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What do you mean by the instinct of destruction in children?

It is not there in all children. I have known many who, on the contrary, were very careful.

Children are not as “concretised”, materialised in their physical consciousness as older people — as one grows up, it is as though one is coagulated and becomes more and more gross in one’s consciousness unless through a willed action one develops otherwise. For instance, the majority of children find it very difficult to distinguish their imagination, their dreams, what they see within themselves from outer things. The world is not as limited as when one is older and more precise. And they are extremely sensitive within; they are much closer to their psychic being than when they are grown up, and much more sensitive to the forces which, later, will become invisible to them — but at this moment are not. It is not unusual for children to have some sort of fits of fear or even of joy in their sleep, from dreams. Children are afraid of all sorts of things which for older people don’t exist any more. Their vision is not solely material. They have a kind of perception, more or less exact and precise, of the play of the forces behind. So, being in that state they are influenced by forces which otherwise have no hold over people who are shut up in themselves and more gross. And these forces — the forces of destruction, for example, or forces of cruelty, forces of wickedness, of ill-will — all, all these things are in the atmosphere. When one is more conscious and more well-formed within, one can see that they are outside oneself and deny them any expression. But when one is very young and lives in a half-dream, these things can exercise much influence and make children do things which in their normal state they

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would not do. I believe it is due to that above all.

There is also the phenomenon of unconsciousness. Very often a child does harm without even being aware that it is doing harm; they are unconscious, they are shut up in their movement, and they are not aware of the effect of what they do. That happens very often.

That means that if a child is rightly educated, and if one appeals to his best feelings and explains to him that to do things in such and such a way is harmful to others (and one can make this very tangible for them with a little demonstration), they stop doing harm, very often.

It is above all a question of education. These half-conscious movements of cruelty — it is very rare for parents not to have them; well, that is enough to set its impression upon a child's consciousness. There are some — but that is a very small number — who have an adverse formation inside them. These are irretrievably wicked children. But they are very rare. There are none here, happily.

“For it is certain that the nature of the child to be born depends very much upon the mother who forms it, upon her aspiration and will as well as upon the material surroundings in which she lives. To see that her thoughts are always beautiful and pure, her feelings always noble and fine, her material surroundings as harmonious as possible and full of a great simplicity — this is the part of education which should apply to the mother herself. And if she has in addition a conscious and definite will to form the child according to the highest ideal she can conceive, then the very best conditions will be realised so that the child can come into the world with the utmost potentialities.”

On Education, CWM, Vol. 12, p. 9

When great souls want to be born upon earth, do they choose their parents?

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Ah! that depends on their state of consciousness, it depends on the state of their psychic formation. If the psychic being is completely formed, if it has reached the perfection of its being and is free to reincarnate or not, it has also the capacity of choosing. But I believe I have explained that to you already. They don't have a physical sight like ours so long as they are not in a body. So, evidently, they look for a body which is adapted and fit to express them, but they must give its share to the material inconscience, if it may be put thus, and to the necessity to adapt themselves to the most material laws of the body. So, from the point of view of the psychic, the choice of the place where one is born is important, it is more than an insignificant detail. But there are so many things that can't be foreseen. For instance, one chooses an environment, a country, a certain type of family, one tries to see the nature of the likely parents, one asks for certain already well-developed qualities in them and a sufficient self-mastery. But all this is not enough if one does not carry in oneself a sufficient dynamism to overcome the obstacles. So, all things considered, this is not enormously important. Anyhow, even at the best, even if the parents have collaborated consciously, there is an enormous mass of the subconscious and the yet lower inconscient which from time to time rises again to the surface, gets stirred up, damages the work, makes calmness and silence indispensable. Always, always a preparation is needed, even if one has chosen — a long preparation. Not to speak of the phenomenon of being half-stunned at the moment of birth, the descent into the body, which often lasts for a very long time before one can escape from it completely.

Some children are wicked. Is it because their parents did not aspire for them?

It is perhaps a subconscious wickedness in the parents. It is said that people throw out their wickedness from themselves by giving it birth in their children. One has always a shadow

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in oneself. There are people who project this outside — that does not always free them from it, but still perhaps it comforts them! But it is the child who “profits” by it, you see? It is quite evident that the state of consciousness in which the parents are at that moment is of capital importance. If they have very low and vulgar ideas, the children will reflect them quite certainly. And all these children who are ill-formed, ill-bred, incomplete (specially from the point of view of intelligence: with holes, things missing), children who are only half-conscious and half-formed — this is always due to the state of consciousness in which the parents were when they conceived the child. Even as the state of consciousness of the last moments of life is of capital importance for the future of the one who is departing, so too the state of consciousness in which the parents are at the moment of conception gives a sort of stamp to the child, which it will reflect throughout its life. So, these are apparently such little things — the mood of the moment, the moment’s aspiration or degradation, anything whatsoever, everything that takes place at a particular moment — it seems to be so small a thing, and it has so great a consequence: it brings into the world a child who is incomplete or wicked or finally a failure. And people are not aware of that.

Later, when the child behaves nastily, they scold it. But they should begin by scolding themselves, telling themselves: “In what a horrible state of consciousness I must have been when I brought that child into the world.” For it is truly that.

Sometimes it so happens that a mother educates her child well, but the people around spoil it. Then what can the mother do?

Yes, that’s perfectly true. The worst of all (which men usually do) is to leave their children with servants. It is a crime. For these people have an altogether vulgar consciousness, altogether low, altogether obscure; and quite spontaneously, without wanting

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to do so, they let it enter the children. Naturally, there is also the age when children are put to school and there they begin to come in contact with a host of children whose company is not always quite desirable. It is very difficult to avoid these relations. But all the same, if one has started life with a little consciousness and much goodwill, when one meets people who are not desirable company, one feels it. And if one is goodwilled, immediately one tries not to see them or not to be with them.

But if the power of ill-will is greater than the other person's goodwill?

Yes, that's true, that may happen. Fundamentally, this is why we always come back to the same thing: one must do all one can, as well as possible, and do it as an offering to the Divine, and then, once all this is settled and organised, well, if there is really an aspiration in the being, and a being that is a being of light, it can counteract all bad influences. But once one puts one's foot into this world, one can't hope very much to be quite pure and free from bad influences. Every time one eats, one absorbs them; every time one breathes, one absorbs them. Then, essentially, what is necessary is to do the work of cleansing, progressively, as much as possible.

Why do some children take interest in things only when there is some excitement?

They are tamasic. It is due to the large proportion of tamas in their nature. The more tamasic one is, the more does one need something violent and exciting circumstances. When the physical is tamasic, unless one eats spices and highly flavoured food, one does not feel nourished. And yet these are poisons. They act exactly like poison on the nerves. They do not nourish. But it is because people are tamasic, because their body's consciousness is not sufficiently developed. Well, mentally it is

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the same thing, vitally the same thing. If they are tamasic, they always need new excitements, dramas, murders, suicides, etc. to feel anything at all, otherwise.... And there is nothing, nothing that makes one more wicked and cruel than tamas. For it is this need of excitement which shakes you up a little, makes you come out of yourself. And one must also learn, there, to distinguish between those who are exclusively tamasic and those who are mixed, and those who are struggling within themselves with their different parts. One can, one *must* know in what proportion their nature is constituted, so as to be able to insist at need on one thing or another. Some people constantly need a whipping from life in order to move, otherwise they would spend their time sleeping. Others, on the contrary, need soothing things, silence, a retreat in the country-side — all things that do a lot of good but which must disappear as soon as one needs to make an effort for progress or to realise something or struggle against a defect, conquer an obstacle.... It is complicated, don't you think so?

The proportion is very important, this proportion of the three “gunas” (you know the three gunas?)¹ the proportion of the three gunas in the nature. And one must know the exact proportion in oneself and how to use one guna to fight the other, and so on. But there is a moment when one should attain a certain equilibrium, and then be capable of establishing it in oneself a little steadily and facing life without having to fall into holes or struggle against terrible things. From that moment on everything goes well.

It had been proposed that education in our school and our university centre would be given in accordance with the ideals of Sri Aurobindo. But so far the education

¹ The three principles of Indian psychology: *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. Tamas is the principle of inertia and obscurity; rajas the principle of passion, desire and dynamism; sattwa the principle of light and equilibrium.

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given here is the same as in other schools; one follows the same programme.

Yes, my child. And for years I have been fighting for it to be otherwise. When you — you children, here — when you are old enough and ready to become teachers, then you will be entrusted with teaching the newcomers the right thing, in the right way. Actually, for the time being, it is much more a school of teachers than a school of students! What is wanted is that you prepare yourselves by learning what everybody knows — for there is an indispensable basis: it is not anything very much, it is not a very detailed or very deeply established basis, but still there is a basis of general human knowledge that's necessary — but once you have that basis and have at the same time benefited by the influence that is here, and when you have read and understood sufficiently well to be able to see from that angle — the angle of the true life — well, when you know all that, you will be the ones asked to teach the children from outside what you have learnt. That is part of the work.

It is true that apart from a few rare exceptions, the teaching is given on the most ordinary principles. I know it. But, for instance, in order that it be otherwise, the books which are used should be prepared here, with the extracts chosen here, even with the method of teaching worked out here. I have asked several persons to do it. But this is one of those interminable tasks which make you always put off for the next year the possibility of taking a class which does not follow the grooves of the past. That preparation of the material, for instance, for the true understanding of things, that takes time. One has to face very concrete problems. It is difficult to teach children without their having books to be able to study. But these books, finally, are perforce ordered from the stock available. There is not much choice. One tries to find the best that is available, but the best that is there is yet not very good. There also, I need people to prepare them, these books. But precisely, I believe

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that someone who has grown up here from childhood and felt things quite subconsciously when very young, and who has in spite of everything... that leaves a trace, it cannot go without any effect; and when one sees children brought up here beside those who come from outside, there is truly a great difference (perhaps not outwardly in the mechanical part of training, but in the understanding, the intelligence, in the inner awakening), there is a considerable difference, and the new ones need some time to come up to the same level. It is something beyond books, don't you see? It is like the difference between living in a pure atmosphere, filling the lungs with pure air every time one breathes and living in an infected atmosphere and poisoning oneself every time one breathes. From the point of view of consciousness it is the same phenomenon, and it is essentially the most important thing. And it is this which completely escapes the superficial consciousness. You are plunged in a sea of consciousness full of light, aspiration, true understanding, essential purity, and whether you want it or not it enters. Even for those who are shut up in their outer consciousness, well, they cannot sleep in vain. There is an action here during sleep which is quite considerable, considerable. So that has an effect, it is visible. I have seen people who had come altogether from outside, who knew nothing (only they had spent their life taking interest in children), well, the impression of these people — visitors, people just passing by — they are all quite bewildered: "But you have children here as I have never seen elsewhere!" As for us, we are used to it, aren't we? They are spontaneously like that, quite naturally. But there is an awakening in the consciousness, there is a kind of inner response and a feeling of blossoming, of inner freedom which is not found elsewhere. Some of the children who come here are terribly well brought up — so polite, so well-bred, who answer you so... and one gets the impression of little puppets, just half alive, who have been well polished, well brushed, well groomed outside, but within there is no response. Here, I cannot say that we give an example of unusual politeness (!), one is rather a

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little... a little what people call “ill-bred”. But in that too one is so alive! One feels a consciousness vibrating here. And that is the most important part of all. And of this one does not speak, for these are things one *does*, but does not talk about — an occasion like today’s must present itself for me to speak to you about it. Indeed, you have been here for so many years, and this is the first time I have had it. *Voilà*.

You have exhausted all your questions?

It is outside the subject. Mother, every year you give a message on the first of January. What does it exactly indicate?

Yes, every year.... During the war it was wonderful, it was like a prophecy of what was going to come. Now there is no longer any war and no more need of prophecy! But it is always an indication of the progress which has to be made. You will receive it tomorrow morning, the prayer.² But I advise you to reflect deeply on it. For truly it was spoken and considered as of great importance. Now we are becoming almost a thing of public interest, in the sense that there are lots of visitors coming and lots of people concerned about what we are doing here, and then they are taken round and told what we have supposedly done and what we are going to do and all that. And there was truly a great need to say: “I beg of you, don’t speak so much about what we are doing: do it.” That is all.

It is always better to do than to speak, and in the least details also.

There is another meaning too, much deeper. But about that I shall speak to you another time.

Voilà, au revoir my children.

² New Year Prayer of 1954:

“My Lord, here is Thy advice to all, for this year:

‘Never boast about anything, let your acts speak for you.’ ”