri Aurobindo bestowed special attention in the field of poetry, three survive here today: one, Amal himself; two,

myself; three, Nishikanta's self. And the Master has left us. But, before leaving, he commanded: "Stick on!" And my two friends are sticking on literally and I am sticking on psychologically — though all with different movements. Amal has made his movement anapaestic (three-stepped), mine is iambic (two-stepped), Nishikanta's a jumble of both, depending on his inner and outer condition. Also, before leaving, Sri Aurobindo saw to it that, among those he had initiated into poetry with so much special care, one of us at least would be able to follow the path he has opened and I must say that my friend Amal has admirably fitted himself to that task, and is capable too of taking us along if we cling to his numerous appendages. I hope you understand what I mean. Then I can say without fear of contradiction that he is the best exegete of Sri Aurobindo's poetry, just as Nolini is the best exponent of Sri Aurobindo's yoga. I can go further and claim that in the vast field of English and European poetry Amal can stand on a par, not only in India but everywhere, with the best of critics.

Well, my friends, this is no mean achievement for our yoga. There are many other things I could say about him, but I should stop because otherwise it would be my talk and not his. (*laughter*)

Talk by Amal Kiran

By not announcing any subject on our Centre's notice-board, Nirodbaran left me in a quandary. Now, by presenting me as a universal genius and implying on my part a mastery of a great number of subjects, he has again put me in a quandary — as to the direction from which to approach the subject he has proposed in his Introduction. But the gist of his long speech — which is to be followed by my little talk (*laughter*) — is that I should make wonderful revelations. Well, then, I shall start by being startling!

Let me whisper into your ears at the top of my voice an unbelievable secret. It is this: twice in *Savitri*, which is a legend and a symbol, Sri Aurobindo has referred to the present speaker, symbolically, although the speaker is very far yet from being legendary. (*laughter*) The first reference runs:

*But Mind, a glorious traveller in the sky,
Walks lamely on the earth with footsteps slow.*

Surely the person intended is unmistakable. (*laughter*) The lines indicate an inequality between the intellectual aspiration and the physical achievement. Not that the possibility of physical achievement is denied, but what is implied is that the glorious sky-traveller puts up a pretty poor show on the world-stage. The second reference is also more or less like the first, not very complimentary but on the other hand not altogether unappreciative and after all to be mentioned in *Savitri* in any way, however veiled or even unrecognisable, is itself a compliment. (*laughter*) The second reference goes:

*A limping Yes through the aeons journeys still
Accompanied by an eternal No.*

Lest you should misunderstand, I must hurry to say that if the “limping Yes” is Amal Kiran, the “eternal No” accompanying him is not his wife! (*laughter*) I may admit that my wife does have a strong restraining influence on many of my extravagances and recklessnesses; but here I take Sri Aurobindo to be speaking of two sides of a movement within one single person — yes, a person single, even if married! (*laughter*) The lameness mentioned here is also no denial of the possibility of reaching the Divine Goal. In fact the possibility of arrival is more emphasised. By the word “Yes” coupled with the word “limping”, some sort of positive statement is made. But the central difficulty of one who limps upon earth is also brought out. There is all the time some kind of arresting of the onward journey — a negation which keeps on delaying the movement which goes forward, however haltingly. And so I understand here not only a limping but also a stumbling and falling: the “eternal No” involves, in this universe of discourse — or shall I say, discord? — a stumble and a fall often and often.

Indeed my life has been a series of fallings, physical and spiritual — and perhaps some gossipers may add, moral. (*laughter*) However, one has to make the best of one’s situation, and so even in the pre-Ashram days I looked out for some word of wisdom to throw light on my rather deplorable state. I followed Dr. Johnson’s advice:

*Let observation with extensive view
Survey mankind from China to Peru.*

And luckily at the very beginning of my survey — in China itself — I found the word of wisdom. It came from the sage Confucius. I would rather be a disciple of Lao-Tse than a Confucian, which is perhaps the Chinese for confusion. (*laughter*) Anyway, here Confucius was quite clear and not in the least confused. His aphorism read: "Our greatest glory lies not in never falling but in rising every time we fall." So this became my life's motto before I reached Pondicherry. After my arrival here, I let Confucius himself drop (*laughter*) and naturally looked for something in *Savitri*. There I found Sri Aurobindo saying that it is not easy for us to remain perched on the heights for long. He writes that "a dull gravitation drags us down." Then he adds:

*This too the Supreme Diplomat can use:
He makes our fall a means for greater rise.*

Confucius's prose statement was static: he indicated only a recurrence of falling and rising. Sri Aurobindo's poetic pronouncement is dynamic: it points to a sequence in which a greater ascension comes on the heels of a descension to earth or even to hell.

In my early days too the Supreme Diplomat turned to advantage my habit of falling. I shall tell you in brief how. Well, I was educated from my very boyhood in the Western way. I was completely Westernised in thought. Indian philosophy and spirituality came to me at a late period and, before that, I had the typical Western-educated young man's attitude. I developed a keen analytic mind, an independence of temper, a certain intellectual pride and a strong individuality, an unbending individuality. Now, this kind of education does not easily lend itself to accepting supra-intellectual truths, still less to accepting humbly a spiritual Guru. But, thanks to my habit and practice of falling, without very much difficulty I was able to fall — at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. (*laughter*)

Now that I seem to have stumbled upon my real subject, though not in a swift manner but rather with "footsteps slow" according to the description Sri Aurobindo has given of me, I may begin at the very beginning of the quest which has led me here. I won't go into great detail, but I may sketch a general outline. As you know from what I have said, I was not by nature inclined to take to yoga. The first opening, as it were, came through a friend of mine who boasted that he had done some yogic exercises and acquired a

fund of inexhaustible energy. I, as a young man, was extremely struck with this. If yoga is a way of getting inexhaustible energy it is the right thing when you are young. (*laughter*) So I pleaded with him to let me see whatever he had read on the topic. He put into my hands a book of Vivekananda's. It was his treatment of Rajayoga, in which you have breathing exercises reduced to a minimum, but to a quite effective minimum, and several other things related to it. I tried to concentrate on merely the part dealing with a mode of harmonious breathing, which, according to my friend, could open you to a world of inexhaustible energy. But I could not stop there. I went on reading and found that there was more to Rajayoga than merely breathing exercises which make you super-young. (*laughter*) And so I was a little intrigued. Here was talk of the mind being stilled and ultimately passing into a higher state of consciousness, as a result of which you acquired various powers, not only having inexhaustible energy but becoming larger, becoming smaller, flying about and doing a lot of amazing things. Furthermore, just to read the book didn't seem enough. I wanted somebody, some example — greater than my friend — of the results of yoga. My friend, except for his unusual ability to be energetic, was a very poor specimen of a yogi. (*laughter*) Hence I started a search, looking out for people who might enlighten me.

The first fellow I caught hold of once when I had gone for a stroll to a fashionable place was a sannyasi in an ochre cloth. I shadowed him and came to the house where he was staying. I went up to him. He was surprised that a man very stylishly dressed should seek out one practically in rags. I asked him: "What have you to teach me?" He said: "Come inside and I shall give you my secret." So I went into his room. Then he said: "I am a worshipper of supernatural beings — gods and goddesses. You have to invoke them, and in order to do so you have to dig a big square hole in your room and light a big fire there." This was a very tough assignment, especially as I didn't have a room of my own, (*laughter*) and I was at the mercy of a very orthodox grandfather. (*laughter*) I just said: "All right. I'll see what I can do." — and left.

Soon after, I read in a newspaper that a Maharashtrian yogi had come to town. His picture was very attractive. He looked remarkably proportionate as if he had done Hathayoga to perfection, and they said he had various powers: he could take away

at will the light from an electric bulb and he could make his head as big as that (*gesture with two hands*) whenever he wanted — I had already a swelled head, (*laughter*) but this kind of power would be quite welcome to impress people all the more. I sought him out at the address given. When I went to the house, I found a small crowd gathered there and he was in an inside apartment. In the anteroom was his host, a burly old man who promptly stopped me and said: "Sit here." I inquired: "Why?" "Sit here first," he said peremptorily. "All right," I replied with as much dignity as I could muster, and sat down. His next order was: "Show me your right palm." I showed it to him. He exclaimed: "Look!" — and vigorously shook his head. "No chance," he continued. (*laughter*) "But why?" I asked. He answered: "You have got to have six children. (*laughter*) How can you ever become a yogi now? (*laughter*) Go back." I was a little taken aback at first; then I said: "But these six children are in the future, (*laughter*) I don't have them now, there is no prospect of my having them very soon either. (*laughter*) In the meantime please let me go in." Then he grunted: "Very well, go in" — as if meaning "Go and be damned."

I went in. Several people were sitting on the floor in various postures. The yogi himself was standing. He saw me and said: "Sit down." I obeyed him. He came near me and put a finger on my head. I felt a kind of electric current go up. (*laughter*) I said to myself, "Ah, there is something here! He has more power over electricity than merely taking off light from a bulb." He spoke again: "I shall teach you an exercise which you must do religiously every day. Lie in your bed and try to draw up your being, your whole consciousness, from every part of your body, beginning with your toes, right up to your head." This was very fascinating but seemed rather difficult. And I said: "Is this all that you can teach me?" He replied: "Yes, this is all. But when you sit on the top of your head (*laughter*) you will see a circle of light above. Try to jump into that light and you will be in Samadhi." I had read of Samadhi, the great yogic trance. I said to myself: "Very good. I must give it a trial." So I went home and started planning. At that time my brother and my sister were sharing a room with me; and everybody would have been frightened by my lying in bed every day trying to do this fabulous exercise. There was an empty room on a higher floor. I managed to coax my grandfather into giving it to me.

Day after day, I went on practising the exercise — and, though I was in a separate room, my grandfather got the wind of what was going on; and he was rather perturbed. Somebody said to him: “This fellow is trying to become a yogi.” Grandfather shouted: “Yogi? my God, that’s the worst thing possible!” (*laughter*) So he came to a certain decision, and that makes me go back to the period immediately after my B.A. When I passed my B.A. examination, I asked my grandfather to let me go to Oxford. He at once said: “Nothing doing. If you go to Oxford you will bring back an English wife.” (*laughter*) I told him: “I promise you that I will not bring back an English wife.” He smelled the rat all right (*laughter*) and said: “No, I am sorry you can’t go to England. Stick on here and study.” Well, I had to, because I was dependent on him at that time.... Now when he heard that I was trying to do yoga he came out with an inviting proposition. He very sweetly said: “Why don’t you go to England?” (*laughter*) Evidently, in his eyes an English wife was far preferable to the Divine Beloved! (*laughter*) Thus he went on tempting me time and again and I kept saying: “No, no, I’m not interested now. Leave me alone, leave me alone.” But the temptation was indeed great. How long would I be able to hold out? That exercise was going on every day without any result.

Then all of a sudden — I suppose because of the state of desperation, which always brings about a breakthrough — there came something. One night, as I was doing my yoga — trying to pull myself up hopelessly (*laughter*) to the top of my head — I forgot for a single second, in the midst of my straining upward, that I was doing anything, and in a flash I found that I was hovering above my body! It was at the same time a confusing and an exhilarating experience. I could see my body lying in bed, absolutely paralysed — as if dead — and I was in a subtle form up there in the air and perfectly conscious. It wasn’t as if I were dreaming. When you dream, things happen to you, you sort of glide willy-nilly upon the stream of events. Here I was in full possession of my faculties: I could think and I could will, and when I willed to move I just went floating to one end of the room and touched the wall and from there I bounded to the other end, touching the wall there. “Hello, this is something really strange,” I told myself. Then I began to argue with myself. That is a very bad habit. Arguing with others is bad enough, arguing with oneself is much worse. Here it proved disastrous, because as soon as I started to analyse

my condition — “How can I be up here when I am lying down there?” — it was immediately finished and with a rush of sudden warmth in the middle of my chest I felt I was back in my body. I opened my eyes but couldn’t move a single limb. I was still totally paralysed. Only, I could see my whole body lying like that. Then gradually the limbs came to life and I got up and said: “Now I have found something. Now in a most concrete way I know I am not merely my body. No materialist can ever argue and convince me that I am only this physical form and nothing more. There is another reality behind the whole show.” This brought a great deal of assurance that, after all, yoga was not bunk, there was genuine substance to it.

Then I commenced reading books and practising other things, going about all the time endeavouring to concentrate and lift my consciousness. But there was no repetition of that crucial experience. So I wasn’t quite ready to plunge into anything and the old temptation was still gleaming. However, one day I went to a theosophical meeting. The theosophists are supposed to be in touch with all kinds of subtle Masters. There I patiently heard what they spoke but it didn’t go home to me. Before I left, I was introduced to a South Indian who was a critic of painting. We became friends immediately and went out for a stroll. I spoke to him about myself and he kept asking me what I was looking for in life. I said: “I am interested in a host of subjects” — as my friend Nirod has told you, though I am not a master in each as he has said. (*laughter*) Then the art-critic remarked: “Well, for a chap like you who is quite a complexity, a knot of many strings, there is only one person who can help you and be your teacher.” I asked who, and he said: “Sri Aurobindo.” That was really revealing, coming from a theosophist. Theosophists would want to guide me to Master Moria or Master Kuthumi or some other Master out of the group which has completely monopolised the management of the universe, leaving poor Sri Aurobindo no room at all anywhere. (*laughter*)

The name “Sri Aurobindo” remained in my mind. After some months I came across a booklet. I don’t remember whose it was, but the writer spoke about Sri Aurobindo, and two things struck me. One was that he could appear at several places at the same time (*laughter*) — and the other that he could speak half a dozen languages: Greek and Latin were at his fingertips, he was a scholar in French, he knew German and Italian and, of course, English,

which went without saying. Out of the two extraordinary achievements, the second struck me more, because if a man was a yogi I thought he would naturally have a faculty like appearing at several places at the same time; but that a yogi who is usually a renouncer of the world should know so many languages and be a master in them — this impressed me as very super-yogic. (*laughter*) So I said: "Sri Aurobindo is my man." But that was all. The seed had fallen inside and I thought now and then of him, but he was still only a name and my search still went on. It led me to diverse places.

The most unexpected was a shop! One day I went to Bombay's popular Crawford Market to buy a pair of shoes. People tell me I need a new pair even now pretty badly, but I undoubtedly did at that time and I bought it. The shoes were put in a box, and the box wrapped in a piece of newspaper. I carried the packet home. No sooner did I come home than I unwrapped my new possessions, and the moment I did so the sheet of newspaper fell back in front of me and I saw in a big headline: "The Ashram of Aurobindo Ghose." Somebody had been to the Ashram and written about it. At once I fell upon the article, read it most avidly and at the end of it I exclaimed: "I am going there! My mind is made up at last and I have found my goal, or at least the path to my goal." And ultimately I came here, wearing the same shoes, which became the shoes of a real pilgrim!

Now you know how I ended up here. But I did not have much of an idea of what whole-time yoga could be like, much less that the "integral yoga" was entirely new. Though in that article some indications had been given, I couldn't quite understand them. But I did feel that the life here was the sort of life I should like to lead — in which all the faculties were given a full flowering and a free field. They were not suppressed and you didn't have just to shoot up into the circumambient gas!

When I arrived,¹ I first went to Purani's room because I had written to Sri Aurobindo for permission to come and Purani had replied to me on his behalf. His field was Gujarat and I was from Bombay. Now he had sent somebody to receive me at the station: it was Pujalal. He came and met me and took me to Purani. At that time the Mother used to take a walk early in the morning on

¹ For accuracy's sake I may mention that I did not arrive alone. But that part of the story would have taken me rather off the track. So I did not bring it in.

the terrace above her own room. I had reached Purani's room just when she had come up. From a northern window, I could see her. I said: "She is very beautiful!" She was at a considerable distance and it was my first glimpse of her, but the impression of beauty was very definite. She walked for a while and went down. And I stayed on in Pondicherry.

The Mother had engaged for me a house just opposite the Ashram: it was the house on Rue François Martin, in which Vasudha has been staying for nearly four decades. I had the entire place for Rs.12 a month! (*laughter*) In those days the room where Kamala now stays was the Mother's store-room; and she used to come from her room every now and then to her store-room across the open passage on the first floor, and I used to see her from one of my windows. It went on like that and then I asked for an interview. She gave it to me. She sat on one side of a table and I sat on the other. She asked me: "What have you come here for?" I made a dramatic sweeping gesture with one hand and replied: "Mother, I have seen everything of life; (*laughter*) now I want nothing except God." (*laughter*) She said: "Oh yes? How old are you?" I said I was 23. (*laughter*) "Oh, at 23 you have seen all of life? Don't be in such a hurry, you must take your time. Stay here, look about, see how things are, see if they suit you and then take a decision." I was much disappointed at this kind of cold water poured over my dramatic gesture. But I said: "All right." When I was talking with her I felt as if from her face and eyes some silver radiance were coming out. I am very critical and sceptical, you know, but I could not make out how this was happening — nor could I doubt that it was happening. Apart from this impression of light, there was another — of something out of ancient Egypt.

After our brief talk, the Mother got up. "I am going," she said and moved towards the door. "No, please wait," I urged. Then I started to indulge in my habit of falling. It was taking a new turn, for I was preparing to fall — as I have already told you — at her feet. She seemed a little surprised at a man clad in European clothes, with a necktie and so on, wanting to fall like that. Seeing the surprise on her face I made an explanation: "You see, Mother, we Indians always do this to our spiritual Masters." (*laughter*) I taught her what was the right thing to be done. Afterwards I learned that the Mother at that time couldn't move from one room to another without 20 people falling at her feet! (*laughter*) When

she found me determined she said: "All right" — and let me go down. Then she put her hand on my head and I got up. At home I thought I had done something very important: I had asserted my Indian-ness, I had shown my Indian-ness in spite of those clothes, and I was sure the Mother must have appreciated it. It seems the Mother went and told Sri Aurobindo: "There is a young man here who came to see me and taught me how Indians do pranam!" (*laughter*) Sri Aurobindo was much amused.

Days passed in the Ashram. Every night I used to go to the pier. We had the old pier then — a long thing a quarter mile into the sea. I would go there at about 11 p.m. and sit in the dimness at the furthest end and attempt to meditate. I was hoping to see visions, but I saw nothing except when I opened my eyes at times and found hideous faces of fishermen in front of mine, uncomfortably close. They were peering into my face, seeming to wonder who this lunatic could be, coming at so late an hour all alone, and sitting with shut eyes. I was a little frightened, but I kept my courage up and went on visiting the pier. Nothing very much happened by way of inner experience. Only once I felt as if the waves of the sea were washing into me and washing through me and out of me: I suppose it was some opening to the cosmic forces — though a poor and small opening — a very wishy-washy feeling, I may say. (*laughter*)

Then came my first Darshan Day. . . but no, I must tell you something else before that. I reached Pondicherry in December just before the year in which — somewhere in April — I was to sit for my M.A. examination — or rather I was to submit my thesis. I had the thesis drawn up in outline — in the form of chapter-headings. Nothing had yet been written out to develop the various themes. The two years after one's B.A. are the most enjoyable and one keeps everything troublesome to the dead last. My subject was: "The Philosophy of Art." Now I had to decide whether or not to start writing the thesis. If I didn't I wouldn't have any M.A. But how after coming here could I start again going round and round in the intellectual mill? I would never be able to take advantage of whatever new consciousness was there in the Ashram, a light beyond the mind. So I decided to let my M.A. go hang.... Nor did I know how long I would be staying at the Ashram. Every minute seemed precious. Some circumstance might cut across my stay.

I had come here without telling anybody in Bombay that my destination was Pondicherry. Else I would have been hindered. I shall now make a little digression. I am all the time digressing, but this is a bigger version. I had gone to Calcutta before turning south, and from Calcutta I went to Puri to see Jagannath's Chariot and Temple. I wanted to know what exactly traditional orthodox Hinduism was like. So I stayed in an Ashram in Puri and asked the man-in-charge whether I could go into the temple. He said: "No, you are not a Hindu." I said: "I am not a Hindu, I am a Parsi, but can't I go? Is there no way?" He answered: "Who says there is no way? Of course there is a way." "Then please tell me what to do." He said: "Just pull your shirt out of your pants, (*laughter*) make it hang over and you become a Hindu!" (*laughter*) I immediately did the conversion ceremony and went into the temple. Nobody stopped the newly made Hindu. I walked right in, saw the image of Jagannath — Lord of the World. He looked pretty frightening. I stood there and watched all the rituals going on. I visited also the place nearby where Chaitanya was supposed to have stood daily at the same spot so long that his footprints had got imbedded in the stone. They were rather outside footprints, I must say. (*laughter*) Going about, I tried to talk with whoever could talk in English and let me learn something of what traditional Hinduism meant. I had the feeling that there was something important at the heart of it, but, as things were, it didn't appeal to me a great deal. And it is from Puri that I came to Pondicherry.

Now in Pondicherry my first Darshan Day was approaching — it was the 21st of February, the Mother's birthday. People were not very encouraging at that time, they left me in doubt whether I would be able to attend the Darshan or not. Up to almost the last minute I didn't know my fate. I had to go and scrutinise the list of names put up. At last I found my name. "Good!" I said, "I am lucky to be allowed." Later I took my place in the queue. Of course in those days the queue was a small one: I think there were only 40 people staying in the Ashram and perhaps as many visitors.

The Darshan used to be in the long front room upstairs. I went in my turn — first, of course, to the Mother because Sri Aurobindo I didn't know, while the Mother I had seen again and again. I knelt down at her feet, she blessed me; then I went to Sri Aurobindo's feet and looked at him. My physical mind came right to the front:

“What sort of a person is Sri Aurobindo? How does he look?” I saw him sitting very grandly, with an aquiline nose, smallish eyes, fine moustaches and a thin beard.... I was examining him thoroughly. At length I made my pranam. He put both his hands on my head — that was his way — a most delightful way with his very soft palms. I took my leave, looking at him again. I observed to myself: “Quite an impressive Guru: (*laughter*) he is very fine in appearance, very grand — I think I can accept him!” (*laughter*)

The next day I met the Mother and asked her: “Mother, did Sri Aurobindo say anything about me?” (*laughter*) She answered: “Well, he just said that you had a good face.” (*laughter*) Here was a piquant situation. When I was examining him, he was examining me — on the same level, it seems. (*laughter*) He had come down, as it were, to meet my physical mind. I didn’t think the compliment he had paid me was very satisfying or quite sufficient. Only a good face? Then I asked myself: “What did you require of Sri Aurobindo? That he should have a good face for you to accept him. Why shouldn’t he accept you for your good face if that’s the sole qualification you have got?” (*laughter*)

Round about this time I began writing to Sri Aurobindo. It was the start of a process that went on and on for years — sometimes two or three letters a day! Since he replied to everything, we never felt he had gone into retirement. You see, unfortunately a year before I reached Pondicherry he had withdrawn for concentrated work: the 24th of November 1926 was almost a year earlier. I am a pretty ancient person, you will now understand! (*laughter*) After 1926 we could come into touch with Sri Aurobindo only by writing. I wrote to him my first letter informing him of all my difficulties: I could not do this and I could not do that — how the devil was I to do his yoga? He wrote to me a long letter, very encouraging and helpful. It gave me a lot of hope that I would be able to do everything and go through if I rejected the lower forces, aspired after the light and surrendered to the Divine: a steady will to change and conquer was all he considered necessary to get me through the hard period. Strangely, he dated his letter 1998 instead of 1928! (*laughter*) I was set wondering whether it would take me so long. (*laughter*) Would all the things he spoke of happen after 1998? That letter is really unique — postdated by seventy years! I don’t know what exactly it implies. At least on a quick computation the year 1998 falls within the 12-year cycle which is said to distinguish Sri Aurobindo’s life. In 1914 he met the

Mother and started the *Arya*. 1926 marked what is called the descent of the Overmind Consciousness into his physical being and into the Mother's. The Ashram too was officially started — under the Mother. Next, 1938 is the year — 12 years later — in which it seems a decisive step was taken to draw the Supermind into the outer physical consciousness, even if the step was partial and not continuous in its effect. Then comes 1950 — the year of the strategic self-sacrifice of Sri Aurobindo. The result of the sacrifice was not only that his body got filled with the Supramental Light as it lay in his bed as if in a deep trance for 5 days. Something also happened to the Mother. She has told me that as soon as Sri Aurobindo left his body what he had termed the Mind of Light got realised in her. And the Mind of Light she has described as the physical mind receiving the Supramental Light. So the individual fixation of the Supermind in a conscious part of the gross physical took place in 1950. The other years in the same series are 1962, 1974, 1986 — and 1998!

I went on writing to Sri Aurobindo, and all types of questions I used to put him, just as Nirod did, bombarding him with queries. Most of my questions were either philosophical or literary — because, though I had my own share of common difficulties, the real difficulty at the beginning was my Westernised intellect. Once I told the Mother that I found Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine* not sufficiently logical! (*laughter*) She opened wide her eyes — and said: "This is the first time anybody has said such a thing." As with the first pranam, she related the incident to Sri Aurobindo: "Look at what he says...." Sri Aurobindo, it seems, just nodded and smiled, as he often used to do. He was not given to being very voluble or demonstrative. The Mother, I am told, would go and tell him something or other quite animatedly and he would do nothing but gaze. Then she, thinking she had not made herself clear, would repeat the matter in other words. Then he would say: "I see." (*laughter*)

To come back to my own troubles: the intellect was a great bar. Though I put it off a little by not appearing for my M.A., I still couldn't do without it. And several times I have surprised the Mother by asking for an interview and rushing up to her with my difficulties. Once I said: "How can there be the One and at the same time the Many? Explain this to me. It's a terrible difficulty." And she said: "Read Sri Aurobindo more and more and you will find out how it is possible." Again, a very great difficulty

— the supreme crisis of my mental life — came when I began to think of the problem of Freewill: have I freewill or not? I read all the philosophers; they could not enlighten me. Even in Sri Aurobindo I could not fasten upon a clear-cut solution. I tossed arguments to and fro and I got so tangled up in my mind that all the day I was debating with myself. Nothing else mattered in the world. Finally I felt my head was so full of these attacks and counter-attacks that the only way to get rid of the commotion was to knock my head against the wall and break it! In that desperate condition I asked for an interview with the Mother. As usual, she said: "Yes, come." When I went, she asked: "Now what is the trouble?" I said: "Have I got freewill or have I not?" She began to speak. I at once interrupted: "Please don't argue with me, Mother. (*laughter*) I have argued enough with myself. Don't say anything because I am sure to say something to contradict you. Just tell me whether or not my will is free, to however small an extent. Don't say anything more than 'Yes' or 'No'." (*laughter*) She said: "Yes." I said: "That's enough." And I went away. Our Gurus are so patient with all our vagaries! I told myself: "I must not argue at all now. Once I argue I am lost. I must cling to this one word of the Mother's — until I get some light." And, for 12 years or so; I clung on to it. At the end of that period I felt I could see something, even in a philosophical way, and I wrote out a short essay: *Freewill in Sri Aurobindo's Vision*. I had the sense that now I had stated something philosophically cogent. I sent my compact piece to Sri Aurobindo and Nirod read it out to him. The comment simply swept me off my feet. He said — well, I should not quote it in public, but now that we are at it, now that I have talked so much of myself, I might as well put a crown to it all — he said: "The article is excellent. In fact it could not be bettered." That set me on top of the world, of course. (*laughter*)

There are a lot of other things to say, but we don't have the time. For, once I start, it would take another 40 minutes at least, and I don't have the heart to keep you waiting hungry so long. Let me therefore thank you and make a halt. I call it a halt because some time in the future I may resume. So thank you very much, and I suppose I must make a long speech thanking the Chairman in order to stop him from delivering another speech himself! (*laughter*)

Nirodbaran's Winding-up

Well, this is the preface; so the face you'll see again, he has promised! (*laughter*)

TALK TWO

August 29, 1970

During the last talk I realised that the subject was as much myself as Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, but I could not really help it and I hope you will forgive me if I repeat the folly. I even made the claim that in *Savitri* Sri Aurobindo had referred to me twice because twice he has mentioned lameness symbolically. I might take a cue from that procedure and complete the count by giving you some more lines from *Savitri*, which bring in the same characteristic. Only here the reference seems to be more general than particular. It is part of an occult vision of this enigmatic world of ours with all its play of contraries and its internal paradoxes. Sri Aurobindo figures it in the form of a strange bird which is hanging in the sky and disclosed to the eye of yogic vision. The lines run:

All things hang here between God's yes and no,...
The white head and black tail of the mystic drake,
The swift and the lame foot, wing strong, wing broken
Sustaining the body of the uncertain world,
A great surreal dragon in the skies.

It's a tremendous vision. As the lame foot is there you might hold the passage to be a covert allusion which could again be considered unmistakable. But the wingedness gives one pause, until one remembers my versifying tendencies and Plato's idea that a poet is a winged creature who has no power over himself but sort of lives in the air of the mind blown by various forces good or otherwise. In any case it is difficult to think how so grandiose and dreadful a figuration as the dragon could be applied to a person, whether he be a versifier or not! I myself wondered until I suddenly realised what a tremendous drag on the Mother and Sri Aurobindo I had been! (*laughter*)

In fact most of us are so. And in that way the whole passage refers to the generality of the sadhaks who have come here. And if the central point can be taken to be Amal, well, then I can say, "Am all!" (*laughter*) representing everyone, and of course the first

instinct of the poet would be to rhyme with "Am all!" "Damn all!" (*laughter*) But you cannot really damn all, all are lumped together and all are a huge brake, a massive retardation, on the yogic process carried on here with so much patience by our Gurus.

Last time I referred to my arrival in Pondicherry and my first Darshan. Perhaps it may be interesting to sketch the background of the life here before I came. Of course, it didn't make much difference, my coming here; the same thing went on, perhaps a little worse, but still it did. The background was just a year earlier — the descent of what Sri Aurobindo has called the Overmind. The Overmind, as you all know, is the world of the Great Gods and also the unity of these Gods in an all-covering Godhead. Sri Aurobindo says that so far all the spiritual inspirations have had their source in the Overmind, which is a plane of infinite diversity. Though always its basis is unity, the unity is not in the forefront, the diversity is the prominent feature. And hence there have been innumerable religions throughout history, each one making an absolute of one aspect or another of the Supreme Reality. The consciousness known as Krishna's is also said by Sri Aurobindo to have been — at least in its dynamic aspect — a manifestation of the Overmind in a concrete and personal way. So this occasion of the descent of the Overmind was, as it were, an extension of what Krishna had achieved — that is, the Overmind Consciousness coming down right to the most physical. We may question whether Krishna brought it down even to the external physical, because if we understood the story of his death symbolically we would see why he died by an arrow shot into his foot: the foot is the symbol of the most material consciousness. That part, we may conclude, had remained vulnerable. Anyway, here was a great occasion on which a power, not unheard-of but unrealised in its fullness, had come down in its fullness, though perhaps not in all its details yet. As a result of this the Ashram as such could be started. Sri Aurobindo was always reluctant to start an Ashram. When disciples wanted to come to him, either he asked them not to do so or it was as if he felt like running away from them! I remember Purani telling me that when, on his arrival here, he first fell at Sri Aurobindo's feet and then raised his head there was no Sri Aurobindo! (*laughter*) He had quietly vanished into his room. And you may have known from his letter to C. R. Das how very careful he was to secure his base, his ground, and be absolutely sure

before launching out on anything. So there had been no Ashram as such.

At that time people were staying in various houses and the Mother too was one of the residents, though a very looked-up-to resident. But on this day of the Overmind's descent Sri Aurobindo is said to have called the Mother to his side and made her the head of the Ashram, telling his would-be disciples that henceforth she would be the active Guru in front and he would be in the background. Now, I have learnt that in the months soon after this Overmind manifestation, there was an unimaginable play of extraordinary Force resulting in what you may call minute-to-minute miracles. Everything in our Ashram-life, I believe, is miraculous but it often wears the guise of a natural event. Only when you think of it deeply you see the miraculous power behind it. But here it was an open display of extraordinary phenomena, because at that time the process of sadhana, according to the information I have gathered, was to bring down the Great Gods of the Overmind into human receptacles. And when such a constant descent takes place all kinds of wonderful things occur. The only wonderful thing the Mother and Sri Aurobindo had not quite foreseen was that the human receptacles would digest the Gods (*laughter*) and think they were themselves the Gods instead of being their instruments! (*laughter*) And this bit of surprise, of course, could never be accepted.

But the most astonishing result of the descent was — as the Mother once related to me — that she got what is called the Word of Creation. Yes, the Word of Creation — just as the God Brahma is supposed to have created the universe by his Word. Now a Power came to the Mother to create as it were a new world by the mere Word: whatever she would say would come true. And a whole new World of Light was ready for precipitation: she had just to say the Word and that World would come and take possession of the earth. So she went to Sri Aurobindo and told him, "I have the Word of Creation. What is to be done?" It seems Sri Aurobindo, as usual, kept quiet for some time, did not give any kind of response immediately, but finally said, "This Word of Creation is of the Overmind and we do not want it. We want the Supermind." The Overmind is so marvellous that if it were established here nobody would look beyond it, nobody would want anything more. It is so dazzling that everybody would think the ultimate had come. Actually what the ultimate would have

brought was a new religion, because, as I have said, the Overmind is the source of all religions. This would have swamped all the existing religions, but it would itself have been still like them. And it would have stood in the way of greater manifestations. So the Mother says she went back to her room, concentrated for some hours and dissolved the whole World which was ready for precipitation. I think this was the greatest renunciation the earth's spiritual history knows of. A Power, such as had not come to anyone, had come and was ready to be put into effect; but, at a short "No" from Sri Aurobindo, the Mother blew it away as if it were a bagatelle!

And, once it was stopped, the entire process of sadhana seems to have undergone a change. Instead of bringing down the Great Gods, the effort now was to start from the bottom, not from the top — to dig, as it were, into the subconscious and gradually prepare the purification of the human consciousness and nature and bring out what Sri Aurobindo has called the psychic being — the Divine's representative in the very midst of the natural formation. Thus the evolutionary creature would develop slowly, gradually with a lot of hardships but still with a sure footing.

So that was the condition, the spiritual condition of the sadhana into which I happened to stumble.

At that time there were only about 40 people here — just a handful, and the life here was much more quiet, and people at least looked much more serious, and they were supposed to be concentrating much more on their inner development than on any outer action. I cannot give you an idea of what all the 40 people looked like or acted like, but I have memories of some of them who could not be bypassed. Of course, Nolini was there, quite a young man but more or less the same. He used to go about with his eyebrows high up as if in concentration on some Beyond, not paying much attention to outer things. When we were standing together and talking he would pass along, stand, look with a very interested air and say "What?" and just walk away. (*laughter*) We tried to give some answer but before that he was gone! (*laughter*) Amrita was there also — more impulsive, more easy to get at. He used to come to my room pretty often, I remember. In fact he learned typing on my typewriter, in my room. And he was in charge, at that time, of our milking department. (*laughter*) Cows were actually brought into the Ashram (*laughter*) — into the courtyard there, because when they were milked outside there

was a lot of dilution of the milk (*laughter*); so they had to keep a close watch; 2 or 3 cows were brought into the courtyard near the Reading Room, and Amrita would sit there, supposed to keep an eye on things. But unfortunately he had a companion — it was a man named Dara, now dead. You might have seen him, a huge man from Hyderabad, a very aristocratic Mohammedan. And he was an incurable chatterbox. (*laughter*) So all the time he was talking with Amrita and poor Amrita could hardly attend to what was going on with the milking. Once I happened to come into the courtyard and found Dara holding his hands up and saying something and Amrita listening to him very raptly and the milkman doing something hurriedly with two cans. It struck me afterwards that he must have been pouring water into the milk! (*laughter*) Indeed Dara was quite a character — a very extraordinary character with a lot of eccentricity. He was also a poet, of course: at that time poets were budding all over the place. But he was a very original kind of poet. His themes always used to be like how he sat in his canvas chair and the canvas tore apart. (*laughter*) Such exciting events became the subject matter of his poetry. On another occasion, as you might have heard, he exhausted his stock of tea, so he penned a furious poem to the Mother:

*Mother Almighty,
I have finished all my tea. (laughter)*

Among the others who were present, there was Champaklal, young but an old hand. He had come fairly early and he was one of the few, if not actually the only one, who from the beginning addressed the Mother as "Mother". Many were a little bit averse to accepting her; the chief argument was that she was not an Indian — how could there be a Divine Representation in a non-Indian? (*laughter*) All the Avatars had been Indians, so the Mother could not be an Avatar, she being French! But Champaklal had no such inhibition. And I believe Dyuman was there, too, though I am not very sure. He may have come a little later; at least he was later than Nolini, Amrita and Champaklal; but I think his devotional face was there when I arrived.¹ And on my arrival I found

¹ It is strange that in my talk I missed mentioning the one person who had impressed me the most by his dynamic character and who, as the first talk recounted, had been the Ashramite I came the earliest to know, next to Pujalal who had appeared at the station to receive me: I mean Purani. Another sadhak I should have men-

two Americans in the Ashram. They were the first Westerners to reach the Ashram in its initial period of 1926–27. Pavitra¹ was already present, he had been settled for a few years, and we had an English lady named Datta — Miss Hodgeson — who had been associated with the Mother in France. But after the early settlement these two Americans were the first to come from the West. They were an old couple, Mr. and Mrs. Mcpheeters — the man was named Vaun and the lady Janet, and they had come just a month or perhaps not even that long before I arrived. So they too were preparing for the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

I happened to be just behind them in the queue and I couldn't help overhearing their agitated conversation. It seemed a big problem had arisen at the last minute: to whom to bow first, the Mother or Sri Aurobindo? (*laughter*) Vaun told his wife: "If we bow to Sri Aurobindo first, the Mother will feel insulted; (*laughter*) if we bow to the Mother first, Sri Aurobindo will get offended. (*laughter*) So what should we do?" I too was very much intrigued by this almost insoluble problem! (*laughter*) But they had remarkable ingenuity. Their solution was: not to bow to either of them (*laughter*) — but to put their heads, one after the other, in the empty space between the two! (*laughter*) Of course they had the unique privilege of having blessings from both Gurus at once (*laughter*) but they missed the feet of either! For the likes of me it was no problem because Sri Aurobindo was quite new and unknown to us, while the Mother had become familiar; and while Sri Aurobindo was sitting very gravely the Mother was all smiles to set us at ease. (*laughter*) So we went straight to her, got soothed by her, gained some moral courage, then proceeded to Sri Aurobindo and looked at him. I told you last time how I had looked. (*laughter*)

Now to come back to the people, all — the undamned all who were there in the Ashram. Very soon after my coming Dilip Kumar Roy came with Sahana Devi. They came and settled down. And, soon after that, I saw the face of my friend Nirod. It was of course an unforgettable face. (*laughter*) I think he had come straight from England or *via* some place in Bengal, but he carried something of the air of England. (*laughter*) He had passed out as a doctor

tioned was the then librarian of the Ashram — Premanand — with whom I came to be associated very closely after a while. Both have passed away.

¹ Philippe Barbier Saint-Hilaire.

at Edinburgh. I saw him, we became friends and we have remained friends ever since. But when he came as a doctor he was not given doctoring work here. As far as I remember he was made the head of a timber godown! (*laughter*) All sorts of strange jobs were being given to people. Look at the first job I got. The Mother once told me, "I would like you to do some work." I said, "All right, I am prepared to do some work." Then she said, "Will you take charge of our stock of furniture?" (*laughter*) I said to myself, "By gosh! To manage furniture, it's something unthinkable!" (*laughter*) But I said to the Mother, "Very well, I'll take it up." It was really a stunning blow. But then I saw that it involved getting the Mother's signature on a chit every now and then. People would ask for a table, a chair or a rack or something and I would have to go to the Mother and get her signature. It was a great Grace that one could come in contact with her through such a job. There was no other job, I suppose, open at that time which could bring one in touch with her so much. And then I found that as I kept listing the tables and chairs and other uninteresting items I was full of happiness. I said, "Have I become so perverse as to derive pleasure from noting down chairs and cupboards and stools?" (*laughter*) But I realised that the Mother, when she gives any work, gives two things along with it: first, the Ananda of the thing because without that joy you couldn't carry on at all, and, secondly, the capacity — to some extent at least! I can tell you that I carried on this job of putting furniture into people's rooms and keeping an account, for about a year and a half, by which time I found it a pretty tough affair because things were not organised in those days as they are now. I had no servants under me, I had to hire the rickshaw-wallas from the street and tempt them to carry tables and chairs. Sometimes they would go on strike, asking for more payment, and I didn't know what to do. Occasionally I had to break the strike by showing them that I could shoulder furniture myself too. (*laughter*)

Then in the course of my duties I had my first serious fall — a physical fall — in Pondicherry. It was a toss on the road and my knee became swollen. Quite a big swelling it was. So naturally the question arose: "What to do about the furniture?" Well, Amrita was sent to me to break the sad news that now my job would be taken away from me. I was lying in bed and he came and very sweetly asked me how I was and all that. He was beating about the bush. (*laughter*) I knew why he had come. (*laughter*)

I said: "Amrita, please come out with it. If you have come to tell me that I shall be deprived of this job and lose it, please say it at once, because I will thank you most heartily." (*laughter*) Then of course he came out with it and carried the report to the Mother that Amal had received the news like a yogi! (*laughter*)

To return to my friend Nirod — it was after some time that he got the dispensary. I don't know whether he wanted it, or liked it or not, but he established his reputation as the frowning physician. (*laughter*) People used to come to him with a cold and he would stand and glare at them, and say, "What? you have a cold!" Poor people, they would simply shiver (*laughter*) and this had a very salutary effect because they thought that it was better not to fall ill than face the doctor's drastic disapproval of any kind of illness which would give him any botheration. (*laughter*) But he did his job all right, and every time he frightened off a patient he went to his room and started trying to write poetry (*laughter*) — because that, he thought, was his most important job. And, whether he succeeded as a doctor or not, as a poet he has eminently succeeded. Sri Aurobindo has really made him a poet.

The doctoring as well as the poetry was a bond between us, because my father had been a doctor and medicine ran in my blood. We used to discuss medical matters sometimes, but more often the problems and pains of poetry.

Now I must go on to recount my own hardships. Before I come to them I might tell you that I gave up the house in which I had been staying for Rs. 12 a month; the whole house where Vasudha has been staying was in my hands. And, by the way, Vasudha arrived here not long after me. She was a girl of 15. She is now among the oldest Sadhikas in the Ashram — oldest not in the sense that they are the most advanced in years but as being the only ones out of the early Sadhikas, who have stuck on somehow or other. As soon as I left that house she was installed there. I had made an appeal to the Mother, saying: "The house is too big for me. So many rooms, and I don't know what to do with them and every night I have to shut so many doors and windows, it's a job (*laughter*) really beyond me. Give me just one room with one window from which I can watch the stars." (*laughter*) The Mother said: "I'll see about it." Very soon after, I got the room where Purani had been staying some years. It is the room in the Dortoir Annexe just opposite Pranab's place — the corner room up there. Now Purani was promoted to a room within the Ashram compound

itself and I was put in his place — a promotion for me also. But it is interesting that it was the very room into which I had stepped first, because as soon as I came from the station Pujalal took me there. But this room had greater associations. It was the room where Sri Aurobindo had spent several years; so it was really a Godsend for me to live in it and what was most remarkable was that Sri Aurobindo had done his sadhana walking 6 to 8 hours a day in that room and the adjoining one leading to it. He had walked with such vigour that he had actually dug a path in the floor with his feet, and that path had been cemented over afterwards but could be seen clearly — from one end near the window to the other end — almost up to the small terrace on the south — this was Sri Aurobindo's Path to the Supermind. (*laughter*) O how many times I have tried to walk in his footsteps, (*laughter*) trying again and again to get some illumination! But I have a very sad fact to record: when I went back to Bombay the third time in the 10 years of my early stay here, and returned to this room, some fellow had got it into his head to renovate it and make it up-to-date. He had redone the whole floor, and Sri Aurobindo's Path to the Supermind was obliterated. I think it was one of the greatest pieces of vandalism that I can think of. The Path had been a veritable landmark; now there was a smooth red floor, which I think is there even today.

The trouble with me in those days was, as I have said in my first talk, that I was using my head too much. Of course there has always been a controversy down the ages among the philosophers and others whether the soul is in the head or in the heart. Man is called a mental being, a rational animal and hence most Western philosophers have believed that the characteristic human consciousness is up in the head. The heart has been often so capricious, so impulsive, so whimsical, so changing that people have not put much trust in it. There are four lines by a poet-lover which go:

*I put my hand upon my heart
And swore that we should never part.
I wonder what I would have said
If I had put it on my head! (*laughter*)*

But those who believe that their souls are somewhere higher betray their own cause if they are questioned suddenly. You ask a philosopher, "Who says that the soul is in the head?" He'll

immediately answer, "I", pressing his hand firmly on his chest and giving himself away. (*laughter*) However, we must observe that it is not in the emotional heart that the real soul resides. The emotional heart seems to be, by its very impulsiveness, a kind of representative of the real soul which also is impulsive, but in a deeper way — spontaneous with a truth-feeling, self-guided by a Light. So I had learnt during the early part of my stay here that we must have the opening of the inner heart. But how the devil was I to have an opening there? (*laughter*) It was beyond my understanding. Naturally I asked the Mother what I should do. She said, trying to make things as easy for me to understand as possible: "Think that there is an open book lying there." I was a little disappointed: "What, again books? (*laughter*) Books are what I want to get away from and the Mother is asking me to think of a book lying open even in my heart and to concentrate on its openness!" Still, I said I would try to do this — though it was not a very pleasant job. Then as I went on doing it day after day I began to get an unnatural pain in the chest, as if something were resisting there. We don't realise what a wall there is in that region. We think that everything comes out of the human heart so very easily; but everything doesn't come out from the soul which is in the deep heart behind. As soon as I shut my eyes and tried to concentrate, there was a pain. I told the Mother about it. She said, "Don't worry about it, it will be all right after a while." And it was all right, because something like the breaking down of a wall took place and I felt that I was very free, I mean not shut up and cramped in a narrow ego or individuality. The sensation was something indescribable.

Many people have tried to give an idea of what the soul or, as Sri Aurobindo puts it, the psychic being, is like. He has himself quoted Matthew Arnold's words — "sweetness and light" — to convey the characteristics of the psychic being. And indeed they are quite apt because that sort of thing you do feel — the sweetness in the experience is of a bliss which has no cause; a self-existent bliss is there. It is not dependent on persons, occasions, circumstances, objects. To be there, deep within, to feel oneself there is to be perennially, and I might even say unbearably, happy. The light also is present, because some kind of natural truth-feeling is experienced, which guides you all the time. That is the positive side of the psychic being. On the negative side, in telling you what one does not do when one has some sort of psychic opening, I may

hazard a punning paradox. First, I may say that one is not depressed, one does not bewail one's lot any more; secondly, one does not rebel, either against the Divine or against human beings. So I might state: "When you are psychic you neither sigh nor kick!" (*laughter*) That will perhaps sum up in a more intelligible formula this experience of the opening and the functioning of the deep heart.

But while talking about the guidance I must add that one has to be on one's guard against various kinds of voices which come from within. There are many parts of us which are occult and of whose existence we hardly know, and they come forward and give promptings, and often if the promptings suit us we think it is the soul talking. (*laughter*) One or two very striking instances I have come across here, of being completely misguided by the inner voice. There was a Telugu gentleman whom I had come to know because he and I used to eat opposite each other at a small table outside the Reading Room. We would bring our food from the Dining Room which was where Prithwi Singh stays now. This chap used to bring with him some ghee every time and pour it on all that he ate. When I look at people I always try to fix them in my mind by comparing them to some author or other. And this person looked like the famous novelist H. G. Wells. So I began to call him H. Ghee Wells! (*laughter*) Now, he was a man who used to be very sensitive and very impulsive. One evening he was found missing. And people wondered where he had gone. Those who were staying in the same house as he — that is, in Trésor House — came home at about 8 o'clock and heard shouts and screams. They didn't know from where the sounds came, they could only recognise the voice. They looked in every room but couldn't find him. Then at last they found him sitting at the bottom of a well (*laughter*) and howling, "Please take me out!" "Why the hell did you get in there?" "I heard Sri Aurobindo's command and jumped into the well." (*laughter*) It was indeed very creditable that he had obeyed immediately, but it wasn't Sri Aurobindo telling him. Though proverbially Truth is found at the bottom of a well, (*laughter*) it cannot be the Supramental Truth; this Truth is to be found somewhere high up. (*laughter*) They had to haul him up. You see, these voices are dangerous and one has to be vigilant. Also I might say that even spiritual experience can be quite dangerous. One instance comes to my mind, of a friend who began to have extraordinary experiences. He wrote to Sri Aurobindo about them: he felt Light

descending into his head, and he described its characteristics. Sri Aurobindo wrote back that this Light came from the Overmind. That simply went to his head — “I am getting Light from the Overmind, so I am something wonderful!” He wrote to Sri Aurobindo: “Now that this is happening the Victory is sure. You and I will do everything (*laughter*) and the Mother will surely help us.” (*laughter*) Then Sri Aurobindo wrote to him that after all the Light from the Overmind was not anything very exceptional: it was remarkable enough, but so many sadhaks had got it and people in the past too had got it. My friend wouldn’t believe this. “Sri Aurobindo is just trying to water down the uniqueness of my experience” — that is what he believed. So all the correspondence of Sri Aurobindo he used to carry with him and go about showing even outsiders the letters to prove how he had got the Light from the Overmind. Very soon after that, he became so side-tracked from the true Path that he had to leave the Ashram.

So you see how dangerous it is, not to understand what sort of experiences one gets and how necessary it is to be guided by the Guru. He went away and we framed his spiritual epitaph:

“Undermined by Overmind.” (*laughter*)

This theme of the Overmind is a very seductive one, as my friend Arindam Basu must know, and I am very much tempted to make a little digression about this plane in its relation to the Supermind, but where is the time for it? So I won’t do it. We’ll come to some other topics.

I stayed on for about six and a half years at first, at one stroke. And during those years I asked Sri Aurobindo to give me a spiritual name. It seems it was very difficult to find that name. Somebody else had asked for a spiritual name and that person had got it almost the next day, but I got it only after a year. I must have been quite a problem: how to pin down something for me? But after a year Sri Aurobindo did pin it down. He sent me the name, on a very small card, in Sanskrit, with the transliteration in English, followed by the translation. The name, as you know, was “Amal Kiran” — which means, as he says, “A clear ray”. It was a very tall order to live up to such a name. To be a clear ray when one is so full of confusion, and one is so dependent on one’s own intellectual capacity, to become really luminous was quite a job — and still is. But it’s very curious that this word “ray” should have come in, for it repeated itself a little later in a very important context. The very first time that I heard of *Savitri* from Sri Aurobindo was

in connection with the mention of a ray. While critically commenting on a poem of mine, he referred to “the Ray from the transcendent penetrating through the mind’s passive neutral reflection of the supreme quietude of the silent Brahman”. To illustrate the point he cited two lines of poetry:

*Piercing the limitless Unknowable,
Breaking the vacancy and voiceless peace.*

The reverberations of these lines shook me so much that I asked Sri Aurobindo where they had come from. The reply was: “*Savitri*.”

Savitri has been very closely linked with my life here, as you perhaps know. That is also why I have been quoting *Savitri* at the start of each talk. Naturally after those lines, I was goaded on to make more and more inquiries. And in the course of my poetic aspirations I was all agog to get the inspiration which Sri Aurobindo had called Overhead Poetry. Overhead Poetry is poetry which passes over everybody’s head! (*laughter*) But how is one to receive an inspiration entirely new which comes from the planes which Sri Aurobindo has distinguished as Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuition, Overmind? So I once got the idea to make a very direct appeal to Sri Aurobindo. I pressed on him a singular request, emboldened by his innumerable favours of tutorship. I wrote to him:

“I shall consider it a favour indeed if you will give me an instance in English of the inspiration of the pure Overmind. I don’t mean just a line like Milton’s

Those thoughts that wander through Eternity

or Wordsworth’s

Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone,

which has a brief burst of it, but something sustained and plenary. I want to steep my consciousness in its rhythm and its revelation. It will be a most cherished possession. Please don’t disappoint me by saying that, as no English writer has a passage of this kind, you cannot do anything for me.”

He wrote back in his characteristic vein:

“Good Heavens! how am I to avoid saying that, when it is the

only possible answer — at least so far as I can remember? Perhaps if I went through English poetry again with my present consciousness I might find more intimations like that line of Wordsworth, but a passage sustained and plenary? These surely are things yet to come — the ‘future poetry’ perhaps, but not the past.”

With the familiarity — almost the impudence — he permitted us, I replied:

“I think the favour I asked was expressed in perfectly clear language. If no English poet has produced the passage I want, then who has done so in English? God alone knows. But who is capable of doing it? All of us know. Well, then why not be kind enough to grant this favour? If difficult metres could be illustrated on demand, is it impossible to illustrate in a satisfying measure something so naturally Aurobindonian as the Overmind? I am not asking for hundreds of lines — even eight will more than do — all pure gold to be treasured forever. So please . . . Perhaps it is possible only on Sunday — the day dedicated to golden Surya and rich for you with leisure from correspondence: I can wait answerless for 24 hours with a sweet *samatā*.”

The answer came the very next morning:

“I have to say Good Heavens again. Because difficult metres can be illustrated on demand, which is a matter of metrical skill, how does it follow that one can produce poetry from any blessed plane on demand? It would be easier to furnish you with hundreds of lines already written, out of which you could select for yourself anything Overmindish if it exists (which I doubt) rather than produce 8 lines of warranted Overmind manufacture to order. All I can do is to give you from time to time some lines from *Savitri*, on condition you keep them to yourself for the present. It may be a poor substitute for the Overmental, but if you like the sample, the opening lines, I can give you more hereafter — and occasionally better.”

And then with an “E.G.” there followed in his own fine and sensitive yet forceful hand 16 lines of the very first Canto of *Savitri* as it stood then.

It was the hour before the Gods awake . . .

Below the quotation were the words: “There! Promise fulfilled for a wonder.”

This day was October 25, 1936 — I would say one of the most important days, if not *the* most important, of my life here. But the matter of keeping *Savitri* a secret was a difficult job. In those days Nolini was Sri Aurobindo's postman. He used to bring the letters for everyone; we used to wait for him in the morning. And he knew that some special correspondence was going on between Sri Aurobindo and me, because the Mother might have been giving him the folded letters to put into the envelopes. Each time he handed me my letter he lifted his eyebrows. (*laughter*) I looked very innocent (*laughter*) and took it and waited for him to go away (*laughter*) before opening it. He would hesitate for a minute or two and then go away. (*laughter*) It happened like that 3 or 4 days, and then it got on my nerves, (*laughter*) so I wrote to Sri Aurobindo: "What should I do? I think Nolini is going to ask me." (*laughter*) Then Sri Aurobindo very blandly replied, "Let us hope he won't." (*laughter*) But still the silent inquisition of the lifted eyebrows did not cease! Then I wrote in desperation to Sri Aurobindo: "I am sure it is going to happen now. Please tell me what to do. Can I take him into the secret or not?" (*laughter*) Then Sri Aurobindo said: "All right but only him." (*laughter*) So this secret remained a secret between Nolini and me for 10 years. Only in 1946, when I began to write a book on Sri Aurobindo's poetry, I divulged *Savitri* to the world — with Sri Aurobindo's approval. *Savitri* came out in excerpts for the first time in that book of mine, *The Poetic Genius of Sri Aurobindo*. Afterwards the Ashram published it in fascicles and then as a volume.

I think we can stop at this climactic point, though unfortunately I haven't finished and I think I'll never finish at this rate. (*laughter*) I thank you all very much.

TALK THREE

February 24, 1971

A few days back Nirod asked me to give a talk. After much trepidation I agreed, encouraged by some friends. On my own I shy away from talking — except in private, where perhaps I overdo it.

Then a couple of days later he asked me what my subject would be. When I looked at him I suddenly thought of him as he had been before forsaking his first steady love — Medicine — in favour of that capricious Goddess, the Muse. It was Dr. Nirodbaran asking me as if addressing a consultant: “What will you prescribe?” And the response naturally came: “The mixture as before.”
(laughter)

Well, what is this repeating mixture? I would say it has three ingredients. One is the Ambrosia that is Sri Aurobindo, the second is the Nectar that is the Mother, and the third is rather a questionable one which can be best expressed perhaps in some lines of Gerald Manley Hopkins:

*I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: the taste was me.*

So now you know the third ingredient. All the three form a kind of trinity-in-unity. And this trinity-in-unity may be formulated with a slight difference from the usual, traditional, great formula of the Christians: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Here it would be: the Father, the Mother and the Unholy Son! *(laughter)* If you like to conform more to the accepted terminology perhaps we could bring back the word “holy” — only we must spell it “holey” — the Son full of holes, riddled with defects and deficiencies, gaps of human ignorance, wounds of common mortality.

And this brings me not only to my subject but also to the Yoga here. Isn't it the aim of the Yogic life to convert what is a “h-o-l-e” into a “W-h-o-l-e”, the limited fragmentary individual consciousness into the divine All, the cosmic abundance, the transcendent plenitude? But how is the conversion to be done? I may approach the answer by recalling what Vasari, an Italian painter of the

Renaissance, who has written biographies of the great Masters of the period, has said about Leonardo da Vinci.

He remarks: "With the splendour of his most magnificent face he could make every broken spirit whole." Now it is interesting that this observation should have been about Leonardo, because, as you surely know, Leonardo is one of the few figures about whom Sri Aurobindo has let us believe, though very indirectly, that he was they in his past births. I used to pester Sri Aurobindo with all sorts of questions, dangling a long string of names: "Were you Homer, were you Shakespeare, were you Valmiki, Dante, Virgil, Milton?" And he stoutly said "No." I asked him also whether he had been Alexander and Julius Caesar. He replied that Alexander was too much of a torrent for him and, as for Caesar, he said: "You have forgotten that Mrs. Besant claims Julius Caesar. I don't want to be prosecuted for misappropriation of personality." (*laughter*) He was careful not to encourage commitment in this very delusive field, because once you start thinking who you were, there is no end to the riot of imagination. But, while he said "No" to all, he didn't answer in the negative to my proposal of Leonardo and Augustus Caesar. And what Vasari has said about Leonardo's face would apply in a superlative degree to Sri Aurobindo's. Even as I remember his face, all my skin seems to bristle. It is not only sadhaks who have found their shattered spirits entirely rebuilt; even others have been immensely affected. K. M. Munshi, for example, went to see him some years ago, and he came out with the statement that this was the most angelic face he had ever seen. Well, I have tried to catch in general the impression of Sri Aurobindo's face at the beginning of a poem I wrote in the early period of my stay in the Ashram:

*All heaven's secrecy lit to one face
Crowning with calm the body's blinded cry —
A soul of upright splendour like the noon!*

Now, this magnificent face of Sri Aurobindo has a profound meaning in the history of evolution. I believe that the central need of the evolutionary world is Avatarhood. Unless the Divine comes down to earth, man has very little hope of becoming Superman. He may ascend to the spiritual skies, and the soul may remain suspended in "a privacy of glorious light", but his mind will fall away, his life-force will wither, his body will crumble. Where then

would be evolution? It is these instruments that have to be fulfilled, and unless they are perfected the cosmic travail cannot be consummated. But these instruments are obstinate creatures, they set conditions to the Divine — they say: "If we are to be divinised, show us that you can be humanised!" I think the conditions are quite legitimate, and the Divine knows it very well and He hurries to become an Avatar every now and then — that is to say, every few thousand years! For, unless the Divine gets on intimate terms with the earth, the earth is unable to respond. And, where intimacy is wanted, the relation has to be of love — if the Divine does not bring love to humanity, humanity will fail to respond to the Divine's call. And how shall solid and concrete earth know Divine Love unless the Divine Himself becomes solid and concrete to earth? I believe the central truth here has been seized with a fair degree of success by an Ashram poet at almost the commencement of his frail, faltering, fumbling, failing and falling existence at this place. The poem is called *This Errant Life*. It runs:

*This errant life is dear although it dies;
And human lips are sweet, though they but sing
Of stars estranged from us; and youth's emprise
Is wondrous yet, although an unsure thing.*

*Sky-lucent Bliss untouched by earthiness!
I fear to soar lest tender bonds decrease.
If Thou desirest my weak self to outgrow
Its mortal longings, lean down from above,
Temper the unborn light no thought can trace,
Suffuse my mood with a familiar glow.
For 'tis with mouth of clay I supplicate:
Speak to me heart to heart words intimate,
And all Thy formless glory turn to love
And mould Thy love into a human face.*

This is the eternal cry from below. And never before in history has it been answered as in our Ashram. For, the human soul would have been content with one Avatar face: we are given two! We are simply heaped over with a luxury of light. And if you want to have the description of the Mother's face, I think you will have to go to a greater poet than the specimen before you. You will find descriptions very accurate and very penetrating when Sri

Aurobindo delineates the heroine of his epic that is a legend and a symbol. Read what he writes in *Savitri* about Savitri and you will have an idea of the Mother's bodily presence, the Mother's facial expression.

Now that I have touched upon *Savitri*, the topic with which I closed my last talk, I might say a few things about it. In fact, I have already said some of them to a friend of mine a week or so back. He was sitting and trying to meditate. I went up to him and put him a silent query as to how he was. He looked up; there was a smile on his lips but a depression deep as hell in his eyes. And he brought out the great pronouncement: "I am getting on."

Well, it reminded me of an exchange I have sometimes heard in South India, the morning greeting among some Tamils. There is a lot of compression and intuitive packing in this exchange. One of the parties asks: "How are you, I hope?" (*laughter*) And the reply is: "Somewhat, I am afraid." (*laughter*) I thought my friend did seem as if he was in a bit of "somewhat" condition. (*laughter*) So I asked him: "Why not tell me what exactly is the matter?" He looked up sadly and said: "The trouble is precisely that I do not know what exactly the matter is. All I can say is that several years ago I was in touch with a certain set of circumstances and personalities, and the result is an undiagnosable damage inside me." "Then perhaps," I answered, "I can help you a little." So I sat down and told him a story of my own.

It's connected with an experience which I recounted in my very first talk — my very first abnormal or supernormal experience: I somehow got out of my body and began to float in the air above my own form stretched out in bed below, and moved in the room from wall to wall, bouncing as it were to and fro. Now this escape got encouraged by a little practice of Yoga. After coming here it became more frequent and it was very enjoyable indeed while it lasted: I could feel free from all the cares of the world when I was out of the body. But when I went to Bombay and stayed there for several years, it became a little dangerous because the Guru's protection was not immediate. And there I found that I would loiter about in all sorts of unpleasant places. In those subtle worlds, you must understand, there are pretty unpleasant spots. There are extremes: on the one hand you find beauty surpassing anything that any poet has described — on the other you find indescribable squalor, filth, wickedness. Wickedness, of course, from our point of view — for the beings there what we call hell is really a heaven

of perverse pleasure. And it should be so because these are not evolutionary worlds but typical ones, and God would be indeed unjust if He didn't allow them to get pleasure in whatever way is open to them. In Bombay, exploring these worlds, I fell into a company which seemed terribly hostile. Sri Aurobindo has given a hint in *Savitri* about such company: "their very look is a calamity." And these creatures, after showering their calamitous looks on me, got behind me and, when it was least expected, I felt a tremendous crash on my back: I felt as if my whole spine had been broken to bits.

I didn't know what to do; naturally with a shock like that I woke up and the subtle body rushed back to the fortress of the physical, but I was sick — sick in a way that seemed incurable. What could I do? Should I call a doctor? The doctor would come and thump my chest and hear the sounds in my lungs and feel my spine and find it absolutely intact. Then all of a sudden I remembered that when you cannot have the privilege of seeing the face of the Mother or Sri Aurobindo, which can make whole every broken spirit, you can turn to the poetry of Sri Aurobindo, that poetry which is called the Mantra. The Mantra is the highest spiritual poetry, as you know: it is the Divine, as it were, expressing Himself directly, not through any other medium of consciousness. The Divine Being, getting embodied in words on the very plane of the Divine Himself: that is the Mantra. It is the Word from the Overmind, the Supermind's delegate that has been the governing Power of the universe so far.

I remembered also that I had asked Sri Aurobindo what plane a certain passage in *Savitri* — the description of Savitri herself in Canto Two of Book One — had come from. Very reluctantly he had admitted it to have come from the Overmind or rather the Overmind Intuition, as he very cautiously used to label the source of the highest poetry in his own works. The passage begins:

*Near to earth's wideness, intimate with heaven,
Exalted and swift her young large-visioned spirit
Voyaging through worlds of splendour and of calm
Overflew the ways of Thought to unborn things.*

It goes on to reach somewhere in its middle what I consider the Mantra of Mantras:

*As in a mystic and dynamic dance
 A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
 Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
 Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,
 A heart of silence in the hands of joy
 Inhabited with rich creative beats
 A body like a parable of dawn
 That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
 Or golden temple door to things beyond.*

Onward from glory to glory the passage moves. I recited the whole of it, and when, on the way to the close, I came to the line —

For even her gulfs were secrecies of light —

I suddenly felt cured, made whole.

So I said to my friend: "If you can read *Savitri* all your inner troubles will tend to disappear. But you have to read it aloud to yourself." My friend was surprised. "I have read *Savitri* several times," he said, "but I have never thought of reading it loudly." I explained: "That is the way to read it because the sound-significance is tremendous. It must go into you through your ears. You cannot just read it with your eyes, you have to read in a slow controlled voice bringing out the vowel-values, the consonant-combinations and the sound of the line as a whole. It is then that the language sweeps beyond thought to stir awake deeper tracts in you: it is then that the Mantra will wing home to you. And I can assure you that if you let it do so your undiagnosable damage will disappear."

I do hope it has started disappearing by now with short exercises of mantric incantation.

Now that we are on the matter of poetry I am a little tempted to make a digression. If the Mantra is the supreme poetry, there must be some quality of it in all verse — not directly but at least indirectly. Poetry by itself is not necessarily a spiritual art in any immediate sense. A poet can write all sorts of things which we do not associate with spirituality: a man can even be an atheist, as the Roman Lucretius was, and still be a major poet. How this could be is well hit off by the English poetess Elizabeth Browning. She has written about Lucretius's atheism that he "denied divinely the Divine." There you have the essence of the poetic utterance

revealed. It is not the content, the substance, the matter, which has to be spiritual, but there is something in the form, something in the style, something in the manner which is as if a godhead came and said "I don't exist" and walked away and you saw by his figure, his gesture, his gait that he still existed and would ever exist. That is what poetry gives us — the perfect expressive shape, the inevitable rhythmic mould. And perhaps the same truth is also stated in another fashion when Flecker observed: "Poetry may not save souls, but it makes souls worth saving." It makes souls worth saving because it brings about a certain enrichment of consciousness, a subtilisation of it, a transfusion of beauty into it, which renders it very precious material for somebody who can really evoke and bring it out to meet its source, the Eternal and the Infinite.

This quality of the indirect soulfulness, the subdued or concealed divinity, has been sought to be formulated by many critics. Some kind of light is perceived as its sign. But the perception is variously phrased. A French writer, trying to describe what good writing — *bonne prose ou poésie* — should be, has said, "Claire, encore claire, toujours claire!"¹ Well, I strongly suspect that when he made this pronouncement his wife was standing at his elbow and her name happened to be "Claire". (*laughter*) Oh my God! what have I done? I have made a dig at petticoat influence in connection with a name borne by a lady in the audience, who is very charming but also very dynamic. (*Turning to the lady*) I apologise to you, madam; I hope my life won't be in danger. (*laughter*) But the name gives me a clue, because it is one that means "clear" and yet is combined with the sex which throughout history has made poor man raise his hands in despair or scratch his head in bewilderment — the sex to which we may apply those words of Churchill about Soviet policy: "a riddle wrapped in an enigma enclosed within a mystery." (*laughter*) The combination of "clear" with such a condition of being leads me to another expression in French which, I think, is nearer the mark we are seeking. It is an expression related to Painting: "clair-obscur" — what the Italians call "chiaroscuro" and what in plain English is "light and shade". Poetry must bring a central clarity which with a sure grip upon our minds leads us towards a mystery which is beyond mind. The poet may de-clare his designs upon the "obscur" like the Negro

¹ "Clear, again clear, always clear!"

preacher when he said to his congregation: "Beloved brethren, we shall now fathom the fathomless and unscrew the unscrutable!"
(laughter)

Let me, however, warn you against pseudo-mystery, the facile massing of shades, the obscurity due to confusion or carelessness. The true mystery is that which remains over, an indefinable nimbus, when in dealing with heights or depths we have made our utmost effort to be clear. And even about this mystery I may utter a clarifying word. All true mystery is ultimately the Divine Presence. Now, to the Divine His own Presence is self-luminous: it is not a mystery in the ordinary sense at all. It is a mystery only to the mind of man. It is a supreme, a colossal clarity to the Divine Himself. So I should say that in order to be poetic we have to try and be clear in the way the Divine, when expressing Himself, would be clear and luminous to His own consciousness. And there again we come to the Mantra — the Divine's direct self-expression which in some mode or other should be found pervasive of all poetry.

It is indeed right that I should end on the note with which the French writer mistakenly began, and nobody with the name I have conjectured to be his wife's need feel let down by my analysis — for, if we are to get rid of clarity in every sense and if my analysis did any final letting down, what would I have to say to my own blessed name given by Sri Aurobindo: "Amal Kiran", which means "A Clear Ray"?

I will now, like a clear ray, shoot towards its parent Sun — the presence of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother — and give you a few recollections of my contact with them.

I shall begin with what happened when I first came here and stayed in what I have called Vasudha's House but what would be labelled in our Ashram English as "Old Amal's House" (laughter) because Amal, although only 23 at the time, had it as his old residence before he moved on to another place. In this house I saw a well, and naturally with the vigour of 23 I pulled up water from it and with the equally natural rashness of 23 I drank the water! (laughter) The result was severe diarrhoea. Perhaps this was an experience of purification — purification starting at the wrong end! I did not know how to check the process. So I sent for the Ashram doctor. The doctors in the Ashram now are innumerable. At that time there was only one and even he was almost invisible,

because he was ever so thin. (*laughter*) He appeared to be a being of one dimension attached to a wispy beard.

He came to see me. I was in bed. He sat next to the bed and then, as I was looking at him, he shut his eyes and sat like that for what seemed to me a rather long time. I got a little impatient and said, "Doctor." He sweetly replied, "Yes?" I continued, "I want some treatment." He answered, "I am giving you treatment" — and again shut his eyes. (*laughter*) I imagined that he was thinking of the right drug to give me, and concentrating for the purpose. But he didn't do anything at all. So once more I poked him a little. "What?" he asked me. I said, "I want some medicine." "Oh, you want some medicine?" "Of course," I said — and he was so disgusted he got up and walked away with a curious smile and after a short time brought a bottle of medicine; which I can say was quite effective, a tribute to him. But from then I began to guess there was something here called doing things by meditation. The doctor's behaviour, his eye-shutting, was an eye-opener to me, and later I discovered that meditation could do a lot if the Gurus themselves meditated on us instead of our meditating on ourselves or on each other! (*laughter*)

One of the instances was when, on a visit to the Ashram during the period I spent in Bombay between my original arrival and my second coming, I had one of my famous falls. This was a very bad toss. I was on my way to the Ashram gate. I tried to take a short cut where there was a gutter. Instead of going over the gutter I went into it. (*laughter*) My left leg got so twisted at the hip that I had to keep sitting down in the gutter. Several people passed by but didn't do a thing. When the sister of the friend with whom I had come did the same I couldn't help protesting. "Don't you see what I am doing? I can't get up. I have fallen here." She said, "Why, I thought you were just sitting and talking. You sit anywhere and find occasion to talk to people." (*laughter*) I was astonished. "Now, please do something and get me out of this place." Then she and some others picked me up and somebody from inside the Ashram came out — I think it was Dyuman — and looked at me and went to report to the Mother.

I had to be in bed, of course, for a few days. I sent for crutches from the Dispensary. The Darshan was shortly due and I did not wish to miss it. When somebody reported to the Mother that I was bed-ridden and didn't look as if I could change my horizontal position, she coolly said: "I am sure he will come to the Darshan.

He is not the sort to lie down for long, he will come anyhow.” When I heard this, I said: “I surely must go.” So with crutches I went up to the bottom of the staircase leading to the Darshan Room, and then some of Udar’s muscle-men came with a chair and put me on it and carried me upstairs to the entrance. At the other end of the long passage Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were seated. I was put down at the staircase-end. I took again to my crutches and with as much slowness as I could reasonably indulge in I started moving, so that I could have the longest Darshan I would ever get the opportunity of enjoying. (*laughter*) Laboured step after step, very dramatically gradual, I kept nearing the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. All through my crutch-propped progress they kept looking at me, the Mother sweetly, Sri Aurobindo calmly. On reaching close to their seat I felt a great power coming into me. But to my horror I found that Sri Aurobindo was concentrating on the wrong leg! (*laughter*) You see, the right leg was the wrong leg and the left leg was the right leg! (*laughter*) — quite a confusing matter. And somebody facing me after my fall could easily report my right leg to be the injured one since my left leg would be opposite his own right! Anyway, what was I now to do? I just moved my really injured leg, but to no effect — the concentration was so complete! But I realised, soon after, that for the Divine it is not necessary to be omniscient in order to be omnipotent; for, so long as some leg of Amal’s was being concentrated on, the effect was bound to be terrific. In fact, I threw away my crutches almost the same day and, using two sticks instead of my habitual single one, I came to the Mother at the next Pranām. I told her: “Mother, this is the first time I have had a fall in the physical gutter....” She laughed and said: “Well, how are you now?” I replied: “I am much improved, but what do you think? Should I inform Sehra in Bombay about my accident?” She at once said: “Oh no. Why worry the poor girl? Within two days you will be walking normally.” I was surprised at the confident prophecy. But actually it did come true — within exactly two days I was up and hobbling about in my old way, as if nothing had happened. This shows how spiritual force can work.

I may give you another instance. It was in connection with a side-tooth of mine. You see, I had a bit of tooth-trouble once and I went to our oldest dentist. Our dentists here have a very important function to perform, as you must be aware: their job is to see that before we become supramental we don’t become supra-

dental! (*laughter*) The dentist examined my tooth and gave the verdict: "I find that your tooth has got broken and will have to be extracted." I said, "What, doctor? Say it again." He repeated, "Yes, it will have to be extracted." I exclaimed, "Wonderful! Never in my life have I had a tooth extracted. Now I will have this thrilling experience. Please, doctor, go ahead immediately." He worked at it for half an hour and brought out piece after piece until some pieces just wouldn't come out. So he sent for his wife to assist him. She came and they applied jointly a small chisel and hammer and he successfully got all the pieces out, as a good dentist should. Then I went home. After some time severe pain started. I thought it was the natural consequence of a tooth-extraction and that I just had to grin and bear it. The whole day passed and still the pain persisted. I didn't know what to do. I kept fumbling in my mind for a way out. I suddenly recalled that a day earlier I had received from the Mother a letter of only four words in green ink to a question of mine. They were: "It is all right." Somehow they got linked up with my present state. I asked myself: "Why is my state so bad? It should be all right. The Mother has spoken about it in advance." I got the inspiration to put that paper on to my cheek, with the four words pressed against it where the gap was there inside the mouth. Believe me, within 3 minutes or less, the ache was completely gone. It returned only after 4 hours. Here was a little miracle. Evidently I had got in touch with the Mother's Force and it had passed through those words to my sorry plight. The next day the dentist helped me out.

I have some other incidents also to report but there doesn't seem to be time enough. I shall just go to another aspect of what the Mother and Sri Aurobindo can do with us. They can do the most impossible things. You know how the Mother made out of me a keeper of furniture — a role I could never have dreamt of. As I told you in an earlier talk, I became quite a good keeper, and many lessons too I learned during my furniture-keeping career, including, of course, a couple of falls. Several amusing occurrences too I could record. I'll cite one.

I used to receive appeals for various kinds of things from people. Our Pavitra once sent me an appeal. He was not quite a master of English at that time. He sent me the note: "I want four blocks to understand my table." (*laughter*) I supplied to him what he required, with a reply-note: "Here are the needed blocks. Fortunately they are not blockheads: otherwise your table would never

have been understood.” (*laughter*) Later Pavitra told me he realised the joke and greatly enjoyed it.

Now, what else can the Mother make of one? A big shock came to me when I learnt that *Mother India*, of which I had been appointed Editor, was to be a semi-political paper. I writing on politics was something unthinkable! I told the Mother: “I have no grasp of politics, no interest in it.” She said: “Neither have I.” (*laughter*) I cried out: “What then shall we do about it?” She very calmly replied: “There is Sri Aurobindo. He will do everything.” And he jolly well did — because I began writing political articles as if I had done it from my birth. I even came to be venerated as a political oracle. Every time I visited Pondy, people used to flock round me, asking my opinion on this event, that issue, the other situation. And I could deliver confident statements as though I were inevitably inspired. Within me I couldn’t help laughing.

Sri Aurobindo could make a political thinker out of me as Napoleon could make generals out of mud, as it were. But I must say that there has to be a line drawn to Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s power in such things — because once during a visit of mine to the Ashram, when Pondicherry was still French, she spoke to me very seriously at Pranam: “Both Sri Aurobindo and I have come to the conclusion that you should be the next Indian Consul in Pondicherry.” I muttered inwardly to myself: “Good Heavens! This is really Divine Power running riot. I must check it. How can I be a Consul? How can I ever do such a difficult no less than dreary thing?” But aloud I just said: “All right, all right. I shall see what can be done.” (*laughter*) Rather dazed, I went to Udar, who was a very great friend of mine at that time. I poured out to him my bewilderment. He said: “Don’t be afraid. So many of my friends have become Consuls in different places. Their staff carries on all the work. It is a job for absolute duffers!”

Udar’s words were not exactly complimentary but he certainly put heart into me by knocking all head out of the job! As luck would have it, the crisis passed when it was learnt that in India you cannot become a Consul unless you go through the whole grill of the diplomatic service. And soon afterwards Sanat Banerji — no duffer absolute or relative — was appointed Consul and he was an excellent instrument of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother such as I could never have been in that post.

I think we must stop here. I may keep some stories for another occasion if you are willing to come again and listen. At the moment I shall say only one thing and perhaps that can be the summing-up of all my speeches as a Yogi. On September 17, 1934, after nearly seven years of attempt at Yoga I wrote to the Mother: "Pardon my writing to you without any specific reason; but I feel like telling you that you are extremely dear to me. In spite of my thousand and three imperfections, this one sense remains in me — that you are my Mother, that I am born from your heart. It is the only truth I seem to have realised in all these years. A very unfortunate thing, perhaps, that I have realised no other truth; but I deeply thank you that I have been enabled to feel this much at least."

Sri Aurobindo replied something which all of us might remember. He said: "It is an excellent foundation for the other truths that are to come — for they all result from it." And the Mother wrote underneath: "My blessings are always with you."

Well, I don't know whether the other truths Sri Aurobindo refers to have resulted from what I realised over thirty-six years ago. But the foundational one still stands and I hope it always will. It is the only compliment I can have to give to myself.

TALK FOUR

February 27, 1971

Last time I gave a somewhat unpleasant if not gruesome description of myself as a being full of holes — not only the seven physiological holes but also seventy-seven or more psychological ones! Keenly conscious though I have always been of the multiple character of His Holeyness Amal Kiran, I did not realise that I had some holes in my brain through which many things slipped out. I don't mean only things which I should not have spoken, yet unfortunately blabbed, but also several which I should have said, yet somehow let go.

I have to remedy the defects. This business may come in the way of my saying on the present occasion a number of things I have in mind about the Mother and Sri Aurobindo. Perhaps I should start with them, but then I may get launched on a course which might again make many matters slip out of those holes in my brain. It seems that whatever I do I shall have to deliver a third talk, which may not be such a calamity after all — except for the talker, because he feels terribly nervous until he forgets himself and says things which may need forgiving! (*laughter*)

I'll begin with remedying some of my oversights before endeavouring to pass on any more insights. But even prior to doing that I have to do something in response to my friend Nirod. He has made an earnest plea that I should rid your minds of the delusion that the doctor I spoke of last time was he. (*laughter*) It seems many of you carried away that impression, though I wonder how.

Nirod can hardly be described as a person of one dimension attached to a thin beard. (*laughter*) But, of course, in this place there are all kinds of miracles occurring and you may have thought he might have been like that. Well, one example of the unexpected to be expected here is the look of my own self 43 years ago. Can you imagine me, when I first came here, to have started growing long hair and sprouting a far from wispy beard? And yet I did so. No doubt, I always had the ambition in my younger days to look like Bernard Shaw whom I admired a great deal. But when I was in Bombay I could not grow a beard — beards at that time were

not in fashion for people who were rather young and perhaps inclined to be romantic. (*laughter*) Even when I returned to Bombay after a six and a half years' stay here and met my future wife Sehra, whom I had known earlier, she was indignant on seeing me bearded, though not long-haired any more. She made a disgusted face and said: "What is this?" Then I very calmly explained to her: "You see, I am a Yogi. (*laughter*) God thrust on me the spiritual favour of a lame leg so that I might not run after anybody glamorous (*laughter*) and I have spiritually favoured myself with a beard so that nobody glamorous may run after me!" (*laughter*) Well, I am rather running away from my friend Nirod and after my own unglamorous self. So let me finish what I started saying.

Nobody should have imagined Nirod to be the person I had described — nor do I think that Nirod ever had sufficient confidence in his own meditation to substitute it for medicine. (*laughter*) The person in question was somebody quite different and I don't think any of you will recognise him now because he has been dissociated from medicine completely for almost the last four decades — just as I myself have been dissociated from drawing and painting for nearly as long a period.

In those days in the Ashram there was a scarcity of specially qualified people. Now we have a dozen doctors, each diagnosing a different disease for the same patient. (*laughter*) In those days we had only one doctor and he always diagnosed a spiritual illness, though, I suppose, he did not have a cure for it. In that period, I was a sort of Raphael and Rembrandt and Whistler rolled into one, because there were no real artists about, and the Mother somehow picked me out for drawing-jobs. I am not quite sure how she came to the conclusion that I could draw or paint. But I have two tentative clues.

Once I drew a series of somewhat irreverent sketches of people meditating. In those early times we used to have meditation at 7.30 a.m. in the long room where the Mother, after the passing away of Sri Aurobindo, gave darshan on the four big days of the year. Of course, on those big days she used to sit in a chair, but in the old period she sat on a big seat meant for herself and Sri Aurobindo. During the morning meditation she would be alone there — and Sri Aurobindo was in the background, supporting the meditation going on in the front room. The Mother, wearing a sari, would sit cross-legged, looking radiantly beautiful. She was a picture of supreme repose, but a repose in which there was

a great deal of held-in power, as if she had come and sat there after having gone on a journey through the centuries and finished her job of finding what she had wanted to find. All journeys seemed to come to an end in her, and when we went and knelt down at her feet all journeys of ours also seemed to end there. All our difficulties vanished — except the difficulty of going away and leaving the Mother's feet!

During these early meditations, each of the old sadhaks had his turn to sit throughout with his head on one of the Mother's feet — profoundly surrendered to the foot and profusely perspiring on it! (*laughter*) I may make a small digression here. The old sadhaks had an affectionate way of referring to one another. They called one another "Old Bandicoot". (*laughter*) Why exactly long-standing sadhana resembled the movements of a rather obnoxious-looking big rat of Pondicherry, I cannot precisely say. But my ingenious mind conjectures that it may have been in accordance with the goal of Yoga as expressed in Sanskrit and as mispronounced by a non-Sanskritist like me. The goal of Yoga in India, as stated in Sanskrit, is self-mastery, "Swarat" (*laughter*) and world-mastery, "Samrat". (*laughter*)

Well, to come back to our situation. While one of the old bandicoots sat at the Mother's feet, the rest of us sat at some distance from her. As I was new, I did not know properly how to meditate. I thought the best procedure was to keep my eyes open and watch the others getting into meditation. (*laughter*) That would be one of the first lessons of my Yoga. And I kept on watching and saw a lot of things which I put into a series of cartoons. (*laughter*) I don't remember all of them, but I hope that when I describe some, those who are concerned will excuse me — well, it will be a test of their Yogic equanimity. (*laughter*)

To begin with, there was the first American here, old Vaun McPheeters — quite a hulk of a man, over 6 foot tall. He used to meditate as if by closing his eyes and going inward he were trying to hypnotise the Absolute into submission. (*laughter*) He knitted his brows, set his jaws and looked most aggressively concentrated. I should say somebody looking as resolute though in a different way was Purani — as you might expect. He had the habit of making a movement with his mouth all the time, as if trying to swallow the nectar of the Divine Bliss. (*laughter*) And his determined look seemed to say: "No fooling with me! I shall drink all heaven up, no matter how large the quantity!" And, strange to say, his neck

used to become stiff and straight and expand enormously: the weight of the descending nectar must have been immense. Nolini with the thumb and fingers of his right hand held his impressive forehead, as if his brain needed support when the Light plunged in and filled it to overflowing. Then there was our Ashram engineer, Chandulal — the only engineer then just as there was the only doctor and the only artist. He sat stretched out, almost sprawling, with his features somewhat intent — he appeared to be inwardly calculating — and with his two arms planted behind, palms flat upon the floor, to support his stretched-out posture like a pair of pillars. It was as though he was trying to throw a bridge between earth and heaven with his own body. (*laughter*) A Mohammedan sadhak, brother of the great Dara, sat with a very prayerful expression but with his head hanging loose to one side in a state of what I called dislocated devotion (*laughter*) — that is, the consciousness forcibly pulled away from ordinary objects of desire and helplessly bent towards the Divine. Dara himself was like a baby elephant, his curved aristocratic nose — or shall I say, his thoroughbred trunk? — working vigorously its nostrils and breathing hard to get a whiff of the invisible but evidently not unsmellable Beloved of the Sufis. Near the two brothers was Amal Kiran. He bore a rather sad look on his long-nosed face, moving his open eyes over people while straining his thin neck upward to touch as best he could the “sky-lucent bliss” towards which his all-too-errant life wished to soar as you know from the poem I recited on the last occasion. Not the least spectacular and cartoonable was a sadhak with the grandiose name of Purushottam, meaning “Supreme Being”. He sat with quite a soulful countenance but with a constant jerk in one leg. He sort of kicked out at unYogic things every two or three minutes. My caption for his speciality of meditation was: “Purushottam striving to achieve the psychic.”¹ (*laughter*) Then there was Champaklal. As soon as he shut his eyes he would start swaying a little — obviously in response to some inner rhythm. It was a fine sight — that gentle semi-circular swaying with a deeply absorbed face. The moment his eyes were closed, his consciousness seemed to get outside the fixed poise of the common physical mind. Perhaps the most dynamic meditation was of a person who did not sway in a semi-circle but who, losing

¹ It is now many years since Purushottam kicked off the dust of the Ashram and sought for a spiritual achievement on his own with no Guru supervising his progress.

outer consciousness, would nod forward — not only with his head but with his whole body. And the nodding kept increasing in tempo until his head either went bang into the back of whoever was in front of him or, if there was nobody near enough to cushion the blow, fall with a terrific thud upon the floor. (*laughter*) The Mother would open her eyes wondering what had been the cause of the sudden explosion (*laughter*) and the exploder would himself wake up and look all around in extreme astonishment. (*laughter*) But I really admire the simplicity, the sincerity, the lack of self-consciousness which this sadhak had and also the sense of humour which enabled him to laugh at himself afterwards when his friends poked fun at him. His case was outstanding enough for Nirod to ask Sri Aurobindo once what exactly was happening. Sri Aurobindo explained that Rajangam's consciousness completely left his body during meditation.

The peculiarities of some others have been left out. I think there were only three or four people whom I could not particularly characterise in my sketches because they meditated more or less in a normal fashion. For instance, Pavitra, sitting perfectly straight and looking very calm and pure. I may mention Lalita too, quiet and refined and childlike. Amrita looked the picture of meekness, the Divine's obedient and ever-ready servitor with just a faint forward and backward movement of the head at times. Dyuman too sat unobtrusively though not unimpressively, with a dedicated visage that appeared incapable of ever saying "No" to anything the Mother might order.

I hope none of the objects of my cartoons will get angry with me now. At the time the sketches were made very few saw them. I showed them to Purani who enjoyed them immensely. One or two others were a bit peeved. Some got the wind of them but never saw them. I think Amrita heard about them and maybe he spoke of them to the Mother. He used to give her a lot of news. But the Mother never spoke to me about this adventure of mine. What she did was to ask me unexpectedly one day: "Will you draw and paint the flowers I give all of you at Pranam?" I said: "How do you know that I can do such a thing?" She answered: "It is very easy. Hold up your right hand." I held it up. "There! you have the hand of an artist." Well, that was that. There was no question of disputing anything with her or of going against her wish. But I surmise that apart from her reading the potentiality of my hand or having heard a rumour of those cartoons, there might have

been some memory of a past life. Just as I pestered Sri Aurobindo about his own past lives, I once put an exploratory question to him on myself. I wrote: "Certain poets very strongly appeal to me and their minds and characters seem to have strong affinities with mine in different ways. Have you any intuition in the matter of my past lives? The Mother once saw Horace (as well as Hector) behind Dilip; but she has told me nothing about myself except that she is positive I was an Athenian." Sri Aurobindo replied: "A strong influence from one or more poets or all of them together is not sufficient to warrant a conclusion that one had been those poets or any of them in former lives. I have myself no intuitions on the subject of your past lives, though from general impressions I would be inclined to wager that you were not only in Athens (that is evident) but in England during the Restoration time or thereabouts, in Renaissance Italy etc.: these, however, are only impressions." So it may be that I was a footling of a painter tutored by the great Leonardo who, we are convinced, was an emanation of Sri Aurobindo's. I may have handed him brushes when he was doing the portrait of Mona Lisa whom we take to be an emanation of the Mother in that period. At least once I confronted the Mother with the question of Mona Lisa. Just as she had asked me to hold up my hand I held up her hand on one occasion after a private meditation with her, and said: "See! your fingers, when curved like this, look exactly like Mona Lisa's as Leonardo has painted them." She didn't confirm or deny but looked pleased. Is it impossible that she faintly recollected a poor assistant of Da Vinci when she saw my hand?

Anyway, I began my career in the Ashram not only as a furniture-keeper, as I have told you several times, but also as a flower-painter — and as a budding poet. Here I think I must remedy a gap I have left in regard to furniture-keeping. It is in connection with somebody who was in charge of the carpentry department at that time. Nirod was in charge of the timber godowns; so don't mix him up with this person. I had often to go to the carpentry department to pick up things to supply sadhaks' rooms with. Once a shelf and table had been demanded; so I had told my friend the carpentry-manager to have them made. After a few days, I passed along the road and saw that they were lying ready. I went in to inquire. Well, I must tell you, before I come to the incident proper, that this friend of mine had a remarkable faith in the Mother — especially in the Mother within his own being. You know that there are two

Mothers who are ultimately one — the Mother inside us and the Mother outside. Of course, the aim in general of the Mother outside — the Mother who is in a body as our Guru — is to make us aware of herself within our being. But she is there also as a check on our imagination of what she is within us. The Divine Presence within, if properly found, is the most wonderful discovery; but, if improperly found, it is the most marvellous invention! Oh, it is ever so kind, so accommodating, so convenient — indeed it might as well be no other than ourselves in disguise. The ego in us is very clever and finds all sorts of ways to justify what it wants to do, and again and again the Mother outside us has to contradict the Mother inside before we are guided to the true Light within. And these contradictions are pretty unpleasant at times. The Guru in front of us can often be a damned nuisance or, if we must be reverent, a blessed annoyance. (*laughter*) This Guru won't let our pet desires and favourite proclivities skip and hop and have a holiday. The one who is a fountain of delight can frequently be such a kill-joy to the ego. Yes, the Mother is there before us to test, times without number, whether we have truly found the Mother inside us. I have learnt this truth, not always pleurably but, I hope, always gratefully.

Now I come to my confrontation with my friend. I said: "The table and shelf are ready. May I pick them up and have them carried away?" He said: "No." I looked a little puzzled and must have struck him as rather foolish since he had said "No" with such assurance. I asked: "Why?" He replied: "I have received an order from the Mother that every piece of furniture should be coated with chocolate paint." I countered: "Really? I have never heard of such a thing and I have often taken furniture from you without any chocolate paint." He explained: "Yes, that was formerly. But now the order has come and I have to obey it." I questioned: "Has the Mother written it to you?" "Written?" he rather contemptuously repeated my word, and added: "I don't need written orders. The order has come from here" — and he thumped the middle of his chest. (*laughter*) I was a little stunned. He saw that my ears were not tuned enough to hear the voice coming from his hairy bosom. So he continued: "You will learn about these things as you get on in Yoga. The Mother will teach you."

I saw there was nothing for me to do except report the enlightening dialogue to the Mother herself. I asked her whether she had

really instructed so-and-so to chocolate-paint every piece of furniture. She wrote back in an emphatic hand: "I have given no order of the kind, and it would be too expensive to chocolate-paint everything!" I took the note to the preacher of the new gospel. He was very displeased, but being a good sadhak at heart he admitted the voice from within to have been mistaken or rather to have been mistakenly heard. It must have spoken "No chocolate paint" but he, in his unprepared state, missed the first word. (*laughter*)

The universal chocolate-painting was halted and my friend learnt a lesson. But now look at the sequel. It made me sorry I had found fault with his inner voice. Soon after the incident, he was promoted from the carpentry to the smithy. He worked so hard there that he felt terribly hungry at the end of the working hours and ate the food meant for three or four people and became huge and muscular. He was so full of irrepressible energy that he would not merely walk: he ran all the time and very fast indeed as if he were racing with somebody. I told all my friends that the vision in Nolani's first book, written years ago, on the future evolution of man was getting materialised — the book which he had entitled "The Coming Race". (*laughter*)

One day the giant smith was summoned late in the evening to the door of a house. As usual he came galloping. He was interested to find that an old lady was yelling like mad inside, "Open the door, open the door!" It seems she had mistakenly been locked in and badly needed to be let out. In those days we used to have the Soup Ceremony. I shall come to that subject if I have time and talk to you of it because it is long forgotten and many things connected with it are important. All the inmates of that house had gone to the Soup. But some passerby — an Ashramite — who was late in going heard the yelling from inside. I too happened to be hanging about by chance. A few people had gathered at the door and they asked the smith to force the lock open. He firmly replied: "I can't do anything without a chit from the Mother, our Guru." (*laughter*) Now the Mother was in the Soup Hall and could not be approached. We tried to explain to the smith that it would be quite all right to proceed without consulting the Mother. But he was adamant. "My God!" I said to myself. "What have I done — by discrediting the inner guide?" The old lady increased her yelling. Suddenly something got into the smith's head or, more appropriately speaking, his heart — and the Guru inside gave the decision: "If you

can't get a chit from the Mother, get it from someone who is next to her." We eagerly asked: "Who will do for you?" According to him, the deputy avatar would be the Ashram engineer under whom he had once worked. So people had to run about and find the engineer. Luckily he had not yet gone to the Soup. He hurriedly scribbled a note: "Please let the lady out." (*laughter*) Then the lock was forced and the imprisoned lady emerged into freedom and, without giving thanks to the smith, rushed away to the Soup.

The incident taught me a lesson. There must be a sort of compromise between the Guru inside and the Guru outside. The former should sometimes be able to decide whether the latter is to be consulted or not. We should not proceed too mechanically. A hint on the correct compromise is given by the Mother herself when she says that the first thing people surrender to her when they come here is their common sense!

Now I shall close the chapter of my role as furniture-keeper and turn to myself as flower-painter. As the only artist or the sole apology for one, I got many favours from the Mother. She heaped me with drawing materials. She brought out the sketching-pads she had collected in Japan from a stationer with that most musical of names: "Bumpodo." (*laughter*) I got paint-brushes and, I think, crayons too. Every morning, after the Pranam, I had to hurry home and paint my flower while it was fresh. Every week the Mother inspected my drawing-book. Then I discovered an important thing. I suppose all of you know that what we have to do here is Yoga first and Yoga again and Yoga always. This makes a formula like the one on good writing which I quoted from a French critic last time and which I will not repeat in French now lest I should once more create comic complications. What I want to say now is that the Mother evaluates everything from the standpoint of Yoga. Of course she appreciates competent and skilful work of all kinds, but if she had to choose between great skill with no Yoga in it and smaller skill with a splash of the Yogic consciousness going with it, she would always tilt in favour of the latter. When she turned the pages of my drawing-book I found that she simply passed over paintings I had done with a great deal of cleverness but with a tinge of self-congratulation. But she paused and smiled and appreciated very much whatever I knew I had done with real remembrance of her and with an inner gesture of offering to her. I may add that, on many occasions, things done like that acquire even a finer artistic form than things done efficiently with an outside approach in order

to impress the Mother with our own talents. A psychic delicacy or an inner sensitive strength enters the line and colour and composition. The same applies to the art of writing. Writing can be surfacy or it can be depth-revealing. Here I may pick up the thread where I dropped it last time in dealing with the problem of clarity in poetic expression.

The French critic's statement — on what good writing, prose or poetry, should be — ran: "Clear, again clear and always clear." But I argued that, while poetry should make an attempt at being clear, well-formulated, something you could catch, something you could visualise inwardly, it should combine with the clarity an element of mystery. So I would rather follow Havelock Ellis's dictum: "Be clear, be clear, be not too clear." What I infer from this is that we cannot do without clarity but that our clarity should lead on to a profundity beyond the mere mind — the profundity of the Divine's Being which to the Divine's Consciousness is a most blissful transparency — a colossal clarity of beatitude, but which to the mere mind is an ever-elusive secret. Mark the epithet I have employed: "ever-elusive". It does not mean that you are just stumped and dumbfounded: it means that you move onward, press forward, seeking as it were a shape and a substance but both of them refuse to be caught and pinned down, they overflow the words while yet filling them. Conceptual hints, imaginative suggestions, symbolic shadowings-forth are there, demanding an inner awareness for their comprehension — these are what poetry must have along with graspable and utterable matter. I might say that poetry should aim not so much at the clarity of the mind as at the clarity of what we may term with Sri Aurobindo the Overmind. The one is concerned with seeing faithfully the contour, the colour, the texture, so to speak, of the subject of a poem. The other does not stop with a limited observation. It passes from it to more and more subtle patterns and meanings. The beauty of contour, colour and texture — the loveliness of the finite — opens brightly into unknown dimensions: it is, like the body of Savitri in the passage from Sri Aurobindo I recited to you last time —

A golden temple door to things beyond.

The Overmind's clarity pierces from space to wider space, follows light upon deeper light, discerns truth after greater truth. It is an endless self-discovery of the Infinite. The true poet directly or in-

directly goes after such revelation — directly when he not only deals with spiritual themes but catches the pulsation of an inner language without any admixture — indirectly when he handles themes that are secular or even profane, yet infuses into his language an inner turn and tone.

Let me give you an example which may be considered at the same time spiritual and secular. Most of you must have come across Wordsworth's line:

The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep.

The line occurs in Wordsworth's famous *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality* which a British schoolboy made a memorable howler of by calling it Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimate Immorality!* (laughter) In this poem Wordsworth describes the landscape of a May morning in Cumberland, while bringing out the subtle feelings and impressions he had during childhood of a divine radiance everywhere, God's presence in all Nature — in flowers and streams and even rocks. These feelings and impressions he found dimming as he grew older and at times he lamented he had quite lost them. In the midst of one confrontation of landscape with a certain mood he has that fascinating line. What does it mean? An Englishman would be disposed to equate it with:

The Winds come to me from the sleeping fields.

He would mean that as the earth had just emerged from darkness and was still covered with shadows the adjacent fields lay in a mist and seemed to be in a drowse lingering on from the night and so the breeze blowing from them came with a drowsing influence to the poet. As a result, the poet's heart was cooled and lulled and soothed. This interpretation sees the line as absolutely clear in its significance: it gives us a fair picture of finite things. But, if Wordsworth meant just this, why did he not say "sleeping fields" instead of "fields of sleep" and make the line akin, with a different atmospheric touch, to the start, breathing a reverent Nature-enjoyment, of the 1804-version of *The Prelude*:

*Oh there is blessing in the gentle breeze
That blows from the green fields ...?*

One may answer: "In the passage concerned there is the word 'steep' at the end of a nearby line and Wordsworth has to rhyme with it: so he puts 'fields of sleep' here rather than 'sleeping fields'. That is all the reason." But surely Wordsworth was enough of a master of language to rhyme "steep" with some other line-ending and get the proper rhyme for "fields" by another verse. Even if he could not, what prevented him from writing not what he actually wrote but simply:

The Winds come to me from the fields asleep?

The rhyme remains, yet does it say what Wordsworth wanted? Of course the shade of sense in "the fields asleep" is not quite the same as in "the sleeping fields". The emphasis has shifted from the "fields". The qualifying word "asleep", placed after the noun and then also at the end of a line where a greater or smaller pause is always made, takes up our attention rather than the word "fields". The activity — or, if you like, the passivity — of sleeping is now in the forefront. A greater interiority is indicated, but we do not go very far except by way of something in the rhythm and in the indefinable suggestion of a particular word-order. However, we fall between two stools. We miss the surface clearness, the clearness that is a nearness, and we yet do not get any clearness of the depth, of the distance. There is neither the mind's admirable clarity nor the amazing clarity of the overmind. The final fulfilled poetic effect has not been reached and we are more tantalised imaginatively than satisfied intuitively. The intuitive satisfaction arrives only with the line Wordsworth actually penned. There "sleep" assumes the centre. We are face to face with a state of in-drawn consciousness, what seems a blank to the surface mind but is really a new dimension of being. Now it is the presence, the power, of "sleep" that has fields of its own: "sleep" is now a plane, a hidden world, a mysterious existence. Modern psychology would call it the Subliminal or else the Collective Unconscious. But such labels do not carry us sufficiently into the poetic mystery here. It is only the ancient Mandukya Upanishad that supplies the right clue. There we have three stages of consciousness described: the waking stage, *jāgrat*, which looks outward on the physical cosmos, the dream stage, *svapna*, which looks inward on subtle universes, and the sleep stage, *susupti*, in which everything is gathered into a divine concentration, a spiritual seed-form. Wordsworth's "fields

of sleep” conveys the life-sense of the superconscious unknown that is the Mandukya Upanishad’s *susupti*: these fields are the hidden height of our inmost being, from whose recesses of eternal bliss and rapt truth-sight the most profoundly re-creative inspiration wafts into us.

Note how well the spiritual mystery pressing upon the poet from across in-drawn distances is prepared by the three preceding lines in the passage:

*The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong:
I hear the Echoes thro’ the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep.*

The physical reality imaginatively caught up into the semi-symbolic meets us in the opening line: the trumpet-metaphor affines the cataracts to invisible high-poised archangels. A subjective turn enters the next line, putting the poet’s grief into relation with something living and vocal in the season, something against whose secret burden of self-existent bliss all expression of grief would be an ungrateful rebellion. Then the physical sounds from the steep, descending and spreading in space, are mentioned in a rarefied form as “Echoes” gathering in lofty places, hovering for the poet like a remote remembrance of some looming range and recess of reality, both without and within. Then we get the last movement with its leap beyond all Nature-hints of the spiritual into sheer mysticism and Mantra. Nót that Nature is annulled — the fields of Cumberland on “a sweet May morning” are still there, but the breath, simultaneously vague and powerful, of Supernature has broken across them and wakened in the poet the thrill of some ultimate soulscape. There we have the divine clarity I have spoken of, shining through the human clarity and giving us the mystery that makes meaning a gesture of ecstasy and, whether colourful or delicate, sweeps us from the finite concrete object into illimitable vistas. In the words of Meredith,

*its touch is infinite and lends
A yonder to all ends.*

A long time ago — in 1934 — I submitted Wordsworth’s line to Sri Aurobindo, asking what plane exactly it had hailed from. He

replied that it was very high in the "overhead" inspiration but lacked the precise overmind note and had only the note of the intuition-plane in an intense form. Afterwards, in 1946, Sri Aurobindo sprang a surprise on me with the declaration that the line was one of the seizures from the overmind itself. Naturally I questioned him: "What you write now means a crucial change of opinion — but how and why?" He replied: "Yes, certainly my ideas and reactions to some of the lines and passages about which you had asked me long ago, have developed and changed and could not but change" — and he added: "I have since then moved in those fields of sleep and felt the breath which is carried from them by the winds that came to the poet, so I can better appreciate the depth of vision in Wordsworth's line."

Well, we have come back to Sri Aurobindo, but our time is up and a lot of things I had wished to tell you have got left out. We shall have to meet again, since there seems to be a yonder to all my ends.

TALK FIVE

March 3, 1971

I am afraid that last time I again left a lot of loose ends. I don't quite know where to pick up the thread of discourse. But, first, can a talk of mine be at all designated a discourse? Discourse implies acting the philosopher. In that respect I seem to resemble Dr. Jonathan whom Samuel Johnson once asked: "Have you tried being a philosopher?" Dr. Jonathan replied: "Sir, I have tried several times, but always cheerfulness keeps breaking in." (*laughter*)

Well, the mention of "philosopher" gives me a sort of clue where to begin: the factor which would most seem to accord with the serious look, the grave air, the philosophic posture — I mean the beard I had in the old days. And perhaps the matter of loose ends is quite appropriate to the beard because a beard appears to be a formation of hanging loose ends. (*laughter*) But whether my beard was appropriate to me is another question. I said I wanted to look like Bernard Shaw. Undoubtedly Shaw's beard was very expressive of him, particularly by its colour. A wit has said, "When Shaw was young, his beard was red with anger, and when he became old it grew white with rage." (*laughter*) My beard was not white at that time, it was fairly blackish and in any case even if it had been red it wouldn't have exactly suited me, because I don't think I am prone very much to angry explosions. As far as I can recollect, I was angry only twice in my first ten years and that too for a moment. I am unfortunately not so Yogic now, since I find that every year I once lose my temper for a second and I feel so ashamed not only because of the loss of control but also because the occasion is so tremendously trivial.

Talking of loss of temper, I think the most anger-prone sadhak I have seen was one who once confessed to the Mother: "If I had a pistol in my hand I would shoot the labourer with whom I am angry." Actually the anger back-fired — all the more because he was a true and sincere aspirant who had, in addition, a phenomenal capacity to give himself to the Mother's work. I have rarely seen a worker of that kind, ready to spend every ounce of energy day

and night if need be. But those fits of anger used to play havoc with him. He had horrible reactions: fits of vomiting, as though something nasty had come into the being which could not be assimilated and had to be thrown out. Towards the end of his life I think he arrived at some control over his excitable nature.

Another thing fairly infrequent with me by the grace of God is that very upsetting movement called jealousy. People think jealousy is a most human and natural feeling — but, if they are right, it makes one lament the human and natural, for it is one of the most dangerous responses in a life of Yoga. One may digress from Yoga in various directions and still be able to come back to the straight path; but if jealousy takes possession of one in regard to the Mother's relations with the sadhaks, I am sure that one digs one's own spiritual grave. When one goes wrong in other ways, one doubts one's own capacity to do Yoga: one does not doubt the Mother's capacity to be one's Guru. But when jealousy overwhelms one, one thinks in terms of favouritism on the Mother's part. We start saying: "Oh she is all smiles to this sadhak but doesn't even look at me! She gives such a lot of attention to that sadhika, but completely ignores my needs." Such a critical view leads to a fundamental misgiving about the Guru's own status and the Guru's right to be a guide. This misgiving is, in my opinion, absolutely disastrous.

I once acutely realised what a disaster it can lead to. I was sitting at the top of the staircase outside the Mother's door. She used to open that door sometimes and glance at the people sitting. There was a girl next to me. I think it was Chinmayi who is no more with us. I had been waiting and waiting while she had just come. Suddenly the Mother opened the door, did not even look at me but just called Chinmayi in. Chinmayi went behind the Mother and I was left with the door practically shut in my face. I was terribly upset and a great surge of jealousy swept over me. Wave after hot wave struck against me and I was totally submerged. I felt extremely uncomfortable because it was a most unusual phenomenon with me. But I think the extreme form of my experience was secretly a gift of the Mother's grace, for it broke open an inner vision. When I hung my head down and looked between my legs at the stairs, I did not see the stairs but a black abyss, a bottomless black abyss. At once I was shocked into saying: "Ah, so this is what jealousy is! It is a pit of darkness unfathomable which tries to suck us in irrevocably." And since that moment — except for

minor twinges of envy when somebody or other has written good poems more often than I — I don't think I have had any invasion of jealousy.

Before proceeding further I may hark back for a minute to my blessed beard. Although I have said it was not expressive of any indignation *à la* Shaw at the follies of the age (least of all at my own follies), it did play a certain expressive role. On the one side it mildly suggested what Sri Aurobindo and the Mother thought was quite evident — namely, that I had been an ancient Athenian in one of my past lives. On the other it conjured up, in the overall look of the face, the early Christian. The early Christians used to retire to the desert — in order to avoid the temptations of the world and wrestle with the Devil in private. And quite a wrestle they did have with the Devil, for after all the Devil is inside us as much as in the world. I am sure the wrestling took perverse forms because there was also the unnatural pressure of solitude and they could not distract their minds with anything even innocently improper. They had to concentrate all the time on their souls and that can be a very difficult job. It was the Mother again who marked the look of the early Christian in me. She glanced at a photograph of mine and pointed out the resemblance. I believe part of the resemblance lay in a certain fear in me at that time, fear of relapsing into the ordinary life. I would keep away from crowds, not be a good mixer, avoid even going to a shop, run to my room every now and then — and, with the Darshan in the offing, there would be almost a retirement for a week or so. The Mother doesn't care for a spirituality which is full of fear. I remember we had a French class taken by a very kind French lady, Madame Gaebelé, whose Ashram name is Suvrata, and once at the end of a course she invited all her students to her place for tea, cakes, ice-cream and such things. I was very trepidant: "Should I go? Should I not go? What should I do? Would my Yoga be completely overturned if I went?" (*laughter*) I was in two minds and I asked the Mother: "Do you think I may go?" She replied in effect: "If you don't, won't you feel sorry afterwards? To have a regret that you have missed something would not be healthy. As a rule we don't encourage parties, but there must be no fear on your side. On this occasion I think you can go; but go quite calmly."

Now I would like to come to more serious topics: phases and phenomena of the Ashram which were contemporaneous with the career of my beard. By the way, my beard did not last all my

life, as you can see for yourselves. Actually the first shaving of it marked the first spiritual fall I had, because after a year and a half my people from Bombay came on a visit and they brought the Bombay atmosphere. Although I agreed to see them only twice a week, I was yet afraid I might lose or spoil my Yogic halo. And those few meetings made me open myself to the Bombay atmosphere and I said: "Why should I not shave off my beard? I'll be better-looking without it!" My brother had no beard, the friend accompanying my family had none, either. So one morning I just cleared mine away. But when I looked in the mirror it seemed as if half my face had been cut off! (*laughter*) So much removed from under the chin so suddenly made the face look horribly small. And it was with this face that I went to the Darshan of Sri Aurobindo. He was a little puzzled: "Who is this funny-looking fellow with a face familiar but inexplicably halved?" (*laughter*) Then he concentrated a little and recognised that here was Amal Kiran. Seeing his expression, I on my return home wrote at once to him: "How did you find me?" He replied: "Grow back your beard as fast as you can!" (*laughter*) And I started re-growing it by whatever means I could — even watering my face at times in my desperation. (*laughter*) In a fortnight there was some result to show of all my pains and prayers.

Gradually as I grew out of the complex of fear I felt that the beard which formed part of the early-Christian *ensemble* of my face did not fit in with the new look I was acquiring. But now I was wiser by that first abrupt change from hirsute to clean-shaven: so I began to trim my beard. Every month it became shorter and shorter. (*laughter*) Finally, on the eve of my third visit to Bombay during the first ten years of my Ashram-life, I asked the Mother: "What shall I do? Do you think I could shave off my beard?" She said: "There is hardly any beard left. You might as well shave off what you call a beard. Do what you like; it won't make any difference." (*laughter*) So that was the end of the beard. And since then I am afraid to grow it because now I think most of it will come out white and make me look even more old than I am. (*laughter*)

To go back to the old days when I was young: the most important things then were the Pranam and the meeting with the Mother in various ways. There was at that time not only, as I said, a meditation in the early morning at 7.30 but also a night meditation to which I was not admitted because I was a mere novice and the

Mother must have thought I would fall asleep. Even now she thinks that people on the whole can really meditate only for three minutes: afterwards there are diverse states of sleep. (*laughter*) When somebody asked her how long a man could sit in Sri Aurobindo's room for meditation, she said: "It can't be for more than three minutes, for soon after that he will fall asleep." And actually even the older sadhaks seemed to be falling asleep, for Sri Aurobindo shortly after I came to Pondicherry put a dead stop to the night meditation, saying: "I don't care for a snoring concert." (*laughter*)

The morning meditation went on and a little later there was started an evening meditation. It was extremely exalting because everything was dim and the Mother used to come and sit in a trance and all of us would try to do the same. I believe there were good results for all of us, except that every day there was one little odd occurrence, a disturbance, due to a South Indian Yogi who had become a sadhak here. He was supposed to be a great doer of tapasya — one who could carry on austere meditation. He told me once that before he came here he had thought he was the Avatar of the age. (*laughter*) After he saw Sri Aurobindo he developed some misgiving about himself and was inclined to think that perhaps Sri Aurobindo was the Avatar! Now, he would first sit in his room to meditate and then when he had got into the full swing of the inner consciousness he would come to the general meditation of the evening. In order to keep his room-meditation going he would open only one eye and keep the other shut and come like that all the way so that all of the inner consciousness might not escape. (*laughter*) With one eye shut, naturally several sorts of disasters could take place. The catastrophe that did frequently happen was that on his passage into the hall he put one of his feet right into the capacious lap of a fat lady named Mridu who used to sit just at the entrance. (*laughter*) She was outraged and indignant, but it was impossible to make any protest when the Mother was deep in trance.

In the period of Ashram history somewhat earlier than that of this evening function we had what I may call the Soup Ceremony. I referred to it in my last talk. It was a very important function every evening. It impressed one like a snatch of the Ancient Mysteries. The atmosphere was as in some secret temple of Egyptian or Greek times. In subdued light people would sit on mats in the hall which is now the Reception Room. At about 8 the Mother

would come down from the Prosperity Room upstairs and take her seat near the shaded lamp. Champaklal brought down a big cauldron of hot soup and placed it in front of her on a stool. Then the Mother would go into a trance. In the course of her trance her arms would stretch forward over the soup-cauldron. For a minute they would remain there as if she were pouring something of her subtle-physical spirituality into the liquid. The idea must have been to give her own luminous subtle-physical substance and energy — a most concrete transference of spirituality into physical stuff. Then the Mother would open her eyes and Champaklal would remove the cauldron to one side and give her a big spoon. Each of us in turn would go and kneel before her and offer her our cup. The cup used to be called in the Ashram lingo “the animal cup”: really it was “the enamel cup” mispronounced! (*laughter*) Perhaps the mispronunciation was quite appropriate: what we had to give the Mother was really an animal emptiness after all. (*laughter*) The Mother used to take the animal cup and pour divine soup into it; and sometimes in the middle of the pouring she would again be lost in meditation and we had to kneel there for even three or four minutes. Suddenly she would open her eyes and smile in a little shy or embarrassed way. After filling the cup she would take a sip from it. You see, that was the further and final touch of the transference of her subtle-physical force to something we could materially take into ourselves.

The Soup Ceremony was a very solemn one; but I am afraid the fundamental thing that was required of us was not fulfilled: there was no exchange of energy between the Mother and us. When the Mother gives and gives we should not just gobble up her gifts: on our part we should make an offering too because unless we give ourselves or whatever is in us, we cannot make room for what she gives: otherwise what she gives is grabbed as it were by some sort of spiritual greed. Not an unresponsive vacuity — an animal emptiness — but a receptive vacancy made by a self-purifying consecrated inner gesture is the need. Such a gesture doesn't appear to have been sufficiently made by us. Owing to the one-way traffic of the spiritual process, there was an enormous drain on the Mother and after some months of the Soup Ceremony she fell terribly ill and it was stopped. I can't quite vouch for the words but I have the impression that Sri Aurobindo's comment ran somewhat like: “These fellows are brutes.” We did not realise

what the Mother was doing: she was as if playing with her own life for our sake.

Closely connected with the Soup Ceremony was a series of meetings between the Mother and a few sadhaks in the Prosperity Room before she went down. If the Soup Ceremony had an air of Divine Gravity, the Prosperity Meeting may be considered to have had about it a breath of Divine Levity. It was enjoyable beyond description. The Mother came an hour before the Soup and sat down and attended first to the chits submitted for articles from the Stores. The man in charge was the one who bore the all-overtopping name: Purushottam ("Supreme Being"). Our present Prosperity-chief, Harikant, was just a baby at that time. Besides Purushottam there were two or three people sitting there. Champaklal was always the Mother's attendant in those days, just as he has been in recent times. The Mother says she keeps some lions about her: they belong to the occult planes — but Champaklal looks almost like a physical lion guarding her — a faithful vehicle, *vāhana*, of her Power. In the course of time more and more people gathered around the Mother in the Stores. But it was not because they chose to do so: the manner in which the group grew was incalculable and depended on the Mother alone. I remember how I happened to be in the group. I once went up to collect a writing pad I had asked for. The Mother was sitting in her usual place. I was at the door and Purushottam came and gave me the pad. Then the Mother just said: "Would you like to sit here?" I replied: "Of course, of course." Most happily I went in and sat down. In a more or less similar fashion hardly preplanned, each of the others got a place. The total number stayed fixed at the end. I think it was 24. Like 6, 24 has a special value. 6 is the half and 24 the double of Sri Aurobindo's number — 12 — which represents "The New Perfection". Sri Aurobindo has said that there are 12 powers or vibrations seen from the beginning above the Mother's head: these are indicated in the outermost circle of the Mother's symbol. Sri Aurobindo has also observed that there are really 12 planets in our solar system. 9 have already been discovered but 3 still remain. If you can manage to get this widely proclaimed, you will be hailed as a prophet when the tally is at last made. According to Sri Aurobindo, 12 rays (creating colour-effects) come from the sun, not 7 as we believe. I may note that the Greeks seem to have seen only three: they discerned nothing more than red, blue and yellow in the rainbow. We have obviously

developed more colour-sight. Do you realise that the name "Sri Aurobindo" has itself 12 letters? And, surely, you know, as I once related, that a succession of 12 years marks the most momentous spiritual events in Sri Aurobindo's life. The double of 12 — 24 — has a personal association for me in connection with *Savitri*. When the first one-volume edition of the poem was to be brought out and I was set to look after it, I thought of ascertaining the exact number of lines. Being absolutely incompetent at the counting job, I put our best calculator, Girdharlal, to work. In practically no time he announced the number: 23,814. Then I submitted it to the Mother. At once she said: "There should have been 24,000 lines." This meant, to my mind, that Sri Aurobindo had left some lines uncomposed. One or two parts of the poem did not receive the full final recast — particularly the Epilogue. Perhaps many of the missing lines would have come in there. By the way, the complete title of the epic — *Savitri: A Legend and a Symbol* — makes 24 letters!

To each of us sitting with the Mother in the Prosperity Room she gave a number. I have the impression that Doraiswamy who used to be in the group whenever he came down from Madras had the last number. The first number was of Dara's youngest brother, René. My own was 15, which adds up its numerals to 6: 6 is the number of what is called "The Divine Creation", of which indeed I am very badly in need all the time!¹

We sat before the Mother in a rough semi-circle. But there was one exception. At the Mother's feet was a stool, and Chandulal, our Ashram engineer, somehow got to lie flat in front of the Mother with his head resting against the stool, and the soles of his feet displayed to us. (*laughter*) "Bite-bite", the cat, often came and made herself comfortable on Chandulal's chest and he would try to talk to her in the endearing way the Mother used to address cats. His attempts were extremely funny to hear. All of us and the Mother herself laughed heartily. Chandulal was full of humour and sometimes of unconscious humour, odd turns of speech, strange combinations of words. Some of his pronouncements were quite memorable. I'll give a few examples. Once we had been waiting a long time in silent suspense for the Mother to come down to the room where the evening meditation took place. The effect which

¹ It may be noted that the numerals of 24, the sum of letters in the title of Sri Aurobindo's epic, add up also to 6 — a fact most gratifying to a *Savitri*-maniac like me!

her appearance produced on us was summed up by Chandulal in the sentence: "We were all aghast." How the Mother enjoyed this freakish expression! His character-reading of the first American lady to come to the Ashram — Janet McPheeters, renamed Shantimayi, who formed part of the Prosperity group — ran: "Frivolous in the eyes but serious in the back." (*laughter*) She was puzzled as well as amused, until in less original English it was explained to her that he saw a seriousness of temper behind her apparent light-heartedness. On another occasion, he was discussing the repair of the ceiling of the room below the one across whose floor Sri Aurobindo used to walk vigorously, as he had done in the room of the old "Guest House", where I later stayed for 10 years. Chandulal explained to the Mother in technical language that, if he used beams of a certain thickness, they would bear the moving load only of such and such a weight! (*laughter*) The Mother felt very tickled and Chandulal did not know why she and all of us laughed. At last it dawned on him that he had unwittingly referred to Sri Aurobindo!

Various things were done in the Prosperity *soirées*. The Mother answered all sorts of questions and gave many talks. I would jot down her words in abbreviated long-hand and later reconstruct them. My transcriptions have appeared as the third series in *Words of the Mother*. At times there would be readings from the works of Sri Aurobindo. We would thrust a finger or a paper-cutter into the pages of a book and read out the passage on which we would thus alight. The Mother herself took part in this game. At other times she invented games to test or develop our faculty of intuition. She would arrange some flowers to make up a sentence according to the significances allotted by her to them. We had to guess what she had in mind. It so happened — most interestingly — that everyone of us had on at least one occasion the correct sentence implanted into our heads by her! What was thus demonstrated was not exactly our intuitiveness but her power to make us intuitive when she wanted. There were other games too. I don't remember all the details. Whenever we succeeded in scoring a hit we got a material reward. A slab of French chocolate was the usual gift. Only I went after an unusual prize: a box of French cough-pastilles named Fiamma. I preferred their taste to the chocolate's. All the time there would be joking among us or with the Mother. We were quite uninhibited and the laughter was sometimes uproarious. Many of the over-serious sadhaks in the Soup

Room, waiting for the Mother to come down, were rather disturbed and did not at all approve of the bursts of Ananda upstairs! (*laughter*) It went on like this for an hour every evening.

There were two sights most deeply engraved on my memory. Both relate to the Mother. Once there was a meditation and, as was my wont, I kept opening my eyes and looking around. After the meditation had progressed for some minutes they fell on the Mother. Well, I have never seen the Mother as I saw her then. She was no longer human. Her whole body appeared to have become magnified and there was a light pervading her and the face was of a Goddess. I can only say that it was the face of Maheshwari. Sri Aurobindo has written of this aspect of the Divine Shakti: "Imperial Maheshwari is seated in the wideness above the thinking mind and will and sublimates and greatens them into wisdom and largeness or floods with a splendour beyond them. For she is the mighty and wise One who opens us to the supramental infinities and the cosmic vastness, to the grandeur of the supreme Light, to a treasure-house of miraculous knowledge, to the measureless movement of the Mother's eternal forces. Tranquil is she and wonderful, great and calm for ever...." This was the first time I realised that when the Mother wants she can put forth the Divine Presence and Power completely into the physical being and manifest it. My wife Sehra has seen light coming out of the Mother's whole body and, as it were, assimilating the physical substance or else getting assimilated into it and making it radiant. I have never witnessed such a phenomenon, but here before me was indeed a superhuman being without any veils. I said to myself: "How much I would have lost if I had meditated!" (*laughter*) And, if the Mother showed herself like that all the time, we would not require even to meditate, because all the human part in us, all the mortality in us would be absolutely quelled.

This concrete vision of mine was one peak of the memorable sight-seeing I had in the Prosperity Room. The other peak, which I might call just the opposite but equally divine, was when we were playing a certain game with big lemons. Each of us was trying to balance one of these fruits on our head. And then the Mother herself did the same and sat steady, most unself-consciously. It was a revelatory spectacle, showing how one whom we considered the Supreme Divine incarnate could come down to a funny game like this — I mean something which might look even ridiculous. The Mother sitting with a big yellow lemon on her head! Can

you imagine anything more unexpected? But whenever I recollect the sight I think of the mighty fourth line in the second stanza of Sri Aurobindo's *Rose of God*. Here is the stanza:

*Rose of God, great wisdom-bloom on the summits of being,
Rose of Light, immaculate core of the ultimate seeing!
Live in the mind of our earthhood; O golden Mystery, flower,
Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvellous
Hour.*

A figuration of Maheshwari, the Goddess of my first vision, seems also in these lines, and the last of them —

*Sun on the head of the Timeless, guest of the marvellous
Hour —*

calls forth from me, as an equally profound disclosure of the sheer Divine, a new phrase, now too about a "golden Mystery":

*Lemon on the head of the Mother, our host of the marvellous
Hour.*

When the Mother, as a gracious host, entertained us in those sixty minutes in the Prosperity Room, we saw not only her utter height but also her complete refusal to put on any airs. Perhaps "refusal" is not the right term because any airs would be unnatural to her and she does not have to make an effort against them. But we have to be on guard against taking her for granted. She comes so close to our beings, acts so familiarly with us, as though she were one of us, that unless we keep our minds and hearts open we shall be in danger at times of missing to realise what she is.

I am sure Sri Aurobindo behaved in the same natural manner. From Nirod's accounts we see him overflowing with humour, cracking all kinds of jokes. Some of the jokes were even unreportable! (*laughter*) When editing Nirod's accounts, I submitted a few of Sri Aurobindo's jokes to the Mother for approval and she said: "No, no, you can't publish that in *Mother India*."

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother do not deliberately keep any barriers between themselves and their disciples. I have found the Mother behaving without the slightest sense of the gulf separating her in quality of consciousness from us. The Divine Shakti, I have

learnt, does not go on thinking of her own greatness, does not stand on her supreme dignity as human V.I.P.'s do. Once I found the Mother come very sweetly in search of me all the way from her lunch-corner to the farther of the two doors of Sri Aurobindo's room. In those years after Sri Aurobindo's passing away, some of us used to gather on the first floor and receive flowers and blessings from her or be near her for some reason or other until her lunch-hour. Then everybody would go away. But, by an inexplicable stroke of Grace, I was allowed to remain waiting in the passage room outside her bathroom. I would sit there until she finished her lunch and came out to go to the bathroom. On occasion I would not quite know what to do and so I would walk into Sri Aurobindo's room, sit there for a while and then return to my usual station and meet the Mother. One day I oversat in Sri Aurobindo's room. And what did I see? The Mother had crossed all the way through the passage-room right to the end of the long room outside Sri Aurobindo's, wondering where the waiting fellow had disappeared. When I saw her I got up with a start, feeling ashamed that I had made her take all that trouble to come and look for someone utterly unimportant, just to give him the blessing he hardly deserved but keenly desired.

The manner in which the Mother deals with children is another eye-opener. I recall how she once handled a little girl who was brought to her as having fever. The Mother put her hand gently over the girl's head, moved it slowly to the back of the head, then slid it right down the spine in the same caressing way, and at the end lightly kissed the child on her forehead. The little patient, I am positive, went away as good as cured. I wish everybody could receive such doctoring. The Mother has told me that she used to cure her son André, when a boy, of all his illnesses without ever calling a doctor. She has an extraordinary healing power. Most of us have had plenty of experiences of it. I would like to tell you some of mine, but where's the time today? I shall close this part of my talk on the theme of the Mother's coming intimately near to us and making the Integral Yoga so very easy and lavishing her love on us without reserve — I shall close this part of my talk by quoting, if you will excuse me, two poems of my own. One is concerned with the time of Pranam. I have entitled it *Grace*:

*Take all my shining hours from me,
But hang upon my quiet soul's
Pale brow your dream-kiss like a gem.
Let life fall stricken to its knee,
If unto lone-faced poverty
You give your blessing's diadem.
Make of these proud eyes beggar-bowls,
But only drop your smile in them.*

The other poem, named *O Silent Love*, reads:

*Because you never claim of us a tear,
O Silent Love, how often we forget
The eyes of countless centuries were wet
To bring your smile so near!*

*Forgive if I remember not the blaze,
Imperishable, perfect, infinite,
Of far omnipotence from which you light
Your lamp of human face.*

*Make me a worship-vigil everywhere,
Slumber and wakefulness one memory
That you are God. O let each pore of me
Become a mouth of prayer.*

TALK SIX

October 20, 1971

The high-lights of our last talk were my recollections of the Divine Levity which went on in the "Prosperity" Store-room and of the Divine Gravity which held sway at the Soup Distribution downstairs. But perhaps these terms I have chosen are too trenchant in their distinction. Many serious things were done upstairs and at least once a very funny thing happened during the Soup Distribution.

The Mother was in deep trance. We tried to imitate her by shutting our eyes tight. Now, a big rat decided to join the Meditation. (*laughter*) But it had a rather original way of meditating. It ran to and fro amongst us — I'm sure with its eyes shut like ours, because otherwise one cannot explain what it ultimately did: it rushed right into Dara's dhoti! (*laughter*)

You can imagine poor Dara. He was in a terrible fix. Perhaps the word "fix" is not quite the *mot juste*, for he was extremely mobile. (*laughter*) He jumped up on one side of his seat and jumped down on the other, he thrust out one leg, pulled in the other, and fumbled with both hands to catch the fellow within the folds of his dhoti. (*laughter*) At last the rat ran out, but there was such a commotion that the Mother opened her eyes and looked for an explanation. Then Pavitra, in what he believed was a voice suitable to the solemnity of the Soup Distribution, said in a low rumble: "It is a Bandicoot!" (*laughter*)

The Mother was amazed at first and then amused. I was in such a state I had to exert supreme self-control in order not to explode into a most unspiritual Ananda. Well, I managed to bottle myself up for some time, until my turn came to go to the Mother. I went to her, knelt at her feet and, still holding myself tight, gave her my cup. She looked at me and smiled with a twinkle in her eyes. I just burst into laughter. I couldn't act the concentrated Yogi any longer. And she was quite a sport: she opened her eyes wide, smiled very broadly, filled my cup, took a sip from it as usual and, with a slight knowing push, gave it back to me.

Nothing on the serious side to the same degree happened upstairs to counterbalance the general light-heartedness. Only a tiger leaping into our midst would have created a match to that incursion of the Bandicoot. However, something quite startling did happen once. You know we used to sit in a sort of semi-circle before the Mother. Suddenly she declared: "A fat black hostile being is sitting just in front of me." We all looked at one another (*laughter*) and wondered who she could have meant. I happened to be right in front of her. (*laughter*) Well, I may be more or less blackish, perhaps some hostility too may have lurked, but surely I wasn't fat at all in those days. (*laughter*) So the suspicion slid off me, and then we could see from the Mother's eyes that she was looking at something that was invisible to us. After a while she packed the blighter off. "He is gone," she said. We asked her: "Why didn't you finish him? Why did you just let him go?" She explained a very important point. These hostile forces take all kinds of forms. And it's no use destroying one form, because the forces themselves cannot be destroyed. They will take another form and come to harass you. But they do serve a purpose: they put their probing fingers on defect after defect in us, spot after spot which is receptive to them, so that every shortcoming of ours may spark up in our consciousness and we may be able to deal with all our weaknesses efficiently. They will go pricking us and poking us until we achieve absolute perfection. Then their existence will be nullified by becoming absolutely useless.

Thus, nothing like a tiger-leap occurred upstairs, but the Mother sometimes sprang a number of tiger-surprises on us, tearing our fixed notions to bits, destroying our conventional ideas. I may recall to you some of these mind-shaking revelations.

One concerned the very physical plane. The Mother had a friend named Alexandra David-Neel. Madame David-Neel also knew Sri Aurobindo a little. She was a student of Buddhism, especially the Tibetan variety about which she has written a very fascinating book. She died recently at the age of 101 or so in Paris. Our Prithwin interviewed her once, before she passed away. The Mother had a high opinion of her. She said she was very sincere and intense and was capable of considerable meditation. Now, the Mother told us, this lady once started walking while meditating. It was in the open. She walked and walked for a long time with closed eyes. When at last she opened them she found herself in a strange place and turned to go home. She walked back without

shutting her eyes. At a certain distance she saw that there was a stream running right across. How had she gone over the stream? There had been nobody to help her take a boat. Evidently she had walked upon the water! This seems incredible, but as the Mother believed it we had no right to doubt. The Mother said Madame David-Neel would not fool anybody nor would she deceive herself. So the miracle of walking upon the water can occur even in our twentieth century! We have heard of Jesus walking on the Lake of Galilee. But to go across a fairly wide and deep stream in our own day by sheer power of consciousness spiritually poised above earthly matters was really an eye-opener. No wonder the Mother's story has stuck in my mind.

Another startler was when the Mother brought her original manuscript of *Prayers and Meditations*. The printed book had already come out, but we had never seen the handwritten version, the personal diary. With the shut volume in her lap, she asked us: "Name your favourite sentence." All found out the words that had appealed to them most. Quite coolly the Mother picked up a pair of scissors and started cutting out from the manuscript the parts we had selected. Then she pasted them on pieces of paper, wrote our names on top, put the current date which was June 21, 1932, signed her name "Mira" and handed the pieces to us. So precious a document she could just cut up and give away like that!

I remember the sentence I selected as the master Mantra of my life in the Ashram. It was an entry made in Pondicherry on September 25, 1914. It ran: "O divine, adorable Mère, avec ton aide qu'y a-t-il d'impossible?" The bit the Mother cut out from her volume contained the next sentence also: "L'heure des réalisations est proche et tu nous a assuré ton concours pour accomplir intégralement la Suprême Volonté." The English translation of the two sentences reads: "O divine and adorable Mother, with Thy help what is there that is impossible? The hour of realisation is near and Thou hast assured us of Thy aid that we may perform integrally the supreme Will."

I may add that there is one more sentence in this Prayer before the grand conclusion, which is:

*The Lord has willed and Thou dost execute:
A new light shall break upon the earth,
A new world shall be born.
The things that were promised shall be fulfilled.*

These words look forward to the Supramental Manifestation for which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were working. As you know, the Manifestation at last took place on February 29, 1956. On April 24 of that year the Mother declared for the first time publicly that the long-awaited event had come to pass. She distributed in the Meditation Hall the above phrases as the Message of the day. When she went upstairs, she called for the copies of all those of us who were near her there, and altered the future tense to the present and gave the first line a different as well as a personal turn. In its earlier form the passage had appeared as one of the epigraphs of *Mother India* ever since the fortnightly had grown a monthly: henceforth it appeared in the new form:

*Lord, Thou hast willed and I execute:
A new light breaks upon the earth,
A new world is born.
The things that were promised are fulfilled.*

It was indeed very gratifying to me on a back-look that I should have selected a sentence from that particular Prayer — and perhaps the selection was symbolic of some small vague connection I was to have with the Day of the Supramental Manifestation. But I shall come to this point a little later.

Let me continue with some of the unforgettable things of the Prosperity meetings. A few statements by the Mother bearing on the Yogic life have always kept ringing in my ears. One was a call for inner freedom, a casting away of all bondage of the past, a spiritual rebirth. She said: "If we want to counteract, annul or outgrow our past, we cannot do it by mere repentance or similar things, we must forget that the untransformed past has ever been and enter into an enlightened state of consciousness which breaks loose from all moorings. To be reborn means to enter, first of all, into our psychic consciousness where we are one with the Divine and eternally free from the reactions of Karma. Without becoming aware of the psychic, it is not possible to do so; but once we are securely conscious of the true soul in us all bondage ceases. Then incessantly life begins afresh, then the past no longer cleaves to us." After this, the Mother went on to an astounding pronouncement based on a realisation of hers. She told us: "To give you an idea of the final height of spiritual rebirth, I may say that there can

be a constant experience of the whole universe disappearing at every instant and being at every instant newly created!"

We think of the universe as necessarily a continuity through time. The Mother shatters this impression. According to her, there is no necessity compelling the universe to be what it has been. Every point of time is a point of absolute freedom for the Divine's Will. The Divine may make the universe more or less as it was before, but He does it freely. And the Divine can introduce certain elements at each second which are unforeseeable by us. And that is why history is so full of somersaults. People expect one thing and something else happens. Against all calculations the course of events suddenly takes a new turn. We are inclined to believe that hidden antecedents are responsible. But we never really find them, however much we may try to draw up a logical scheme. The unexpected is, in my view, the touch of the Divine re-creating the universe at a particular minute just a wee bit different.

Well, if we have faith in this re-creation minute by minute, we can also feel we are not completely bound by what we call the chain of Karma. We are often upset over the hold of our past. Like a millstone round our neck the past seems to hang. But nothing really binds us down in an absolute sense. Of course, our power of re-creating ourselves in our lives is limited. But self-conscious beings, beings who can stand back and watch their own nature, inner and outer, with however small a detachment, beings who not only know but know that they know — such beings have at least a speck of true freedom, and from that speck they can alter their lives at any instant. This certainty I got when the Mother came out with that secret of secrets about the universe.

You will perhaps say: "It is all very well to know this. Actually we are hemmed in all the time by our feeling of incapacity: it is most difficult to alter our lives." Even for such a feeling the Mother has a consoling word. In the Store-room she once talked about the flower which symbolises in her vision "Successful Future". Apropos of this flower she said that the successful future means the supramental change of the world, when the Divine will stand manifest — unveiled in its total perfection. Then she told us: "I do not mean to say that the whole world will at once feel its presence or be transformed; but I do mean that a part of humanity will know and participate in its descent — say, this little world of ours here. From there the transfiguring grace will most effectively

radiate. And fortunately for the aspirants, that successful future will materialise for them in spite of all the obstacles set in its way by unregenerate human nature!" Aren't these words wonderfully reassuring? To know that the work of the Supermind does not depend on us altogether but that the golden future will somehow come and pick us up and envelop us, provided we are willing to be so treated — this is indeed supreme Grace. And no power except the Supermind can be so gracious. It alone can transform us in spite of ourselves! But I think we should properly understand this sweeping of us into the Light. It means that at least one part of us wants the Light. Ordinarily, the other parts that don't want it and won't co-operate present to us a problem we have ourselves to deal with. We have to fight with these parts and often the fight looks pretty fruitless. The Supermind can overlook them and, through the one pure point of aspiration and surrender, set up a blaze that can act upon all the rest and do what seems impossible.

The Supermind — there you have a subject of perpetual fascination for my intellect. So you can imagine my pleasure when the Mother made a most surprising disclosure. When we usually talk of Supermind and Overmind, we do draw a marked distinction between them, but we do not go beyond saying that the latter is only the delegate of the former and therefore an inferior power by comparison and not capable of achieving the ultimate victory of the Divine. All the same, compared to our mind, it is a mighty splendour and we couple it with the Supermind while we mental creatures stand dwarfed below. The Mother shook us up by saying that the gap we feel between our mind and Overmind is less than the gap existing between Overmind and Supermind. Her words put things quite topsyturvy. But if we think clearly they should strike us as quite natural. After all, the Overmind is only the divine aspect of the mind. The Supermind is the Divine self-experienced in its creative movement — directly, immediately. The Overmind is the Divine projecting itself into the highest mental formulation of its nature. The Divine there is self-aware at one remove. Because of this the Overmind is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the top of the Lower Hemisphere: the Higher Hemisphere starts beyond it. Yet we are always impressed by its proximity to the Supermind and forget the radical, the colossal difference between the two. The Mother threw this difference into memorable relief. And the astounding reversal she made is very picturesquely reflected in some lines of Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*. Nobody seems to have

noticed them, but they can serve as the packed seed of a whole revelatory philosophy, a whole new vision of reality. Sri Aurobindo writes in the third Canto of the first Book:

*As if a torch held by a power of God,
The radiant world of the everlasting Truth
Glimmered like a faint star bordering the night
Above the golden Overmind's shimmering ridge.*

There is a night between the Overmind and the Supramental Truth-world, and so vast, so deep is it that the Supermind appears above the Overmind as no more than a tiny star at the furthest end of the darkness.

These lines and the Mother's words account also for the fact that the knowledge of the Supermind was lost and the Overmind stood as the ultimate Dynamic Divine for all spiritual seekers. And here the actual glories of the Overmind are themselves responsible too. What Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have said must not lead us to look down on the Overmind. It is the plane of the Great Gods who are aspects of a single Godhead representative of the Supramental Divinity. Both the Mother and Sri Aurobindo have here declared that there has not been any Yogi who, having gone into the Overmind plane, had not been caught in its giant grandeurs and believed he had reached the limit. Sri Aurobindo, of course, as soon as he came to that part of his sadhana when the prospect of the overhead planes was opened up, knew intuitively the essential character of the Supermind. He could not but know it, since he had come from the Supramental Truth as its Avatar to establish it on earth. But he has said that in the course of his sadhana he passed through a stage when the Overmind did not seem radically different from the Supermind. It is because of this that the word "Overmind" does not occur in the *Arya*. He felt that the Overmind was just a lower or subordinate status of the Supermind, a level where a divine multiplicity was much in evidence: that was all. And he says that he saw it like that because he was looking at it from the mind-plane, where the sadhana was then going on for a mental transformation. When you are on the mind-plane, you are so submerged in the Overmind's illuminations that you think here is a continuation of the highest "radiant world". But when Sri Aurobindo came down to the vital plane and still more when he descended to the physical consciousness for the

transformative sadhana there, then it became sharply evident that the Overmind was not merely a sub-Supermind. Standing in the world of marked division, the plane where the One is broken up most strikingly, he could recognise as if from a terrible effect the root cause that had remained hidden. The root cause leading to the total division was the Overmind where the One and the Many are not in an integral balance but the One withdraws into the background or sinks into a basis and multiplicity has full play. The unity is never lost, yet it permits the multiplicity to work out every possible line to the extreme. The line of increasing division until the unity is lost gets worked out, after a few planes below the Overmind — then we have what Sri Aurobindo terms Ignorance and — at the lowest reach of the scale — Inconscience. And I guess that when the lustres of the Overmind were focussed by Sri Aurobindo on the formations of Matter, the products of the Inconscience, their rays broke instead of victoriously penetrating. Such breaking must prove that the Overmind is not the true Omnipotence.

Now we can go back to where we stopped: the Day of the Supramental Manifestation, with which, I said, I had a small vague connection symbolised by my choice of that particular Prayer of the Mother's.

I believe the Supramental Manifestation was actually expected in 1938. In that year I left Pondicherry at the end of February for a short spell in Bombay. I had some work to do there, and the Mother had told me, as perhaps many of you know from some reminiscences of mine published in the past, that Sri Aurobindo and she were expecting very great things that year, and so I shouldn't stay in Bombay too long. I said: "Mother, I'll come back the very moment you want me here. Will you please inform me? Do send a telegram at once." She agreed. But no telegram came. I waited for nearly five months and then asked why. Sri Aurobindo replied: "A general descent of the kind you speak of is not in view at the moment."

Now again in 1956 I had to go to Bombay at the end of February. As 1956 was a leap year, it was actually on February 29 that I left Pondicherry. I was to catch the morning train to Madras. So I met the Mother pretty early in the day. She said: "I don't want you to stay away long. Can you come back by the 29th of March?" Evidently she was expecting "great things" once more — the Supramental Manifestation, though she did not specify anything — and she was expecting it within a month's time, perhaps on the

29th of March itself, the date on which, 42 years earlier, she had first come to Pondicherry. I replied, "Mother, I shall surely be back by then." Then I left.

That very day, in the evening, the stupendous thing happened! If I had known, I would never have gone. But I had a strange experience the same night. I need not recount it in detail, for I have told it elsewhere. At Madras I had caught the night-train to Bombay. I was alone in my compartment and I soon fell asleep. Almost at once I had a dream. I saw a huge crowd in an open place — something like the Ashram Playground — and I was on the fringe of the crowd. The Mother was sitting somewhere inside the open place and everybody was going in to do Pranam to her. I also wanted to do it, but somehow I couldn't get the slipper off my left foot — the lame one, as you know. I was shaking the foot and trying to fling away the blessed slipper. In the final jerk of that action I woke up. When my eyes opened, I saw the Mother standing in front of me in the compartment. I am a very sceptical fellow as a rule; so I thought I was imagining things. I shut my eyes; I opened them again, and there she still was. I shut my eyes once more and opened them. She was yet standing. This was too much. So I shut my eyes now for a long time. When I opened them, she was gone. Perhaps I should have kept looking and not allowed the sceptic in me to have play. I might have had a deeper experience. But the benefit now was that the sceptic got completely routed. An indelible wonder filled me. And the memory of that strange calm translucent figure has stayed for ever with me.

I wrote of the experience to the Mother, but received no reply. Only on my return to the Ashram she explained what had occurred. It sounds too self-glorifying to talk of it, but it was a very glorious thing to hear from her. She said: "There were only five people who knew about the Supramental Manifestation — two in the Ashram and three outside." I blurted out: "Then what's the idea of staying in the Ashram?" (*laughter*) She said: "I don't mean that anybody actually knew the Supermind had manifested, but something extraordinary happened to some people. Among those three who were outside, I count you." Puzzled, I asked: "How's that?" She answered: "Didn't you write to me that on February 29 at night you had seen me in the railway compartment?" I said: "Yes, but what did happen?" She replied: "Do you remember I promised in 1938 to inform you. I came now to fulfil my promise." I was absolutely overwhelmed. My God! what Grace the Divine

could give to a poor fool! I fell at the Mother's feet in deepest gratitude.

All this is an old story and here it is rather by the way. After knowing of the Great Event I started revolving in my mind how it was that the Mother had been expecting the Manifestation on or about March 29 and it had come on the 29th of February. What could be the reason? The first reason I found was a most humbly egoistic one. I said: "The Supermind came on the day I left Pondicherry. I must have been the biggest obstacle in its way. (*laughter*) As soon as I was removed, it found its passage free and there it was!" Then I reflected: "Well, it's pretty humble to think yourself such a big obstacle but pretty egoistic to believe the Supermind could depend on so insignificant a chap being there or not." I further thought: "Perhaps it did not come at the expected time because India was the field of the Manifestation. India is famous for unpunctuality. (*laughter*) So the Supermind must have been most Indianly divine to come like that and not keep its appointment with the Mother." But I realised there was an opposite side: not only was the Supermind most Indianly divine but also most divinely Indian, and that is why it came a month earlier than a month later. (*laughter*) Even this explanation did not satisfy me: it struck me as more imaginative than realistic. Then I thought: "We know now that two or three times in January, 1956, Sri Aurobindo came to the Mother and told her that the Supramental Manifestation was in the offing, but he didn't tell her the date. On the morning of the day I left the Ashram the idea of the Manifestation was very strongly in her consciousness: hence she was so particular that — as the saying goes — I shouldn't miss the bus. Her consciousness must automatically have given a push to the Supermind and it rushed out."

This explanation, however, is not the end. I found another in the Mother's talks. She has said: "It was absolutely unexpected on that day. But all my greatest experiences have come like that. I am in my usual consciousness and they come all of a sudden, as if to show their reality in the fullest contrast and vividness. One obtains the best value of a realisation when it is first experienced thus. If one is informed beforehand, the mind begins to play a part."

Still the question persists: "Why on February 29 exactly and on no other day?" Why not on February 28? My sister-in-law Mina who is sitting over there would have been delighted if it

could have come on February 28, which was her birthday. Or else why not on March 1? It could have given the Mother a splendid surprise on any day round about.

Then I remembered what the Mother had said at the Playground on the evening of December 31, 1954: "I foresee that the coming year will be a difficult year. There will be much inner struggle and much outer struggle too.... The difficulties may last perhaps more than the twelve months of the year, may extend to fourteen months.... They will be for all, for the world, for India, for the Ashram and individuals also, more or less equally. It is, I may say, the last hope of the hostile forces — to prevail against the Present Realisation."

Now think of the period the Mother has mentioned for the difficulties: fourteen months. Count twelve months of the year 1955 and then add two. Where do we land? From the evening of December 31, 1954, the fourteen months would come to a close exactly on February 29, 1956, in the evening!

Here is a prophecy that came true with the utmost precision. So we get a new "slant" on the Supramental Manifestation's character. It was not prodigiously unpunctual but observed the very day to which the Mother had pointed in her talk. So the Supermind may be seen to have shown the quality of being not Indian in any divine way but extraordinarily English: the Englishman is known for his punctuality. (*laughter*) And would you believe that the Manifestation clearly carried a touch of the Englishman? The Mother, when she went into a trance in the Playground on the evening of February 29, found herself standing before a huge and massive golden door separating the world from the Divine and, lifting a mighty golden hammer with both her hands, she struck one single blow on the door and shattered it to pieces. But she did this on hearing four words. She has said: "As I looked at the door, I knew and willed, in a single movement, that 'the time has come'." Later she commented: "It is interesting to note that the words — 'the time has come' — which express what I simultaneously knew and willed... were heard by me in English and not in French. It was as if Sri Aurobindo had spoken them." The fact that the Mother did not hear "Le moment est venu" but "The time has come" was, as I have put it, the Englishman's touch, and Sri Aurobindo was the Englishman! (*laughter*) He had not only a greater mastery over the English language than any born Englishman but also something of the *sang-froid* raised

to the spiritual plane: the Englishman's typical composure, coolness, in danger or agitating circumstances, was transformed in him into a superb, an infinite equanimity, a Himalayan poise, we may say. So, in the Aurobindonian Englishness, I found a precise link between something said before and something which happened afterwards.

Now, talking of Supermind and of Sri Aurobindo in connection with it, I may touch on a statement which has become a part of our historical knowledge of the supramental progression upon the earth. You will find it in the pamphlet I published on February 29, 1960, where all that had been said up to that year by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother about the Supermind's advent was collected. There the Mother is reported to have declared in 1953: "Even in 1938 I used to see the Supermind descending into Sri Aurobindo. What he could not do at that time was to fix it down." Later I used this statement in an article of mine. Last year — 1970 — it was quoted to the Mother from my article in relation to a brochure on Auroville which was being prepared. The Mother called it nonsense, romance, fiction, imagination and demanded who had ever said such a thing. The person who had taken the matter for the brochure to the Mother did not know the identity of the criminal. (*laughter*) Subsequently, he found I had been the source. So my name was mentioned. The Mother again spoke out her mind spiritedly, branding the statement humbug and what not, and asking how I could have got hold of such an idea and published so absurd a thing. The situation looked quite serious. Pretty soon after this outburst my birthday came: November 25, if you care to know. It seemed really an occasion for me to shiver in my shoes. (*laughter*) The Mother would surely tick me off. In advance I ascertained where precisely I had first found the declaration.

I went up to her, trying to look as innocent as I could. (*laughter*) She also smiled very angelically — and quite without pretending, for the Divine's Grace can flow in spite of all our foolishnesses. Then the conversation started. I'll repeat it here but can't vouch that every phrase is exactly reproduced.

"How old are you today?"

"Sixty-six years complete."

The Mother laughed. I suppose from her chronological height — or, better still, her height of eternity — this age was just a joke.

I added, "Mother, I want to hang on till I see your Victory."

She looked a bit surprised at the tall order, but again laughed and said, "Bien".

Then she started the main topic.

"I want to tell you something. Somewhere in *Mother India* — I don't know in what issue — you have said that the Supermind had been descending into Sri Aurobindo's body in 1938 but could not be fixed down. Where did you get this information? It is just a piece of romance, it is utter nonsense."

I at once said: "Mother, I am very sorry."

With immediate response she said: "Oh, it doesn't matter."

I proceeded to explain: "I did not invent that statement. You are yourself supposed to have made it. And it first appeared in an article by my Associate Editor Soli Albless in 1954. The article was read out to you before it was published."

The Mother shrugged her shoulders and said: "I don't know what he meant. It has not come out correct. I'll explain the true thing to you. Clearly, Sri Aurobindo did not have the supramental body, and neither do I have it. But that does not mean that the Supermind was not in his body. The two things are quite different. One can have the Supermind in the body without the body being supramentalised. It is not true that the Supermind descended into Sri Aurobindo's body only in 1938 or that it was not fixed there but merely coming and going."

"I understand the position now, Mother."

"You see, when he left his body, he gave his whole supramental force to me. It came to me most concretely."

Then she touched the skin and flesh of her left arm to convey the sense of the concreteness, as if even flesh and skin had felt that supramental force. She added: "His force passed from his body into mine. Its passage was like a wind blowing upon and into my body." I thanked her for her enlightening explanation.

Here the important part of the interview ended. What followed is purely personal. I said:

"Now, Mother, I want to tell you something. Will you please open me up for good? Put your hand on the middle of my chest so that my heart may be always open to you."

She put her hand where I had wanted and pressed her fingers on the spot.

"Oh, it is going very fast!"

"Yes, Mother, it's like that because I am very impatient now."

She laughed and blessed me.

I came down a wiser and a happier man. Later, I linked up in my mind some of her words now with what I had been told by her several years before: "As soon as Sri Aurobindo withdrew from his body, what he had called the Mind of Light got realised in me." And subsequently, on June 29, 1953, she had sent me through Nolini an explanation: "The Supermind had descended long ago — very long ago — in the mind and even in the vital: it was working in the physical also but indirectly through these intermediaries. The question now was about the direct action of the Supermind in the physical. Sri Aurobindo said it could be possible only if the physical mind received the supramental light: the physical mind was the instrument for direct action upon the most material. This physical mind receiving the supramental light Sri Aurobindo called the Mind of Light." In view of all this I hazarded the guess that 1938 — the year when the Mother had expected something very great — had seen not exactly what had been expected but a great enough event: the come-and-go, rather than the permanent fixing down, of the Mind of Light.

These are extremely high matters and guesses are risky. Nearer home for us is the experience I prayed for at the close of my interview: not the come-and-go of the psychic opening but the permanent establishment of it. Even its glorious occurrence unbroken for days or weeks or months is not sufficient: it must be there at all times.

Here I may recall a friend of mine, a Bengali whose name was Sarat. He was a fierce-looking skeleton of a fellow. He had been a revolutionary and even in the Ashram he kept something of that fire and I dubbed him "the domesticated fanatic". He was not only thin but also seemed sickly. So every day, when I met him, I would ask him: "Hello, Sarat, how are you?" His answer, accompanied by a knitting of his brows, used to be: "Somehow I am feeling quite all right." (*laughter*) He was a private student of mine for a while, wanting to learn English better. His greatest difficulty was to pronounce a word like "above". He could never combine the *b* and *v*. He would say either "avove" or "abobe". Anyway, he had some aspiration to what was above, but not much of a psychic opening. I watched him every day at Pranam and he was quite stiff face to face with the Mother. Once, however, I saw a sort of unstiffening and softening. So I caught him afterwards and said: "Sarat, what has happened?" He exclaimed: "Oh, it's all finished — my part of the Yoga is finished — I have made my

surrender. Now it's for the Mother to act — her job remains — I have nothing more to do." (*laughter*) I remonstrated: "Look here, I know there was a psychic opening in you. I could see it and that's why I am asking you what happened. But don't imagine the opening is permanent just because you had such a glow of it once. You have to go on keeping it, concentrate on its remaining with you, pray for its staying always, work for its recurrence, make yourself ready to have it for a longer and longer time." He didn't look convinced. The Mother evidently had given him a chance to do the needful, but I am afraid he failed to take it. After a somewhat serious illness here he left the Ashram for good.

The point I tried to drive home to Sarat is very important. The psychic being is the golden key of sadhana. Yet we must not jump to the conclusion that the mind is of no importance. If it is utterly negligible, why has Sri Aurobindo written such a large number of books, including the enormous *Life Divine* which is a veritable mind-cracker? I believe that it is necessary not only to attempt doing Yoga but also to attempt understanding Yoga. And the understanding can come best if you read what Sri Aurobindo has written on Yoga. Without the understanding you could be very much upset and develop a habit of being melancholy. For you may have a series of brilliant experiences and then all of a sudden find yourself completely shut. You may feel dull as ditch-water and blank as a wall. It may seem as though the time has come to pack your trunk and bid good-bye. But if you have read Sri Aurobindo, you would know that after a fine spiritual period there is generally a lull, a period of quiescence in which assimilation takes place, the experiences are absorbed by the ordinary consciousness. While this is happening, your outer self may have that desolating dullness and that unbearable blankness. No doubt, you feel as stupid as an ass while the assimilation goes on (*laughter*) — but you mustn't start kicking! You must keep quiet and let this period pass. Occasionally it can last rather long.

Quietness is still more the right thing in longer periods of apparent non-progress — when some obstruction in the being holds one up. Sri Aurobindo has said even about himself that his Yoga used to come to a dead stop for nearly half a year at a time! And I have a friend in the Ashram, a sincere sadhak with an intense turn inward and upward, who had a super-stationary period lasting for six years! Poor dear didn't know what to do, but he understood that everything had not come to an end. So he quietly spent those

six years reading the plays of Bernard Shaw. (*laughter*) That tided him over the prolonged crisis of nothing happening. Then again the Yogic movement started, and I am sure it's going on famously.

In sadhana the place of the mind is not only at the feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother: it is also between the pages of their books. The only thing to take care about is that you should not grow intellectually over-active. Otherwise you start analysing yourself all the time and that is hardly conducive to the Supermind's coming or even to less spectacular progress. There's one chap in the Ashram I know who has never sat in judgment on his own sadhana or indulged in nagging self-analysis. And he has been perhaps one of the happiest here. Though not an intellectual, he is quite bright and intelligent, yet he has never, never worried to find out whether he was progressing or not. Most of you know him. Apart from his service to the Mother, he is now best known as a teacher of Hathayogic Asanas, but formerly he was most notable as one of the two closest friends of Amal, the other having been Premanand, the first librarian the Ashram had. Yes, I mean Ambu — our energetic, outspoken, humbug-proof, loyal-natured Ambu. In the old days he had a somewhat foppish air, but there was no effeminacy in him and, though he looked a little weak, he had a lot of courage. And I may say from repeated experience that he has a rare capacity of giving unstinted service. He has been of immense help to me, he has nursed me through illnesses and permitted me to be as incompetent as I liked. (*laughter*) Thanks to him, I was able even to keep a stove and use it — I mean he managed it and I enjoyed its benefits. I am not very good at house-keeping and, though my incompetence may not match that of Dilip Kumar Roy who once told me that if he had to dust his own furniture every day he would prefer to commit suicide. (*laughter*) I have been pretty much of a dud in domestic science. I used always to think in the old days that Ambu had the qualities of an ideal wife. (*laughter*) Good job he was not born a woman, because husbands are not often ideal, and a husband having such a wife would never have let her go to become a Yogini. Ambu has become a Yogi — but what distinguishes him is that he has kept all bothering about Yoga out of his life: he has let the Mother do the bothering. (*laughter*) He has cared only to serve her. When you keep thinking of her instead of your own progress you find the secret of happiness. As a result, I don't believe Ambu was ever really depressed. I have seen him sickly-faced at times, I have

seen him a little sad too on occasion, but never depressed. And that is an excellent way of living. For, with depression there comes a lot of Yogic upset. Unfortunately there are such a number of people here who are depressed that I would say a sort of spiritual caste-system has sprung up with a large section which can be called the Depressed Class. (*laughter*) We also know that depressions are always followed by inner havocs — storms in sadhana, psychological counterparts of the cyclones that time and again sweep over Pondicherry. And you may have read in the newspapers how these cyclones develop: we are told they develop because of some depression in the Bay of Bengal! (*laughter*)

Time is running out and I have still a few things to say. Let me touch on how the Mother can help us not only out of depressions but also out of severe illnesses. Perhaps you know of the heart-trouble I had in 1948, when I was in Bombay. At that period I was bent on getting to the bottom of Einstein's theory of relativity. Day after day I went to the libraries, climbed up ladders to reach dusty volumes on high shelves, spent hours over difficult expositions and came home tired out. The theory of relativity, when first put forth, is supposed to have been understood by only four people in the world. I came to understand something of it many years later. Perhaps I can give you a very short summary and put you among the wise. Newton said that all physical bodies attract one another, but he did not know why. Einstein came along and said: "They attract one another because they are all relatives." That is the theory of relativity. (*laughter*) Well, while I was on the way to finding this out, I started getting a strange feeling in the heart-region. But I kept on, and one day I had a collapse. I managed to creep home. Then I could hardly move: I just dropped into my bed. There was such a sinking feeling in the chest that I thought I was about to die. I told my wife Sehra: "What can be done now? There is nothing to do. The end seems to have come. I shall go as Yogically as I can. Don't be sorry about anything." As you can see, I was too hasty a prophet. I could hold on till the doctor came. All the time I was inwardly appealing to the Mother and Sri Aurobindo and I felt myself drawing blue and golden lights from them to my heart. Their presence was all about me. Some household remedies were also tried. Then the doctor arrived. He gave me an injection of morphia, which would relax me and send me to sleep. Relaxed I did grow, as if loosened from earth-bonds, but instead of falling asleep I grew

doubly awake — or, rather, deeply awake. For I had an amazing new sense of everything. The whole universe seemed to be a divine being. All objects were as if individualised forms of divinity. The chairs and tables of my room appeared to be gods and goddesses. I felt like getting up and kneeling at their feet.

The doctor had forbidden me to get up or even to lift my head from the pillow. The heart must have complete rest. I did keep to my bed, with the various booklets, in which *Savitri* was then being issued, lying beside me. I read them till nightfall, marking with a pencil, as I always do, whatever struck me most. Then sleep came over me — but in that sleep there was an outburst of poetry. Lines kept racing before my shut eyes and I just had to awake, sit up and scribble them in the darkness on the front and back pages of the booklets, wherever there would be a blank. I would sink back into sleep and emerge from it again and again to record fresh lines. Almost throughout the night this went on. But it didn't tire me in the least.

From that night onwards, the days were filled with poems. The inspiration came in such an exciting fashion that my heart, instead of resting, thundered away — and half the time I was sitting in bed or leaning on one elbow. Every morning the doctor would call, examine my heart and smile in satisfaction, saying that as I was being such a good boy and following his instructions I would soon get well! (*laughter*)

I kept the Mother posted about my condition and sent her and Sri Aurobindo all that I wrote. I informed them of my disobeying the doctor most shamelessly, reported his grave warnings against any exertion, and recounted how the poetry filled me with new strength and their help kept me improving. I asked them whether I was doing the right thing. The Mother wrote back: "My dear child, I quite agree with you that there is a power other and much more powerful than that of the doctors and the medicines and I am glad to see that you put your trust in it. Surely it will lead you throughout all difficulties and in spite of all catastrophic warnings. Keep your faith intact and all will be all right."

I have told the story at full length in the "personal preface" I wrote for the three-months' collection of the poems when, on Sri Aurobindo's recommendation, they were brought out as a book in 1949. Undoubtedly the heart-trouble seemed worthwhile having for the inner experience of the Mother's help and the outer expression in those eighty-nine poems.

May I continue to speak for a little while more? I'll turn to another aspect of life. Once it got into my head that I would play cards here with some people. Udar at that time was in Pondicherry but not yet in the Ashram. He was a very close friend and he too played cards in that circle we had formed. What we played were gambling games, with a little money at stake. Once I lost a certain amount. And then I thought I would invoke the Mother and recover all my losses. (*laughter*) I began to imagine gold, gold, gold coming from the place of every player at the table and gathering in my corner. I actually won back everything. When I next saw the Mother I spoke to her of my achievement. She said, in effect: "Do you think my force is behind gambling? Do you believe you could invoke it to make money by such card-games? Don't you understand the delusion of it? The forces behind gambling are very low ones, which sometimes give you abnormal luck but just to have the pleasure of pulling you down and making you fall flat. That is their game and you people fall into their hands, thinking some wonderful thing is going on." I replied: "Well, Mother, I have been fond of horse-racing too and I realise the truth of what you have said." Then she told me of an incident in her own life.

She said she had gambled only once. It was on board a ship. The person with whom she was travelling played cards hour after hour and kept losing all the time. So his friends turned to her, laughing: "Madame, why don't you take his chair and bring him some luck?" The Mother answered: "I warn you that if I play I will take away all your money." They guffawed. Our Mother took the seat — and she did take away all their money! She told me: "I could see all their cards as if they had been transparent." (*laughter*) So, knowing all their hands, she played hers. Naturally they lost. It was a good lesson to them. They had to beg her to stop playing.

The Mother can do many unexpected things. And her force can work in ways that surprise us. Apropos of gambling I may tell you another story. It concerns my sister Minnie's husband. Nari, my brother-in-law, was very fond of racing, just as I myself was. He had never thought of coming here. My sister had been a constant visitor ever since her girlhood. Although he saw her faith, he was not quite convinced. Now the year was 1952 in Bombay. February 26 happened to be his eldest son Ferdauz's fifth birthday. Ferdauz had told his mamma that he would like

as his birthday gift a visit to the Mother about whom he had been hearing every day when his mamma used to read out the Mother's sayings to the whole family. Minnie told her son's wish to Nari. He said in his own mind, "If I have sufficient money, we shall make the trip to Pondicherry." There was no prospect of having the required funds at that time. Nari felt pretty desperate as he wanted to fulfil the boy's wish. Ten days before the birthday he had a dream. He saw a very beautiful European lady, about 35 years old, dressed in a violet gown. I was standing next to her and I introduced her to Nari saying: "This is the Mother". He said to himself, "How can this be the Mother? I have seen the Mother's photos and she looks different." The lady, reading his thought, answered: "Yes, I am the Mother. I appear as beautiful as you see me to those who have faith in me." Two days after the dream, there was a race-meeting. Nari frantically sought inspiration to select a horse which would bring him the money needed for the Pondi-trip. When he glanced through the names of all the runners on the race-card, the only name that struck him was "Masked Lady"; for the appearance of the Mother in the dream could only be interpreted by him as a mask in view of the photos. The horse was a rank outsider, paying 11 to 1. It galloped home first and brought Nari nearly Rs.2500. With that money he came to the Ashram with his whole family — a birthday-gift to his son. (*laughter*) People can be touched in incalculable ways. One may add that violet, the colour of the gown in the dream, symbolises the Divine's Grace.

I am afraid I have been digressing into rather light talk. I must close on a serious note, shouldn't I? — as suits a man of my age and my supposed wisdom. (*laughter*) I shall go back to the meetings in the "Prosperity" Store-room. On one occasion the Mother asked us: "What is Yoga?" That's a good subject to end with; for, after all, we must know what we are trying to do. Several of us gave the Mother our definitions. I have recovered a copy of them from the limbo of some old notes of mine. But I don't remember quite exactly who was the author of which definition. I can give you my own conjectures and perhaps you can form surmises of your own. I'll read the definitions to you. It is interesting to note how various individuals respond to the spiritual Call and envisage the Integral Life. Some of the definitions incline to be philosophical in their terms, others bring out more feelingly the Ideal, while still others try to catch the actual working of Yoga in general, and

the remainder hint the inner psychic movement in a purely personal mode.

Here is the first definition: "Divinising life."

Who could have framed it? It sounds like Nolini to my ears. He is in the habit of being either short and sweet or else short and severe, and in each case gets rid of a question or a questioner as quickly as possible. (*laughter*) But he puts a lot of stuff into his few words and gives plenty of food for thought. Not much demonstrativeness, but a good deal of concentrated self-dedication.

The next definition runs: "Faith in the Divine and aspiration for the Highest."

This has for me the ring of Amrita. It has a spontaneous putting of oneself in the Mother's care, believing in her implicitly and trying one's best to live up to her expectations.

Then we have a long definition: "A series of experiences which the individual soul feels from the time of the contact with the Divine up to the union with the Divine."

Quite a dictionary-definition — a satisfying one from the intellectual standpoint but a little lacking in the human sense of things and in personal particularity. I seem to hear a man named Satyen. I am not sure any of you have heard of him, for Satyen left the Ashram not long after the contact with the Divine but very long before the union. Perhaps the series of experiences proved a process too long-drawn-out?

The next is: "The process by which we transcend the ego and put on the Divine Consciousness, and by which we transform the the lower nature into the Divine Nature."

This too is a bit of a mouthful, but it has more particularity. The ego seems to have been a troublesome thing and the lower nature a rather demanding proposition. Transcendence and transformation are prominently felt as needs. A sort of talkativeness about one's problems also comes through — and I have the impression of our great Dara, with his portly presence and his lively interest in the ego's doings and the lower nature's problems, as well as his constant commentary on what used to go on in himself.

Now we have: "Birth of the supreme harmony in matter from the union of the above with the below."

Possibly the pronouncement is of the person named Purushotam who was in charge of the "Prosperity" and much occupied with material objects. He was also constantly concerned with movements from below — not low movements but a thrust as of

the Divine concealed in matter. That impulsion used to make him jerk his legs again and again during meditation. (*laughter*) But the above also was not outside his feeling. Of course, his name itself — colloquially speaking — means the chap who is above all, the topmost fellow — and its bearer seemed interested in other people's tops too. Once during a collective meditation with the Mother he moved about in an inspired way and pulled out a fistful of hair from a sadhak's head. (*laughter*) Don't laugh; for, though it looks as if the sadhak must have taken good care not to expose himself again to Purushottam's inspiration, such a thought could never have crossed his mind then. Let me tell you that those were very serious sessions and the Mother was drawing down the beings of the Gods into people, and the sadhaks felt great exaltation and had remarkable experiences. With what Purushottam did, that sadhak had an unforgettable spiritual experience. The Mother confirmed its genuineness and indicated the extraordinary meaning of what had happened to him. Hers had been the general guiding force, even if the particular form given to it may have shown Purushottam's originality.

Then there is the definition: "To be entirely cleansed of falsehood so that there may be purity to know the Divine Will and respond to the Call at every moment."

Some worker wishing to be totally consecrated and made ready as an instrument of the Divine is voiceful in these words. But who could it be? In those days there were five prominent workers in different ways. There was Chandulal, there was Champaklal, there was Dyuman, there was Doraiswamy and there was the Englishwoman Datta, originally Dorothy Hodgeson. Doraiswamy mostly worked outside the Ashram for the Ashram, and he had to deal with a lawyer's world which is notoriously in need of being cleansed of falsehood. And he was also known to be constantly invoking the Divine inwardly to guide him and help him in his complicated cases. Our sentence is phrased in a manner quite consistent with such a habit and it has the lawyer's language — well-knit and logical. So he could be its author. The statement is perhaps too long for Champaklal or Dyuman and is not quite in character with Datta's more direct and less ample movement. It is quite possible for Chandulal in its general bearing, but accurate expression of a complex thought was not precisely Chandulal's strong point.

As regards the next definition, I am positive about its authorship. It goes: "To return home."

The statement has a beautiful brevity. It was Pavitra (Philippe Barbier St.-Hilaire) who framed these words. They have the French flavour — the simple blended with the suggestive, a felicitousness of phrase bringing out a delicate depth of feeling, and it is the feeling of the inmost heart, into which Pavitra, when he meditated, was in the habit of penetrating. From his face one could gather that he had found there his happy repose.

Not much longer is the definition that follows: "To do as Mother directs us to do."

This could be any worker speaking. It could be Champaklal or Dyuman, the ever-ready obedient servants of the Mother, full of the zest of putting her Will into action. But perhaps there is here a certain leaning towards outer guidance, a waiting for the spoken command, the explicit directive. I sense a kind of English trait. Was it Datta defining Yoga thus? She was a very close attendant on the Mother for years.

Next we read: "To live in Mother and to know Mother's Will." Here is the same aspiration, with just the colour of a greater tendency to go inward into a devoted awareness of the personal Divine. A more Indian trait is evident. Maybe Champaklal, maybe Dyuman.

Then: "Not to hinder the Mother in making the best possible out of you."

It could have come very well from an Iranian lady named Tajdar, who unfortunately went away after several years of service to the Ashram life. When I knew her, she was always eager to put all of herself at the Mother's disposal.

The next one is: "To be in complete union with the Mother."

A good summing-up of our ideal, but a little on the general side, showing a bent towards mental expression. Perhaps it came from a girl who had the most mental turn in those days among the sadhikas: Chinmayi. She had a great striving in her to be one with the Mother, but obstacles in her being, which others would not have made much of in themselves, she felt terribly. In a certain sense this was due to an intense sincerity which felt extreme dissatisfaction at the slightest shortcoming, a dissatisfaction which could be very upsetting. She passed away many years ago.

Now only two definitions are left. One of them is: "To live for Mother as if nobody and nothing else existed."

Here is the echo of the strong movement of self-giving which once characterised Lalita. At one time it seemed as if she were an inseparable part of the Mother.

Now the very last: "To feel a warmth and a glow in my heart in my relation with Mother."

This somewhat emotional-sounding expression comes — strange to say — from somebody who would be expected to use more brainy language. Instead of "a warmth and a glow in my heart", one would imagine him saying, "a heat and a light in my head." But actually he had lost his head over Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and that surely was the heart's doing — but for a long time he didn't know what had happened and felt a kindling and unkindling of the heart's love for the Divine — and was all agog to stop the latter and keep always the flame he knew in the Mother's presence. Poor chap, he is still trying to tend the sacred fire. We'll wish him a steady progress and as few stumbles as possible.
(laughter)

TALK SEVEN

October 9, 1971

When I was young I was considered a writer of poetry. I believe I am still a poet though very few may know it and my face can hardly show it.

At times I am a bit of a musician too: as you have just seen, I can blow my own trumpet.

Poets, musicians, painters — all artists — are credited with a very lively imagination. But by no stretch of imagination can I figure myself as still young and, therefore, as having the right to talk to you with a sympathetic spirit.

In this age of dynamic disrespect for old fogeys, I could not help wondering why I had been picked on to address you. I asked myself: "Am I fit to do so?" Then I remembered Oscar Wilde. He does not exactly appear to be a writer coming naturally to the mind of an aspirant to spirituality. But, in the first place, we are in old French India, and in the French language the word "spiritual" — which is "spirituel" on French lips — most often means "intellectually sparkling". Oscar Wilde was surely that. And, in the second place, the memory of Wilde came to me in the form of his epigram: "The only way to remain young is to go on repeating the follies of our youth." Well, I committed one great folly in my youth — or so it was considered. And I have been repeating it for years and in that way I can certainly claim to be still a young man.

Before I committed it I had the desire to go to Oxford for advanced studies after my B.A. in Bombay. My grandfather, on whom I was dependent, turned down my proposal. He said: "If you go to England you'll bring back an English wife. And I will never stand for that." I assured him that I would not bring back an English wife. He smelled sophistry there and remained negative. I had to accept the English-wifelessness. Then, after some time I began to be interested in Indian Yoga. For nearly a year my grandfather watched me. Seeing worse and worse signs of Yoga he at last came out with the suggestion that I should go to Oxford. According to him, an English wife was far preferable

to the Divine Beloved!

But I refused. He said Yoga was a great folly. It was a folly I wholeheartedly committed and, on the strength of its persistence even now, I can qualify by Oscar Wilde's standard to address you.

In the days of Sri Krishna, the kind of folly I committed took the form of leaving everything the worldly-wise would value and running after his flute-music. So powerful was his flute that it has sounded through the centuries and it was its music that I also heard in my twenty-third year. Sri Aurobindo in a splendid line of poetry has referred to its call and to the secret sustenance and guidance it always gives us in our passage through the difficulties of life:

Ever we hear in the heart of the peril a flute go before us.

Following that lure I came to Pondicherry — to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

To look for the Divine seems to the common eye a rather far-fetched folly. Actually it is just the opposite. To drive that point home I cannot do better than bring in Sri Krishna again and make a small digression to an episode in the Mahabharata.

You know that Draupadi was dragged to the court of Duryodhana and threatened that her sari would be taken off. Strip-tease had not yet come into fashion and so Draupadi was quite bashful. In full view of the court Duryodhana's henchman started pulling at her sari. Draupadi did not know to whom to turn. She thought of Sri Krishna the Avatar and appealed to him in her mind. She cried out: "O Lord of the highest heaven, come to my help!" There was no response. The poor girl became more desperate. She sent out again a cry: "O Master of the three worlds, help me!" No reply still — and more and more folds of the sari came out. Once again Draupadi raised her heart's plea: "O Ruler of the four quarters of the earth, rush to my rescue!" All in vain — nothing resulted. Draupadi was really at a loss. Then she cried out in a final intensity: "O You who dwell deep in my own heart, come!" At once Sri Krishna appeared before her with his hand gesturing *abhaya* — "Have no fear." And you know the sequel. The sari went on unwinding endlessly. Draupadi could not be stripped at all.

Later she chided Sri Krishna: "Why did you take so long to come?" Sri Krishna sweetly and coolly replied: "If I had to

come from the highest heaven or from the three worlds or even from the four quarters of the earth, wouldn't it take some time? But when you summoned me from your own heart, there was no distance to be crossed. Naturally I came at once."

So, you see, to seek the Divine we do not have to go far. He dwells within ourselves. He is as near and natural as our own heart. His flute is always playing there. And hearing it there I found that Yoga was not at all an unusual thing to do. However young you may be, you can always get in touch with the Divine's luminous presence. And indeed the story of Brindavan where Sri Krishna lived and fluted is a story of young people. Sri Krishna himself was very, very young and young too were those who went after him. Most of them were girls. When I look around now, I see that most of you are young girls and thus to talk of seeking the Divine is quite apt on this occasion.

How to get more and more in touch with the Supreme Indweller is the whole business of Sadhana. If you ask me what is the simplest way, I shall quote to you three words of the Mother — "Remember and offer." Wherever you are, whatever you do, you can always think of the Divine, and you can always make an offering of yourself and your doings. There is nothing too small, too trivial to be offered. Suppose I put this walking stick of mine in some place. Well, even that action can be and should be a gesture of offering. The inward movement has to be — "I am giving my stick to you, O God." To take in everything into the practice of offering is to make Yoga an integral part of your life.

It is not by cutting yourself off from people or by shutting out activity and locking yourself up in an impenetrable Samadhi that you meet the Divine. Yoga means being in touch with the Divine's presence every minute. It is an all-time job, as Sri Aurobindo has often said.

And, if you live out the Mother's formula of remembering and offering, you will feel that something extremely sweet and at the same time extremely strong is awakening in you. Soon you will feel as if a bright nectar were welling in your heart and flowing everywhere in your body. The whole of you will feel perpetually blessed and everything you lay your hands on will appear to you as if it were receiving blessedness. What awakens in you is — to use Sri Aurobindo's phrase — "the psychic being", the true soul in you. This soul is a part of the Divine and has come with its spark of divinity into the substance of matter to lead through

birth after birth the evolution of life and mind in a material form. It is this soul that links us to the Divine dwelling within ourselves. And I may tell you that to experience the true psyche in us is not only sheer bliss but a bliss that is self-existent, independent of object, circumstance or person. That is because it comes from the Divine Ananda that is infinite Existence and Consciousness. Once the true psyche has been touched, we lose the taste for other enjoyments. All other enjoyments become dust and ashes. Owing to our habitual attachments we may still go in for them, but now we know their absolute inferiority.

It would be wonderful to live all the time in the great golden sense of the psyche. If we could do so, we should not have to do anything to convey to people that there is something in spirituality. When Vivekananda was asked how one was to know whether a man had realised God, he answered, "His very face will shine." Then, of course, there would be no need to talk — as I am doing now. The Mother precisely referred to the psychic being — which she called "the Divine incarnate deep within" — when she was questioned how we should show the reality of the Ashram life to visitors who are expected in thousands on the Birth Centenary of Sri Aurobindo next year. She said we should live that reality — and the way to live it is to commune with the psychic being. All else, talking, etc., is useless, she added.

Perhaps the only use of talking is to point to the necessity of going beyond all talk and being the self-expressive light of the soul.

TALKS BY NIRODBARAN

TALK ONE

June 12, 1970

SRI AUROBINDO – THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN

Friends, some of you at least must have been amused, others intrigued by the title of today's talk. Some of you may even smell some irreverence because we have been accustomed to hear of Sri Aurobindo as the Lord of Yoga, as the supreme Poet, and the greatest Philosopher — to talk of him as a perfect gentleman is rather to bring him down to our own level, because we also claim to be some sort of gentlemen. I was told that the Mother was amused to hear of this title, but I throw the whole responsibility or irresponsibility of it on the Mother's shoulders, because it was she herself who in a piquant situation remarked: "Sri Aurobindo is a perfect gentleman, I am not a gentleman." Well, it came as a shot from a cross-bow. We laughed at this outburst of temper, being familiar with her strangely changing moods, but still at this off-hand remark of hers, I was somewhat taken aback, and it made me think a bit. Earlier I had read — and most of you, students, teachers and professors must have read too — the celebrated piece by J.H. Newman on "A Gentleman". When I read it I thought it was something Utopian which could not be found in this world of ours — Newman's description seemed unrealisable. And when the Mother brought into our view Sri Aurobindo as the example of a perfect gentleman, I thought: "Yes, if there is anyone in the world who can be styled a perfect gentleman, it is Sri Aurobindo!" Now, for those of you who are not familiar with this passage, I shall read out some extracts, so that you may be able to see why I make this seemingly exaggerated statement.

Well, in the very first sentence, we find almost the quintessential character of a gentleman. Newman says: "It is almost a definition of a gentleman to say he is one who never inflicts pain.... He is mainly occupied in merely removing the obstacles which hinder the free and unembarrassed action of those about him; and he concurs with their movements rather than take the initiative himself." In the Gita it is said, if I remember correctly, that a yogi

never begins anything. Then — “the true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast; all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, all restraint or suspicion or gloom or resentment; his great concern being to make everyone at their ease and at home... he guards against unreasonable allusions, or topics which may irritate... he is seldom prominent in conversation... he never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort, he has no ear for slander or gossip; he is never mean or little in disputes, never takes unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings for arguments.... He has too much good sense to be affronted at insults, he is too well employed to remember injuries, and too indolent to bear malice. He is patient, forbearing, and resigned, on philosophical principles.”

I think this is enough to give you some idea of what a true gentleman is like. From the description that I shall try to put before you, you will be able to judge for yourself how much this passage is applicable to Sri Aurobindo. For my part, I can say — correlating these two — that in every fibre of his being Sri Aurobindo was a perfect gentleman. I have chosen this subject because the others are beyond me, and on this one I can speak with some authority because, as most of you know, some of us had the great good fortune to come close to him, to see him face to face, to touch him, even to breathe him (but not to taste him!) — a subject about which I may claim, not egoistically, to have some confidence.

But before I plunge into it, let us go back a little and see whether Sri Aurobindo the gentleman was also a “gentle boy”.

Very little is known of his childhood, of his youth, as a matter of fact of his whole life. You know he has said that his life has not been on the surface. It has been shrouded in deep mystery, except when he chose to lift up the veil now and then — that’s all.

Now about his childhood. It was in 1956 or so that our artist sadhak, Pramode Chatterji, made a painting from Sri Aurobindo’s boyhood photograph, and brought it to the Mother. We were there sitting by her side. The Mother remarked (as I noted down at the time, not knowing that it would be used today): “You have caught something of the spontaneity and freshness of the nature and something candid with which he came into this world. His inner being was on the surface. He knew nothing of this world.” So that was an authoritative statement from the Mother. Another

statement we have from his eldest brother, that he was a very nice and gentle boy except that he could be very obstinate.

Then what about the period of his youth in England? At the beginning, the brothers were very comfortable, affluent, but suddenly something went amiss: they found themselves in great penury. All the three brothers were almost stranded; the father for some mysterious reason stopped their allowances. Gray's *Elegy* says about some poor people: "Chill penury... froze the genial current of their soul." That was not the case with Sri Aurobindo. He took it calmly, quietly, in spite of 2 or 3 hard years, missing a square meal, living on some sandwiches, 3 cups of tea, some sausages, and in the cold climate of London without sufficient warm clothing. But, as he has written to me, poverty was no terror for him, nor an incentive. He said that I was talking like Samuel Smiles! Then he failed in the I.C.S. riding test; he did it, as you know, deliberately by remaining absent as if by a tangle of unavoidable circumstances: in order not to hurt his hopeful father, not to inflict any pain on him, he had to resort to a trick.

Well, I would not like to dwell long on the early period; I want to come as soon as possible to the period when I was an eye-witness. But these are very interesting sidelights at any rate.

At Cambridge, his tutor took upon himself, coming to know of the strained circumstances of his pupil, to write to the father in a somewhat cold tone, that the son was running the danger of being hauled to the court failing to pay up some arrears. The father at once sent the remittances but wrote an admonishing letter to his son, Aurobindo, that he was too extravagant! Sri Aurobindo said to us, smiling: "When we had not even one sufficient meal a day, where was the question of being extravagant?" But he had no feeling of resentment or bitterness towards his father; whenever he spoke of him it was always with affection and tenderness.

Then we come to the Baroda period. There again we know very little except that he knew nothing about money. He said to us: "Yes, the Maharaja offered me a job saying he would pay Rs.200. My brothers accepted, for they knew no better than I; and the Maharaja bragged that he had bagged an I.C.S. for Rs.200!" However, Sri Aurobindo left behind a reputation of fair play, sincerity, honesty; he was loved by his students and all those who came in contact with him, though he wasn't a social man at all. He had a few chosen friends, lived a very simple life, and yet he

could command the respect and honour of almost all the people there, high or low, with whom he came in touch or who heard his name. Even the Maharaja of Baroda held him in high esteem. But Sri Aurobindo showed his mettle once. The Maharaja issued a circular that all the officers must attend office on Sundays and even on holidays. Sri Aurobindo didn't go. Then the Maharaja wanted to fine him. Sri Aurobindo said: "Let him fine as much as he likes, I am not going." The Maharaja cooled down! He saw that Sri Aurobindo couldn't be bent down by such threats.

The most revelatory remark of the period, that has come to us, was from his Bengali tutor, Dinendranath Roy, who, I suppose, was the first to say, because he lived closely with Sri Aurobindo: "Aurobindo is not a man, he is a god."

Next he comes to Calcutta, to the political field which, you know, is not much better today, or is perhaps worse. Sri Aurobindo said to us, quoting C.R. Das's opinion that "the political field is a rendez-vous of the worst kind of criminals"; and that field, when Sri Aurobindo worked in it, he raised to a level of sincerity and integrity, at least in his own example, even if others didn't always follow. He shunned crookedness, duplicity, lust for power and all the other vices of political life. His 'soul was like a star and dwelt apart'. He raised the political consciousness of at least some people to his own level and he did it all because he was through and through sincere — "Sincerity," Carlyle has said, "is the greatest virtue of a great man". All of us know very well the Mother's emphasis on sincerity. There is a line in *Savitri* referring to Savitri herself, which can be as well applied to Sri Aurobindo by a change of gender:

*His mind, a sea of white sincerity,
Passionate in flow, had not one turbid wave.*

In all the political disputes and negotiations, some of which are reflected in his speeches, there was never a tinge of meanness, duplicity or crookedness, that is so common, even so much courted by the politicians. Thus he acquired the esteem of all and sundry, friends and foes. Students loved him, the young revolutionaries adored him, and all the rest respected him for his integrity, for his sincerity, for his self-sacrifice.

Also, there are one or two instances of his domestic life which will be illuminating. His younger brother Barin writes that when

they were living together in Calcutta their sister Sarojini used to complain to Sri Aurobindo about the misbehaviour, the rude conduct, of the cook. Sri Aurobindo paid no heed, he kept quiet; finally Sarojini applied her 'brahmastra' and began to weep. Now Sri Aurobindo had to do something; he called for the servant; everybody was waiting for something to happen. Addressing the servant he said, "Well, it seems you are behaving rudely. Don't do it again." That was all, and all those people were sorely disappointed. The cook went away smiling.

The second instance. Political leaders had come to meet Sri Aurobindo. He wanted to go and meet them, he saw that his slippers were missing. What had happened? His 'mashi' had the habit of putting on his slippers and knocking about. Sri Aurobindo called out, "Mashi, Mashi, people have come to see me; bring me back my slippers!"

There is an instance, too, from his jail life. He was living for a time with all the young prisoners in one cell, and pandemonium was let loose: songs, dancing, shouting. But Sri Aurobindo was most unconcerned with what was going on there. He was absorbed in his own *sādhana*, in one corner. One day those youngsters sat together and began to discuss a very momentous affair: "Why does Aurobindo babu's hair shine so much? Where does he get oil from? We don't get a single drop!" A great problem was to be solved. But how? They said someone could go and ask him, but nobody dared to. Then a young chap of 16 or 17 said: "I'll go." He went and asked: "Sir, your hair is shining so much; will you tell us where you get oil from?" Sri Aurobindo placed his hand on his shoulder and very calmly and softly said: "Oil, my boy? I don't use any" — "But your hair is shining" — "Yes, it is shining as a result of my practice of Yoga." The boy went back satisfied. In all these examples you see how far he was a gentleman. I don't need to multiply instances. I can say, again slightly adapting a verse from *Savitri*:

All in him pointed to a nobler kind.

Let us come now to our own period in Pondicherry. The early years of Pondicherry life when he was living with his young comrades, sharing the same food, even sharing the same towel are common knowledge.

In 1930 or so, the period of correspondence began. Those of you who have gone through these volumes of letters must have noticed with what sublime patience and indulgence he has again and again written about the same subjects, to so many people in different ways, without the least annoyance or displeasure. You'll be very much amused to hear what kind of questions some people used to ask. I've heard that someone asked: "When I walk, shall I put my left foot first or my right foot? When I put sugar in the milk shall I stir it this way or that way?" and Sri Aurobindo answered them calmly and quietly, in a serious manner. Of course, I had my share too, of such foolishness as you know very well. He had given me the great privilege to ask him whatever I liked. I have attacked his Yoga, I have called him inconsistent with impunity! But calmly and affably, and in a very indulgent tone, he has borne all. Those who have read the correspondence will be able to confirm this.

Then we come to the routine which he gave me when once I told him that he had plenty of time to concentrate. He wrote: "From 4 p.m.—6.30 p.m. afternoon correspondence, newspapers. Evening correspondence 7.30—9.00 p.m., 9.10 p.m. concentration, 12—2.30 a.m. bath, meal, rest. 2.30—5 or 6 correspondence, unless I am lucky." Once he wrote: "Correspondence suspended, resumable on notice. But under cover of your medical cloak you can carry on, only mum about it. Otherwise people might get ideas and give you a headache." I quote another letter in which he sweetly admonishes me to become gentle with the patients. He writes: "Well, I don't know why, but you have the reputation of being a fierce and firebrand doctor who considers it a sin for a patient to have an illness. You may be right but tradition demands that a doctor should be soft like butter, soothing like treacle, sweet like sugar and jolly like jam." Throughout the correspondence this was the tone. Though my correspondence was specially seasoned with humour, with all people he was always gentle, very patient.

Now about the Darshans. Some people used to grumble — myself one of them — saying: "You are so grand, aloof, austere, we are afraid of coming to you." He replied to me: "O rubbish! I am austere and grand, grim and stern! every blasted thing that I never was! I groan in an un-Aurobindian despair when I hear such things."

After the correspondence period, personally, we had the privilege to serve him when he was confined to bed due to an accident. One day after my duty I had gone to have my rest; suddenly the person on duty came and said, "Sri Aurobindo is calling you, something has gone wrong." Much perturbed, I ran upstairs, but as I came near, he said: "Oh, it is nothing much." He was so apologetic in his tone as if he had put me to great inconvenience by an untimely call. Then, pointing to his right thigh, he said, "There has been some pain here for sometime, can you do anything?" Sri Aurobindo was not a person to call somebody because of a slight pain. It must have been very acute and he must have been suffering badly for a long time. But it was just like him to say: "Oh, it is nothing!" and offer me an apology! Fortunately by some adjustment the discomfort was set right.

Now a second instance. Dr. Manilal, who was our chief, advised that we should give Sri Aurobindo some massage. He had departed for Gujarat, leaving me in charge. The time that could suit Sri Aurobindo and us was a very odd one — 4 o'clock or so in the early morning. Two or three of us began to massage — the lower part of the leg particularly; he suffered the torture. After a few days he called me and asked: "Is this massage necessary? You see, these early hours of the morning are the only time when I have some sleep. Unless it is absolutely necessary, can it be postponed or stopped?" I said: "Certainly we can stop it." That was his manner.

During the massage we used to talk a lot and ask him many questions. One typical answer of his was "Perhaps"! To three out of four questions he replied: "Perhaps". Then one of us asked: "Why do you answer by saying 'perhaps'? Can't you give a definite answer?" He said: "When the Supramental will descend, I'll give a definite answer."

One day, the Mother brought the report of a sadhaka flying into a temper and belabouring somebody, and it was not the first or the second occasion. So the Mother said to Sri Aurobindo: "I ask for your sanction" (in the French sense). He heard her quietly and said: "Let him be given a final warning." We knew that there would be many final warnings.

Again, when he was writing *The Life Divine*, sitting on the bed, there was no ceiling fan at that time, just a table fan 2 or 3 metres away. As you know, the Pondicherry current is both weak and unreliable; the fan was just like the waft of a tiny bird's wings.

But he lived in another consciousness: whether there was a fan or not did not matter to him in the least. He was writing and writing quite absorbed. When the writing was over we saw his whole *dhoti* soaked and his bedsheet underneath drenched with perspiration: he was sitting, almost literally, in a small pool of water! No complaint in the least. Then sometimes even that fan would stop, thanks to the whim of the Pondicherry electricity, but he would not ask to be cooled by a hand-fan. One of us on duty would fan him, and he would accept it, but would never ask for it.

And whenever he needed anything, he would look this way, that way, to see if the attendant was free or engaged. After being sure that he was free, he would say: "Could I have this? Could I have that?" — always in a mild and detached tone. I may mention that he could be even quite impersonal. Purani records in the early period a typical instance of Sri Aurobindo's nature. Somewhere, on the terrace perhaps, they were all waiting. Sri Aurobindo came out of his room with a telegram in his hand and, looking at nobody, said: "I suppose this telegram has to be sent." This was his way with us too. Those of you who have read the Talks must be thinking that we always had a familiar relation with him. In fact there was for at least half the day an impersonal attitude on his part towards everything, a notable distance which yet had nothing of an aloof "superiority".

Another instance. He was lying in bed, the ceiling fan had been installed. It was revolving at great speed. My colleague Satyendra was on duty; he felt Sri Aurobindo wanted something; he went and asked: "Sir, are you looking for something?" "Oh, no... Is Nirod there?" "No, Sir, he is not there." Sri Aurobindo would not say anything further, but Satyendra pressed: "Can I do anything?" "I was thinking if the speed of the fan could be reduced." "I can do it, Sir." "Oh, can you?" Well, he inquired for me because at the very beginning, as are the Mother's ways, she had given me the charge of the fan and of some other things. Sri Aurobindo wouldn't violate that rule!

Again, he went without a real direct bath for quite a long time because there was no convenience to give it to one who had had a fracture. He had to be satisfied — well, that is our human way of putting it, for satisfaction or dissatisfaction did not apply to him in the least and it was we who were satisfied or dissatisfied — with only a sponge bath for some years, until the new bathroom was made. His long hair went unwashed for quite a time. He

didn't mind at all. Not that he was indifferent to bathing or was trying to imitate Louis XIV who had only two baths in his life, one when he was born and the other when he died — so goes the story. It was not that at all (you have noticed in my earlier statement that he used to take his bath at 2.30 a.m. daily), but his principle of life, as all of us are aware, was that he would not initiate anything, he left himself, entrusted himself, completely to the Divine or to the Mother. He knew very well that whatever had to be done would be done at the right time. He had no worry, he had no concern.

Once a colleague of ours, very much impressed by Sri Aurobindo's look, tried to make a plaster-cast, with the aid of a so-called sculptor from outside. He took great pride in it, and began to show it to a select few. The Mother came to know of this and didn't like the idea at all; she went and reported to Sri Aurobindo such and such a thing was being done. That he should be asked to hand over the cast at once. There you see the Mother is not a gentleman! She can be Mahakali. Sri Aurobindo said: "All right, I'll speak to him." When the disciple came up, he called him, and in a very quiet and affectionate manner explained to him the impropriety of his action.

Again, another sadhak — I am not complaining against sadhaks, I am only trying to bring out what I have proposed to do: Sri Aurobindo's natural character — another sadhak used to write letters critical of some actions of the Mother. Sri Aurobindo tolerated them once, twice, thrice, answering his points, but when it became a little too much he said to me, a bit vexed perhaps — "Why does he write like that about the Mother?" That was all. One thing that Sri Aurobindo didn't like was that the Mother should be criticised, and one thing that the Mother doesn't like is that Sri Aurobindo should be criticised! But when he answered — I know because at that time he used to dictate letters to me — the tone betrayed nothing of the irritation or vexation — all he sent was very calm and quiet reasoned argument. And to this same sadhak, when once he was finding it very difficult to stay here and wanted to leave the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo wrote back — the sadhak told me himself — "I beg of you, I pray to you." Sri Aurobindo saying this to a disciple, however cherished he might be — what humility! It reminds me of Sri Krishna, who, it seems, washed the feet of the Brahmins in some sacrifice. So there you have Sri Aurobindo.

About his food we saw that his lunch started being at 10 o'clock and gradually shifted to 3 or 4. He waited patiently — perhaps I shouldn't use this adverb, it is too ordinary — he just waited without a word till the Mother would be free from her work and bring the food. Only on a single occasion, later on, after 1945 or so, we heard him saying: "I am terribly hungry." Not that he was taking anything in between — except at times a simple glass of water. He was very much concerned that the Mother should not be, in any way, tied to his convenience or comfort. His whole programme was made in such a way as to suit that of the Mother. He gave us an injunction — perhaps it is not the right word — that the Mother should not be kept waiting in any case. We must keep things ready. Because, as you know, from early morning till late midnight, every moment is precious for the Mother; so he didn't want her time to be wasted.

I shall finish by giving one instance more — from our Talks. The War was on, Hitler was in the ascendant. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother declared that Hitler represented a hostile force and so we must all side with the Allies who were on the side of the Divine. But still many in India and Europe were much enchanted by Hitler and wanted him to win. Even in our camp, knowing very well that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were supporting the Allies, some had the temerity to wish for Hitler's victory. Of course the root cause was not that they loved Hitler but that they did not love the Britishers, India's rulers. So when Sri Aurobindo heard about it, he told us:

"It seems it is not five or six of our people but more than half that are in sympathy with Hitler, and want him to win. It is a very serious matter. The Government can dissolve the Ashram at any moment. The whole of Pondicherry is against us. Only because Governor Bonvin is friendly to us, they can't do anything.... If these people want that the Ashram should be dissolved, they can come and tell me, and I will dissolve it instead of the police doing it. They have no idea about the world, and talk like children. Hitlerism is the greatest menace that the world has ever met."

Mark the tone. From what depth of sorrow Sri Aurobindo must have said this! He could easily have sent away all these ignorant and harmful people.

Now, if I have been able by all these instances to prove to you that Sri Aurobindo was a perfect gentleman, I'll be satisfied. If you demur to the common appellation "gentleman", let us call him a Supramental perfect gentleman. But the one impression he has left with us is that he was Shiva himself. He had a magnanimity such as the verse in *Savitri* suggests:

*A magnanimity as of sea or sky
Enveloped with its greatness all that came.*

Indifferent as it were to everything that was going on in the world, his gaze fixed far away and yet in his cosmic consciousness supporting all things and each one of us — that is the impression that always floats before my eyes whenever I think of Sri Aurobindo.

TALK TWO

July, 1971

SRI AUROBINDO – THE MODERN AVATAR

Friends, you will excuse me for the flashy title I have given to my talk, but I hope to justify it.

I begin with some unpublished portions of my correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, sometime in 1936, when an unaccountably good relation was established between the Supramental Godhead and the mental doghead that was still the former's own human portion.

At the time of the following exchange, I was in charge of the dispensary.

Question: My big photo requires Sanjiban's treatment. Granted permission?

Sri Aurobindo: What? which? where? how? what disease? what medicine wanted?

The next day I had to give Sri Aurobindo a little more light on my cryptic language:

Question: I send you your big photo, it is your photo that would be drawn by Sanjiban.

Sri Aurobindo: You are always plunging me into new mysteries. If it is a photo, how can it be drawn by anybody? And what is the tense, connotation and psychological and metaphysical connotation of "would be" here?

You will mark two things: the looseness of my expression and the tone of Sri Aurobindo's reply, which are signs testifying to our good relation. As time passed this good relation increased little by little until it became undefinable and 'nameless'. One day I heard him thundering at me: "Why the devil do you want to know of my life?" Well, instead of being intimidated, my heart leaped for joy and almost popped out of its chamber! Because the thunder had no edge, it was full of sweetness. Then followed a series of such members of the nether family of terms as "damn", "hell", "deuce", etc., along with their higher counterparts "Eternal", "Jehovah", "Shobhan Allah", "Good Heavens", "Good

Lord", and so on. From these ejaculations you can ascertain the nature, the intensity, and the extent of the good relation between us. Not only doghead, but many other epithets he hurled on this head — wooden-head, blockhead, ass, idiot. I took them all in my stride, waiting for the day when I could pay him back with quip and jibe at his Supermind. The day did arrive. But the verbal looseness certainly did not end there — I had committed quite a bit of it, and he had to pull me up again and again.

These few snatches of correspondence prepare the ground for the appropriateness of my title. That Sri Aurobindo is a modern Avatar. It may be argued, but my own point of view is this: only because Sri Aurobindo is a modern Avatar am I here. A materialist like myself could have no place in a spiritual institution unless it was a modern Ashram and the Guru was modern too, in the form of Sri Aurobindo. And I am happy to say that there are many others who share this opinion. I am sure everybody will acclaim with one voice that there can be no other Ashram more modern than this one. Place it side by side with Raman Maharshi's Ashram or Sri Ramakrishna Mission — our modernity will be too patent a fact. Take the Mother playing tennis, for example. Annie Besant's Messiah, Krishnamurti, too, started playing tennis. Or take Sri Aurobindo's correspondence — the voluminous correspondence that he carried on from year to year, day by day, explaining the same subject at length to various people, trying to persuade them, to argue with them point by point, to bring them to his point of view. Some people, such as I, were attacking his Yoga and denying his Avatarhood, and yet with infinite patience he tried to understand the modern mind and the modern spirit, and explain things to us until we were convinced! Or if not able to convince us, he tolerated us until one day he wrote in one of his letters about the sadhaks in his Ashram: "It is as it were a favour is being granted to us by their remaining here!" At another time, in a fit of self-revealing jocularly or whatever it was, he wrote: "The very fact that I am carrying on a correspondence with the sadhaks for eight or nine hours every night should be enough to prove that I am an Avatar."

I am reminded of a sadhak who, in the early days of the Ashram, was given charge of gate-keeping. Instead of keeping the gate, he was always busy reading and, when he wasn't reading, he slept. He didn't bother about who came and went. The fact was reported to the Mother, who sent someone to inquire: "It seems you are

reading instead of doing your duty?" The gate-keeper replied: "Well, I can't help it, it is my weakness." There the matter ended. I have even seen one or two instances of sadhaks abusing the Mother to her face, but she kept quiet, digesting all the insults hurled at her. Can you imagine such tolerance and forgiveness from any ancient Guru?

Well, I don't want to go into a philosophy of Avatarhood to show that Sri Aurobindo is an Avatar, or to fix his place on the list of Avatars; or demonstrate the modern character of his Yoga. All this is not my domain. I am a humble man and I deal with humble things. What I have invited you for is to share with me and to enjoy a feast of Supramental Levity in our correspondence, which ranges over various topics — spiritual, medical, poetic, etc. The portions I have chosen are short — sharp like jets of water, sparkling and scintillating with humour. We shall be reminded of one mighty pen in this context — that of Shakespeare. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to me: "It is not every spear that shakes!" I would venture to say that Sri Aurobindo's spear shook even more than Shakespeare! I would go even further and say that Sri Aurobindo surpassed his own self, for it is my firm belief that Sri Aurobindo *was* Shakespeare. It has also been said of Shakespeare that he never blotted a line. The same may be said of Sri Aurobindo with more justice and accuracy, and greater credit to him, because the entire volume of his correspondence was written with a lightning spontaneity, sometimes coming in a flood like the Ganges or the Brahmaputra. There is one more modern trait, which my friend Purani has noted. During the early years of the Ashram, Sri Aurobindo's foot once touched Amrita's inadvertently. Sri Aurobindo sat up in the chair and said: "I beg your pardon." Well, the Guru telling a shishya "I beg your pardon" is certainly modern!

To further demonstrate the looseness of my expression, I offer the following: "The word 'focus' was unintelligible? But you understand all right. I adopt the device and 'your attention' to save your time and mine as well, as is obvious."

Sri Aurobindo wrote in reply: "Good Lord! Is this Hebrew or Aramaic or Swahili? I can't understand a word. Which device? which attention? Some reference to something I wrote? If so, it has clean gone out of my head. That, by the way, is a manner of speaking, for I never have anything in my head."

The next day I wrote him an apology: "I am sorry for the last elision. I wanted to write — 'I adopted the device and dropped "your attention" to save time' — I find I have chopped the word 'dropped' altogether, so it has become Hebrew, Aramaic or — ? I can't read this last word." This was no better.

His reply: "Swahili. African language, sir, somewhere in West Africa."

So much for my slips. One day I found a slip in his writing. I wrote to him: "What, Sir! 'Expect' has become 'except'? Is it a supramental slip? Hurrah!"

Sri Aurobindo answered: "Do you mean to say this is the first you have met? I used to make ten per page formerly in the haste of my writing. Evidently I am arriving towards a supramental accuracy — spontaneous and careless in spite of the lightning speed of my epistolary movement."

One day I sent him a pen and wrote: "You will find something in my famous bag, Sir, which may startle you. The size will suit you best though the nib may not; I am sending it to you so that your writing in my notebook may flow in rivers from the pen, not in a few stingy lines."

Sri Aurobindo: "Good Lord! What a Falstaff of a fountain pen! But it is not the pen that is responsible for the stinginess; the criminal is Time and with a fat pen he can be as niggardly as with a lean one."

Now we come to the subject of Pranam. I am sure many of you are familiar with the numerous letters that Sri Aurobindo has written on the abuse and misuse of Pranam committed by the sadhaks and sadhikas. In a recent issue of *Mother India* there is a letter on this very subject. Instead of Pranam being a spiritual function we made it, to our shame, a dramatic function. Far from absorbing what the Mother was giving us, we tried to watch her movements *vis-à-vis* each sadhak and sadhika — whether she was smiling at the sadhak or was not at all smiling, how much she smiled; if she touched the disciple with one finger or two, or with only the tip of a finger; if she didn't touch him at all; if she looked at me; why she didn't look at me, what crime had I done?, etc. And the whole ceremony and the entire day were spoilt. I was no exception; here is a letter that proves it:

Question: Guru, I don't know why Mother looked at me like that. Was I anywhere in the wrong?

Sri Aurobindo: Mother knows nothing about it.

Question: I went over the whole incident and didn't find anywhere that I had misrepresented facts in the Dispensary.

Sri Aurobindo: No.

Question: ...or was it because I was bothering myself and you over a trifle?

Sri Aurobindo: No.

Question: It was not an illusion. Some meaning was there.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes? But then it must have been a meaning in your mind and not the Mother's. So only you, its mother, can find it out.

Another excerpt follows on the same subject:

Question: Today Mother looked at me in such a way at Pranam, as though she said something.

Sri Aurobindo: She didn't; she only looked at you a little longer than usual.

Question: Ah! there you are then! Mother did look longer — that's a point gained!

Sri Aurobindo: Just Jehovah, man! What of that? Can't Mother look longer without being furious?

Question: There must have been something. I can take any amount of thrashing with grace, even with good grace, as you know, but to take it without knowing the why or the how of it, that goes a little too deep, Sir.

Sri Aurobindo: No thrashing at all — not even the natural yearning to thrash you.

Question: For an earthly reason, I found that I had accepted an invitation for lunch. Is that the reason then why Mother focussed her fury on my dreadful soul?

Sri Aurobindo: Know nothing about it. Never dreamed even of the lunch — was thinking of B,¹ not of any delinquency of yours.

Question: As I was positively conscious that there was something, you can't say there was nothing.

Sri Aurobindo: I can and do.

Question: I was positively conscious that there was something and I only want to know it so that I can rectify the error.

Sri Aurobindo: Only fancy, sir, dear delightless fancy. Nothing more deceiving than these pseudo-intuitions of Mother's displeasure and search for their non-existent reasons. Very often it comes from a guilty conscience or a feeling that one deserves

¹ One of my patients — (Nirodbaran).

a thrashing, so obviously a thrashing must be intended. Anything like that here?

Question: It may be the thing about which I wrote you long ago and got a smack!

Sri Aurobindo: Consider yourself smacked this time also.

Question: Thrashing, fury, I accept all if that was what it was for.

Sri Aurobindo: It was not. As there was no thrashing and no fury, it could not be for that.

You cannot fail to notice throughout this passage the disciple's dog-headedness and the Guru's inexhaustible patience. Any other Guru, ancient or even modern, would have cut me short!

Now for something about Darshan. In one context Sri Aurobindo wrote to me about "exceptional circumstances". Quoting his phrase, I opened our discussion:

Question: "Exceptional circumstances"! Whatever they may have been they have disappeared.

Sri Aurobindo: Make them re-appear.

Question: Expected many things, or at least something from the Darshan, but don't see anywhere any sign of it!

Sri Aurobindo: Many Americans at least, what was not expected. It is always the unexpected that happens, you see.

(By the way, at one Darshan, an American had a vision of the whole of America lying at the Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's feet. I heard of it and, as was my wont, I wrote asking Sri Aurobindo for confirmation. He replied: "Yes, Mother expects much from America." This was in 1936. Those friends who come from America will be glad to learn this.)

The next day, I wrote:

Question: The result of Darshan in some other quarters leaves me staggered and staggered! I can't imagine such an incident taking place in the Ashram, as N gripping M's throat. It makes me rather aghast. Coupled with that incident is R's rushing to shoe-beat P. Good Lord! but I suppose they are all in the game!

Sri Aurobindo: You seem to be the most candid and ignorant baby going. We shall have to publish an "Ashram News and Titbits" for your benefit. Have you never heard of N's going for K's head with a powerfully brandished hammer? Or of his howling challenges to C to come out and face him, till Mother herself had to interfere and stop him? Or of his yelling and hammering in a

rage at C's door till D came and dragged him away? These things happened within a short distance of your poetic ears and yet you know nothing??? N is subject to these fits and always has been so. The Darshan is not responsible. And he is not the only howler. What about M herself? and half a dozen others? Hunger-strikes? Threats of suicide? ...to leave the Ashram, etc., etc. All from the same source, sir, and, apparently, part of the game.

Then my epic Depression, which used to come over me very often. To quote a line from *Savitri*:

I sat with grief as with an ancient friend.

In such a mood I once wrote: "I realise every moment that I am not made for the path of the Spirit, nor for any big endeavour in life."

Sri Aurobindo wrote back: "Man of sorrows! man of sorrows! knock him off, man, knock him off!"

At another time:

Question: Wretched, absolutely done for.

Sri Aurobindo: Why? Disburden yourself!

Question: Disburden? You mean throw off the burden or place the burden at your door?

Sri Aurobindo: Both!

On another occasion:

Question: I am thrown out of joint, Sir. Madam Doubt still peeps from behind. Anyhow no chance for me! Kismet, Sir! What to do?

Sri Aurobindo: Why out of joint? It ought to strengthen your joints for the journey of Yoga.... Not at all, sir. Mind, sir, mind. Madam Doubt, sir, Madam Doubt! Miss Material Intellectualism, sir! Aunt Despondency, sir! Uncle Self-distrust, sir! Cousin Self-depreciation, sir! The whole confounded family, sir!

Question: Please ask Mother to give some blessings to this hopeless self.

Sri Aurobindo:

Vin. Ashirv.	m. VII
Recept. Chlor.	gr. XXV
Aqua Jollity	ad lib.
Tinc. Faith	m. XV
Syr. Opt.	zss

Twelve doses every hour. (Signature)

Question: What's this second item in your prescription, Sir?
Too Latinic for my poor knowledge.

Sri Aurobindo: Chlorate of Receptivity.

Question: I would put Aqua at the end to make it an absolutely pucca academic prescription.

Sri Aurobindo: Yes, but I thought of the two last ingredients afterwards.

Question: And 12 doses every hour — these tinctures and vinnums?

Sri Aurobindo: Twelve doses — every hour (one each hour. Plagiarised from your language, sir).

Question: Where is the cost to be supplied from?

Sri Aurobindo: Gratis — for the poor.

You can't beat him!

Then there was our correspondence about writing and poetry:

Question: But do you really mean that till 7 a.m. your pen goes on at an aeroplane's 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 not in view?

Sri Aurobindo: 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.

I wrote to him: "My nights are again becoming heavy; I don't know how to deal with them." He replied: "So are mine, with a too damnably heavy burden of letters to write."

Once I warned him: "Tomorrow, by the way, I am going to burst. ATTENTION!" "Eh, what! Burst?" he replied: "Which way? If you explode, fizz only — don't blow up the Ashram."

The next day I wrote: "I am sending my explosion — the result of Darshan!" He responded: "Man alive (or of Sorrows or whatever may be the fact), how is it you fell on such a fell day for your burst? There has been an explosion, as X merrily calls it, beginning in the...¹ but reaching now its epistolary climax and have been writing sober letters to Y for the last few hours. Solicit therefore your indulgence for a guru besieged by other people's disturbances (and letters) until tonight. Send back the blessed burst and I will try to deal with it."

¹ Word indecipherable.

That reminds me of something else he once wrote to me, when one day in a fury I attacked his Yoga — “Karmayoga is all bosh,” etc. He wrote: “You will excuse the vein of irony or satire in all this — but really, when I am told that my own case disproves my own spiritual philosophy and accumulated knowledge and experience, a little liveliness in answer is permissible.”

I often corresponded with him on the subject of poetry. Here is one occasion:

Question: By the way, you didn't like my Bengali poem, or you hesitate to call it mine because of so many corrections by Nishikanto?

Sri Aurobindo: It was very good; mixed parentage does not matter, so long as the offspring is beautiful.

Here is another:

Question: It seems I am not very rich in the faculty of image-making. And without that hardly any creation worth the name is possible.

Sri Aurobindo: What is this superstition? At that rate Sophocles, Chaucer, Milton, Wordsworth are not good poets because their poetry is not full of images? Is Kalidasa a greater poet than Vyas or Valmiki because he is full of images?

Then on April 1st he wrote something about Virgil and myself, so I asked him:

Question: I hope you didn't intend to make me an April fool. Otherwise Virgil and Nirod to be mentioned in the same pen-stroke!

But I couldn't read his answer to this, so I wrote:

Question: Absolutely illegible, Sir. Even Nolinida couldn't read the words.

Sri Aurobindo: I repeat then from memory: What a modest poet! Most think in their heart of hearts that they are superior to Homer, Virgil, Milton and Shakespeare all piled upon and fused into each other.

Question: You referred to “circumstances being exceptional as regards my early success in English versification.” But how are they exceptional?

Then I wrote a doggerel:

*Let me know
How it's so,
A dullard like me
Bursting like a sea,*

*With the heart of the Muse
Makes his rhythm fuse?*

Sri Aurobindo:

*You are opening, opening, opening
Into a wider, wider scopening
That fills me with a sudden hopening
That I may carry you in spite of gropening,
Your soul into the Supramental ropening.*

N.B. — Surrealist poetry.

Question: You have delighted my soul with surrealist poetry but not my intellect — “widening, widening” is not the cause, but the effect.

Sri Aurobindo: Well, but that’s just it — Widen, widen, scopen, scopen, and the poetry may come in a torrent roaring and cascading through an enlarged fissure in your and the world’s subtle cranium.

Question: Now I don’t see poetry anywhere on the horizon.

Sri Aurobindo: How do you know? It may be hiding behind a cloud.

Question: The tragedy is that I know nothing of Inspiration’s reasons for arrival and departure.

Sri Aurobindo: Only unreason or superreason. Keep your end up and it will arrive again and some day perhaps, after Jack-in-the-boxing like that sufficiently, will sit down and say, “Here I am for good. Send for the priest and let’s be married.” With these things that is the law and the rule and the reason and the rhyme of it and everything.

Question: At times I wonder why the devil I bother my head with poetry? Have I come here for blessed poetry?

Sri Aurobindo: You haven’t. But the poetry has come for you. So why shout?

Here are some excerpts from our medical correspondence:

Question: X has got phimosis, Sir.

Sri Aurobindo: What kind of medical animal is this? My dear sir, if you clap a word like that on an illness do you think it is easy for the patient to recover?

On another occasion:

Question: A doctor says that one has to be firm, stern and hard with women. They may not like it superficially but they enjoy it and stick to the doctor who gives them hard knocks. Is it the cave-man spirit? Dr. Y seems no less a firebrand than myself, but women seem to like him.

Sri Aurobindo: He must have been a he-man. She-women enjoy it from he-men. But all women are not she-women and all men are not he-men. Moreover, there is an art as well as a nature in that kind of thing which you lack. He is a he-man. Even so the women have ended by saying, "No more of Y."

Once Sri Aurobindo sent me the following letter in which he gently hinted at my reputation as a doctor:

Sri Aurobindo: Well, I don't know why, but you have the reputation of being a fierce and firebrand doctor who considers it a sin for patients to have an illness! You may be right, but tradition demands that a doctor should be soft like butter, soothing like treacle, sweet like sugar and jolly like jam.

Question: If tradition demands it we shall try to be softer than butter, but we may be too tempting and evoke a response from the patient's palate for making delicious toasts. Who will save us then?

Sri Aurobindo: Of course, if you are too, too sweet. You must draw the line somewhere.

Question: I wanted to be as soft as possible, but couldn't touch Z without making her shed tears. What heartless brutes, patients must be thinking now!

Sri Aurobindo: Much safer than if they think, "What dears these doctors are, darlings, angels!"

We corresponded on the subject of medical tests:

Question: We examine chemically first a sample of urine, i.e., by chemical reagents — which is called a qualitative test. You ought to know that from your English Public School chemistry, Sir.

Sri Aurobindo: Never learned a word of chemistry or any damned science in my school. My school, sir, was too aristocratic for such plebeian things.

Question: It is very strange, Sir, your school had no chemistry; but for I.C.S., you had no science? Perhaps these new-fangled things hadn't come down then?

Sri Aurobindo: It (chemistry) may have been in a corner, but I had nothing to do with such stuff.... Certainly not. In I.C.S.

you can choose your own subjects. They were new-fangled and not yet respectable.

Once I asked him about a patient of mine — an Englishman:

Question: Why the devil does that patient write all these things to you? Are you prescribing medicines, or are we? And what is the use of his knowing the medicines and doses, pray? He could have asked me.

Sri Aurobindo: Well, what about the free Englishman's right to grumble?

This is not London and there is no *Times* to write to. So he writes a letter to me instead of to the *Times*.

Question: Surely there is a twist somewhere.

Sri Aurobindo: There always is a twist, sir, always.

Question: Well, I won't fume any more or tear my hair.

Sri Aurobindo: Don't. Losing one's hair is always a useless operation. Keep your hair on.

Question: Only tell him, please, that he ought himself to let us know instead of sending a boy with an empty bottle.

Sri Aurobindo: Dear sir, tell him yourself, tell him yourself. I will pat you on the back in silence from a safe distance.

I used to suffer from chronic boils, so I acquainted Sri Aurobindo with the fact:

Question: Nose boil boiling down, terrible headache, fever, feeling fed up. Sir!

Sri Aurobindo: Cellular bolshevism, probably.

Question: What's this "cellular bolshevism"?

Sri Aurobindo: Bolshevism of the cells surging up against the Tsar (yourself), also the Bolsheviks carry on their propaganda by creating communistic "cells" everywhere, in the army, industries, etc. You don't seem to be very much up in contemporary history.

"Contemporary history" reminds me of a different subject. A friend of mine working in a Corporation confessed to having tampered with the figures. I wrote about it to Sri Aurobindo: "Guru, C writes to me to ask your opinion on his tampering with the figures. I suppose in the worldly life such things are necessary?"

Sri Aurobindo replied: "Not in the worldly life, but perhaps in the Corporation life. All this promises a bad look-out when India gets Purna Swaraj. Mahatma Gandhi is having bad qualms about Congress corruption already. What will it be when Purna Satyagraha reigns all over India?"

In another letter written in 1935, I brought up a topic of great importance. It was after a reference to Hindu-Muslim riots going on at that time in Calcutta.

Question: In your scheme of things do you definitely see a free India?

Sri Aurobindo: That is all settled. It is a question of working it out only. The question is, what is India going to do with her independence? The above kind of affair? Bolshevism? Goondaraj? Things look ominous.

Well, I don't need to tell you how Sri Aurobindo's prophecy came true. Neither need I point out wherein lies his modernity. If you have not discovered it, I hope at least you have enjoyed this feast of humour I have offered to you.