

27 January 1954

This talk is based upon Mother's essay "Physical Education".

Mother, does a person's body-formation express his character?

No. Even the character itself is not a simple affair, that is, the character of a person is not the expression of his true being but the result of many things. For example, atavism may be expressed, that is, what comes from the father, the mother, from both together which may have a different result; from the antecedents — the past history, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, etc., and then from the environment in which people have lived when they were very young and had no independence at all. That has a considerable effect on the character. And this character affects the physical formation. So, just by seeing somebody one cannot quite say what his true nature is. One may describe his tendencies, know his difficulties, his possibilities, but it is only with the growth of the consciousness and as the development becomes voluntary and organised that the body can begin to express the true character of the person.

And when the body has been deformed by illness?

That may be an accident, you know. Accidents are due to many things; in fact they are the result of a conflict of the forces in Nature, a conflict between the forces of growth and progress and the forces of destruction. When there is an accident, an accident that has lasting results, it is always the result of a more or less partial victory of the adverse forces, that is, of the forces of disintegration, disorganisation. It depends.

There are teachings, like that of theosophy for instance, which take Karma in an altogether superficial and human sense

Questions and Answers

and tell you: “Oh! You have met with this accident because in a former life you did something bad, so that comes back upon you in the form of an accident.” This is not true, not at all true. This is but human justice, it is neither the justice of Nature nor the justice of the Divine.

Naturally the formation of the body is very important in this sense that if, for instance, one is constantly under the influence of a depression, of pessimism, discouragement, a lack of faith and of trust in life, all this enters, so to say, into one’s substance, and then some people, when there is the possibility of an accident, never miss it. Every time there is a chance of something happening to them, they catch it, be it an illness or an accident. You have a whole field of observation here—it is always the same people who meet with accidents. Others do the same things, have as many chances of having an accident, but they are not touched. If you observe their character you will see that the former have a tendency to pessimism and more or less expect something unpleasant to happen to them—and it happens. Or else they are afraid. We know that fear always brings what one fears. If you fear an accident, this acts like a magnet drawing the accident towards you. In this sense, it may be said that it is the result of character. And the same thing holds for illness. There are people who can move about among the sick and in places where there are epidemics and never catch a disease. There are others—it is enough for them to spend an hour with a sick person, they catch the illness. That too depends on what they are within themselves.

And for children, is it also the same thing?

One cannot say. It is a moral question. The problem should not be judged from a moral point of view, one should not say that those who always enjoy good health and to whom nothing happens are “good children” and those who meet with accidents and suffer catastrophes are “bad”. That is not correct. For, as I

27 January 1954

was saying, the logic of Nature is not human logic and its sense of justice (if it has any) is not a human sense. For it there is very little of what we call good and bad. It could rather be said that there is what is constructive and what is destructive, what is progressive and what is retrogressive. That indeed is very important. And then there are those who are luminous, sunny, happy, smiling and those who are gloomy, dull, misanthropic, dissatisfied, who live in grey shadows. It is the latter who catch all the unpleasant things. Those who are radiant (they may be radiant without it being a spiritual radiance, they may simply radiate good sense, balance, an inner confidence, the joy of living), those who carry in themselves the joy of living, these are in harmony with Nature and, being in harmony with Nature, generally avoid accidents, they are immune from diseases and their life develops pleasantly as far as it is possible in the world as it is. And now?

“There is a prevalent belief that brilliant minds are found in weak bodies.” I haven’t understood this.

These were old ideas of the last century. They are no longer in fashion now, but at the end of the last century it was always thought that the more weak and sickly people were, the more brilliant was their mind, the more intelligent they were! Some even explained that the development of their intelligence was due to the fact that they could not draw any joy from their body — for they were quite incapable of living fully, so all their attention was turned to their mind and it was thus that their intelligence had developed. There was even a time when it was the fashion to look a little sickly. Poets, for instance, put on these airs.... An artist, he had to be a little sickly to give the impression that his mind was all afire! But that is now over. It was over even before you were born, I believe. It was the romantic age, the end of the last century. Men like Musset, for instance — I don’t know if you have ever seen a portrait of Musset, but indeed he had a sentimental and sickly look, and he added to it as much

Questions and Answers

as he could by his dress. It was thought that it gave him an artistic and poetic appearance. But now this is altogether out of fashion. People favour a good physical balance, good health, a strong body and all that is given by the physical training of children.

I read a story by a very well-known French novelist (it was a novel), which was set in prehistoric times, in the Stone Age, when man lived in caves, dressed in animal-skins and hunted in order to eat and in self-defence. Now, it happened that by some sort of accident a child was born lame or at least deformed or humpbacked or something like that. And generally, in those days (so it is narrated, I don't know), malformed children were killed because they were a burden. But for some reason or other its mother had hidden it and it had lived. And then this boy who had no means of hunting, for instance, or of doing all the work his companions were doing, had begun to develop his mind and had become the first poet, because he expressed in his words what the others did by their movements. Well, it is just ideas like these which are at the root of this feeling that in order to have a mind one must not have a body, and that the more ill one is, the more intelligent he is! Isn't that quite silly?

It is true that there is a certain independence. I think I spoke to you last time about a French poet called Sully Prudhomme who was dying of a very serious disease — a very painful and grave disease, and it was at this time that he wrote his most beautiful poems and said the most beautiful things to his friends. His mind was quite independent of his body. But still, this is not an absolute rule.

In children the psychic is always in the front, isn't it?

Not always. The psychic is more "in front" than later when they grow up and the mind develops, but it can't be said that in all children the psychic may be felt. And one cannot judge from those who are here, for the condition of admission I make when

27 January 1954

children are brought to me is this: if I see the psychic on the surface I take them, but if they are already veiled by all sorts of deformed activities, I don't take them. So, those whom we have here are an exception. It is the cream. It is a selection.

But why are there greedy children?

Oh, good heavens! Greedy, that's not a crime! There are greedy children. Perhaps they have a bad digestion and so always want to eat. They don't gain by what they eat. The whole outer being is full of difficulties of all kinds, in everybody — in children also. You would be more justified to ask me: "Why are there such cruel children?" That indeed is one of the most dreadful things.... But it is due to unconsciousness. It is because they are not even aware that they are making others suffer. And usually, if care is taken to make them understand — for instance, through experience — then they understand. Children who ill-treat animals (there are many of these) — well, that is because they don't even know that animals feel as they do. When they are made to understand that when they pinch animals or pull their hair or beat them it gives them pain, and if necessary when they are shown on their own bodies how it hurts, they don't do it any more!

There are some who are particularly wicked. These are under a pernicious influence. And at times this shows itself from their very infancy and they are like that all through their life, unless they are converted, which is not easy.

There is a sort of association between the physical and the psychic and between the mental and the vital being. A mental being is very often a very vital being. A psychic being is very often a physical being. Children — just because this psychic consciousness is in the front — live also altogether in their body. But as soon as one begins to develop the mind, the need for association also develops, with all the deformations that go with it. People who make very strict distinctions between man and woman (I

Questions and Answers

don't know why, for one is as good as the other), say that man is mental and vital and woman physical and psychic. There is some truth in it. But naturally it involves all possible exceptions and complications. These are arbitrary simplifications. In fact the physical being has a simplicity and even a goodwill (which is not always very enlightened, far from it), but still a simplicity and goodwill which put it in a closer relation with the psychic than the passions of the vital or the pretensions of the mind. And it is probably because of that also that in children the psychic can feel more at ease, being less constantly jostled by mental and vital contradictions.

How can one know whether the psychic being is in front or not?

Who? Oneself?... It is not felt, no? You don't feel it? I am not speaking of a small child, for it has no means of control and observation, it lacks the capacity of observation. But then, when one is no longer a baby, doesn't one feel it? It doesn't make a difference?... (*The child nods in assent.*) Ah!... There is not one of you who will dare to tell me that it makes no difference when the psychic is there, when one feels better within oneself, when one is full of light, hope, goodwill, generosity, compassion for the world, and sees life as a field of action, progress, realisation. Doesn't it make a difference from the days when one is bored, grumbling, when everything seems ugly, unpleasant, wicked, when one loves nobody, wants to break everything, gets angry, feels ill at ease, without strength, without energy, without any joy? That makes a difference, doesn't it?

It may make a difference, but one doesn't understand that the psychic is something else.

Naturally, if nobody has ever taught you what the psychic or the vital is, you cannot have any notion of the thing. You may say,

27 January 1954

“Today I feel good, yesterday I did not.” Till I was twenty-four I knew nothing about all these things, and yet I could distinguish very well these movements. I did not use these words because no one had taught them to me and I had never read anything, but I felt very clearly the difference at different moments and in what state of consciousness I was.

But you who are here, after all that you have heard and all that you have read and all that I have taught you, you should be aware of all the movements within you and be able to fix a little label: this is this, that is this other.

Do you know the days you are in good health and the days when you are ill? Physically. Do you know it?

Physically, yes.

Physically, quite sure? When you get up in the morning, can you say whether today the balance is good or not?

It changes from day to day.

That’s true, it changes all the time. Even during the same day. But when you have just got up, when just waking up and beginning your day, do you begin your day always in the same way?

No.

Ah! There are days when everything seems to you harmonious, and days when you are as with grinding wheels. Things grate within you, they don’t turn round. Well, it is something like that. If you observe it physically, for your body, afterwards you can observe it for your sensations, your feelings (a kind of inner impression), and then you observe your brain, if the head is clear or smoky. Yes?

Yes.

Questions and Answers

So it is the same thing.

In what part of the being does the power of observation develop?

I think the power of observation develops in all the parts of the being. You may have a mental power of observation, a vital power of observation, a physical power of observation. When you observe ideas, for instance, the train of ideas, the logic of the ideas, it is not altogether the same power of observation as when you look at a friend doing athletics and see whether he is making his movements correctly or not. That is, the capacity of attention is there in both cases, but it works in a different field. It can't be said that it is one part of the being observing the others; it is the faculty of observation developing in each part of the being — that is, the faculty of concentration and attention. For the capacity of observation must not be confused with the capacity of discernment. Discernment is an intellectual capacity. Something like a judgment already enters into it, what we call “discrimination”: you can distinguish between the origin of one thing and of another, and the reciprocal value of these things. But that ought to be founded on a correct observation. The power of observation comes first, discernment follows.

Is there a power of observation in the psychic?

More than that! There is the capacity for a direct vision of things. It is like a mirror in which all things are reflected, whatever they may be. But that is just what most children, when not deformed, have very clearly, a great sensibility — for example, to the atmosphere of those who approach them. There are children who, without any apparent reason, rush towards one person and run away in horror from another. For you both of them are equally good or not good, you make no difference. But in one instance the child is immediately attracted by the person, and in

27 January 1954

the other, try as hard as you may, it will weep, it will cry or it will run away, but it will have nothing to do with that person; and all this is a translation, in a consciousness of ignorance, of a psychic phenomenon: the vision of the psychic quality of that person.

Some people can concentrate very quickly while others can't.

Perhaps they are born like that, for some reason or other, or perhaps they have practised it even without knowing that they were doing so. Yes, there are children who, even when very young, are very attentive, and others who are always distracted. But that is how the inner constitution of different beings is. There are not two who are the same. Some are born with a great power of attention and there are others who don't have it.

Can it be increased?

One can develop it, one can, and there are no limits to the development. And it is even altogether indispensable to develop it.