

On Thoughts and Aphorisms

state of inner receptivity, and to do that, it is indispensable for you to go within each day.

24 October 1958

8 – Either do not give the name of knowledge to your beliefs only and of error, ignorance or charlatanism to the beliefs of others; or do not rail at the dogmas of the sects and their intolerance.

The dogmas of sects and the intolerance of religions come from the fact that the sects and religions consider their beliefs alone to be knowledge, and the beliefs of others to be error, ignorance or charlatanism.

This simple movement causes them to set up what they believe to be true as dogma and to violently condemn what others believe to be true. To think that your knowledge is the only true one, that your belief is the only true one and that others' beliefs are not true, is to do precisely what is done by all sects and religions.

So, if you are doing exactly the same thing as the sects and religions, you have no right to mock them. You do the same thing without being aware of it because it seems quite natural to you. What Sri Aurobindo wants to make you understand is that when you say, "We are in possession of the truth and what is not this truth is an error" — though you may not dare say it in such a crude way — you are doing exactly the same thing as all the religions and all the sects.

If you objectify a little you will see that you have spontaneously, without realising it, established as knowledge everything you have learnt, everything you have thought, everything which has given you the impression of being particularly true and of major importance; and you are quite ready to contradict any different notion held by those who say, "No, no, it is like this, it is not like that."

If you watch yourself in action, you will understand the mechanism of this intolerance and you will immediately be able to put an end to all these useless discussions. This brings us back to what I have already told you once: the contact which you have had with the truth of things, your personal contact — a contact which is more or less clear, profound, vast, pure — may have given *you*, as an individual, an interesting, perhaps even a decisive experience; but although this contact may have given you an experience of decisive importance, you must not imagine that it is a universal experience and that the same contact would give others the same experience. And if you understand this, that it is something purely personal, individual, subjective, that it is not at all an absolute and general law, then you can no longer despise the knowledge of others, nor seek to impose your own point of view and experience upon them. This understanding obviates all mental quarrels, which are always totally useless.

Obviously, the first part of the aphorism can be taken as advice, but this is not what Sri Aurobindo meant when he wrote it; he wanted to make us conscious of the error we make ourselves but ridicule in others. This is a habit with us, not only in this particular case, but in all cases. It is rather remarkable that when we have a weakness — for example a ridiculous habit, a defect or an imperfection — since it is more or less part of our nature, we consider it to be very natural, it does not shock us. But as soon as we see this same weakness, this same imperfection, this same ridiculous habit in someone else, it seems quite shocking to us and we say, “What! He’s like that?” — without noticing that we ourselves are “like that”. And so to the weakness and imperfection we add the absurdity of not even noticing them.

There is a lesson to be drawn from this. When something in a person seems to you completely unacceptable or ridiculous — “What! He is like that, he behaves like that, he says things like that, he does things like that” — you should say to yourself, “Well, well, but perhaps I do the same thing without being aware of it. I would do better to look into myself first before criticising

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him, so as to make sure that I am not doing the very same thing in a slightly different way.” If you have the good sense and intelligence to do this each time you are shocked by another person’s behaviour, you will realise that in life your relations with others are like a mirror which is presented to you so that you can see more easily and clearly the weaknesses you carry within you.

In a general and almost absolute way anything that shocks you in other people is the very thing you carry in yourself in a more or less veiled, more or less hidden form, though perhaps in a slightly different guise which allows you to delude yourself. And what in yourself seems inoffensive enough, becomes monstrous as soon as you see it in others.

Try to experience this; it will greatly help you to change yourselves. At the same time it will bring a sunny tolerance to your relationships with others, the goodwill which comes from understanding, and it will very often put an end to these completely useless quarrels.

One can live without quarrelling. It seems strange to say this because as things are, it would seem, on the contrary, that life is made for quarrelling in the sense that the main occupation of people who are together is to quarrel, overtly or covertly. You do not always come to words, you do not always come to blows — fortunately — but you are in a state of perpetual irritation within because you do not find around you the perfection that you would yourself wish to realise, and which you find rather difficult to realise — but you find it entirely natural that others should realise it.

“How can they be like that?...” You forget how difficult you find it in yourself not to be “like that”!

Try, you will see.

Look upon everything with a benevolent smile. Take all the things which irritate you as a lesson for yourself and your life will be more peaceful and more effective as well, for a great percentage of your energy certainly goes to waste in the irritation

you feel when you do not find in others the perfection that you would like to realise in yourself.

You stop short at the perfection that others should realise and you are seldom conscious of the goal you should be pursuing yourself. If you are conscious of it, well then, begin with the work which is given to *you*, that is to say, realise what you have to do and do not concern yourself with what others do, because, after all, it is not your business. And the best way to the true attitude is simply to say, “All those around me, all the circumstances of my life, all the people near me, are a mirror held up to me by the Divine Consciousness to show me the progress I must make. Everything that shocks me in others means a work I have to do in myself.”

And perhaps if one carried true perfection in oneself, one would discover it more often in others.

7 November 1958

**9 – What the soul sees and has experienced, that it knows;
the rest is appearance, prejudice and opinion.**

This amounts to saying that all knowledge which is not the result of the soul’s vision or experience is without true value.

But the question immediately arises — it was, in fact, put to me — “How do we know what the soul sees?”

Obviously there is only one solution: to become conscious of one’s soul. And this completes the aphorism: unless one is conscious of one’s soul one does not have true knowledge. Therefore the first effort must be to find the soul within, to unite with it and allow it to govern one’s life.

Some people ask, “How do we know whether this is the soul?” I have already answered this question several times. Those who ask this question, by the very fact of asking it, prove that they are not conscious of their souls, because as soon as you are conscious of your soul and identified with it, you have a