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

What is the method of increasing the "capacities of expansion and widening"?

I say there that a great variety of subjects should be studied. I believe that is it. For instance, if you are at school, to study all the subjects possible. If you are reading at home, not to read just one kind of thing, read all sorts of different things.

But, Sweet Mother, at school it is not possible to take many subjects. We have to specialise.

Yes, yes! I have heard that, especially from your teachers. I don't agree. And I know it very well, this is being continuously repeated to me: if anything is to be done properly, one must specialise. It is the same thing for sports also. It is the same for everything in life. It is said and repeated, and there are people who will prove it: to do something well one must specialise. One must do that and concentrate. If one wants to become a good philosopher, one must learn only philosophy, if one wants to be a good chemist, one must learn chemistry only. And if one wants to become a good tennis-player, one must play only tennis. That's not what I think, that is all I can say. My experience is different. I believe there are general faculties and that it is much more important to acquire these than to specialise — unless, naturally, it be like M. and Mme. Curie who wanted to develop a certain science, find something new, then of course they were compelled to concentrate on that science. But still that was only till they had discovered it; once they had found it, nothing stopped them from widening their mind.

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

There is but one instance, that's when one wants to make a discovery. Then, naturally, one must dedicate all one's effort to that. But that is not necessarily a whole lifetime's effort — unless one chooses a very difficult subject as the Curies did. There was a time they had made their discovery — they could go beyond it.

Yet spontaneously, people who wish to keep their balance rest from one activity and take up another. Examples are always cited of great performers or great artists or great scientists who have a kind of hobby, a diversion. You have perhaps heard of Ingres's violin. Ingres was a painter; he did not lack talent and when he had some free time he started playing the violin, and his violin interested him much more than his painting. It seems he did not play the violin very well but it interested him more. And his painting he did very well and it interested him less. But I believe that was quite simply because he needed balance.

Questions and Answers

Concentration on a single thing in order to attain one's aim is very necessary for the human mind in its normal functioning, but one can arrive at a different working that's more complete, more subtle. Naturally, physically one is bound to be limited, for in physical life one depends a great deal on time and space, and also it is difficult to realise great things without special concentration. But if one wants to lead a higher and deeper life, I believe one can acquire perhaps much greater capacities by other means than those of restriction and limitation. There is a considerable advantage in getting rid of one's limits, if not from the point of view of realisation in action, at least from that of spiritual realisation.

Why do we forget things?

Ah! I suppose there are several reasons. First, because one makes use of the memory to remember. Memory is a mental instrument and depends on the formation of the brain. Your brain is constantly growing, unless it begins to degenerate, but still its growth can continue for a very, very long time, much longer than that of the body. And in this growth, necessarily some things will take the place of others. And as the mental instrument develops, things which have served their term or the transitory moment in the development may be wiped out to give place to the result. So the result of all that you knew is there, living in itself, but the road traversed to reach it may be completely blurred. That is, a good functioning of the memory means remembering only the results so as to be able to have the elements for moving forward and a new construction. That is more important than just retaining things rigidly in the mind.

Now, there is another aspect also. Apart from the mental memory, which is something defective, there are states of consciousness. Each state of consciousness in which one happens to be registers the phenomena of a particular moment, whatever they may be. If your consciousness remains limpid, wide

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and strong, you can at any moment whatsoever, by concentrating, call into the active consciousness what you did, thought, saw, observed at any time before; all this you can remember by bringing up in yourself the same state of consciousness. And that, that is never forgotten. You could live a thousand years and you would still remember it. Consequently, if you don't want to forget, it must be your consciousness which remembers and not your mental memory. Your mental memory will be wiped out inevitably, get blurred, and new things will take the place of the old ones. But things of which you are conscious you do not forget. You have only to bring up the same state of consciousness again. And thus one can remember circumstances one has lived thousands of years ago, if one knows how to bring up the same state of consciousness. It is in this way that one can remember one's past lives. This never gets blotted out, while you don't have any more the memory of what you have done physically when you were very young. You would be told many things you no longer remember. That gets wiped off immediately. For the brain is constantly changing and certain weaker cells are replaced by others which are much stronger, and by other combinations, other cerebral organisations. And so, what was there before is effaced or deformed.

One can remember things which happened thousands of years ago!

Yes, if you go to a certain place, if you succeed in entering into contact with the place which existed thousands of years ago. And, moreover (I believe I have written this somewhere), there is the record of the earth's consciousness, and if you know how to go to that place, you can not only remember your own life but everything that happened upon earth. It is recorded there, and it is a phenomenon of consciousness.

Questions and Answers

But how does one remember, Sweet Mother, for when one changes the body, the mind...

I have just told you how, my child, you did not listen to what I said. I said that if it is a mental remembrance it will be effaced; even in your present life you cannot recall incidents which took place twenty or thirty or forty years ago. But a state of consciousness is not a mental state. It has nothing to do with the mind. Indeed, most minds are dissolved with the body, except when there is a very well-made special formation, very “cohesive”, very well organised, which can last. But that is fairly rare. These are only exceptional cases. But consciousness is something quite different. Consciousness is an eternal state. The state of consciousness is an eternal state. Creation is born through consciousness and if consciousness were withdrawn, there would be no creation any longer. And if you enter into contact with consciousness, you can discover the whole history of creation, for creation comes from consciousness. Consciousness is eternal.

Mother, at times unpleasant thoughts come and disturb us. How can we get rid of them?

There are several methods. Generally — but it depends on people — generally, the easiest way is to think of something else. That is, to concentrate one’s attention upon something that has nothing to do with that thought, has no connection with that thought, like reading or some work — generally something creative, some creative work. For instance, those who write, while they are writing (let us take simply a novelist), while he is writing, all other thoughts are gone, for he is concentrated on what he is doing. When he finishes writing, if he has no control, the other thoughts will return. But precisely when a thought assails you, one can try to do some creative work; for example, the scientist could do some research work, a special study to discover something, something that is very absorbing; that is the easiest way.

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Naturally, those who have begun to control their thought can make a movement of rejection, push aside the thought as one would a physical object. But that is more difficult and asks for a much greater mastery. If one can manage it, it is more active, in the sense that if you reject that movement, that thought, if you chase it off effectively and constantly or almost repeatedly, finally it does not come any more. But in the other case, it can always return. That makes two methods.

The third means is to be able to bring down a sufficiently great light from above which will be the “denial” in the deeper sense; that is, if the thought which comes is something dark (and especially if it comes from the subconscious or inconscient and is sustained by instinct), if one can bring down from above the light of a true knowledge, a higher power, and put that light upon the thought, one can manage to dissolve it or enlighten or transform it — this is the supreme method. This is still a little more difficult. But it can be done, and if one does it, one is cured — not only does the thought not come back but the very cause is removed.

The first step is to think of something else (but in this way, you know, it will be indefinitely repeated); the second is to fight; and the third is to transform. When one has reached the third step, not only is one cured but one has made a permanent progress.