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“Not to go on for ever repeating what man has already done is our work, but to arrive at new realisations and undreamed-of masteries. Time and soul and world are given us for our field, vision and hope and creative imagination stand for our prompters, will and thought and labour are our all-effective instruments.

“What is there new that we have yet to accomplish? Love, for as yet we have only accomplished hatred and self-pleasing; Knowledge, for as yet we have only accomplished error and perception and conceiving; Bliss, for as yet we have only accomplished pleasure and pain and indifference; Power, for as yet we have only accomplished weakness and effort and a defeated victory; Life, for as yet we have only accomplished birth and growth and dying; Unity, for as yet we have only accomplished war and association.

“In a word, godhead; to remake ourselves in the divine image.”

Sri Aurobindo, Thoughts and Glimpses, SABCL, Vol. 16, pp. 378-79

We have only accomplished “weakness and effort and a defeated victory”?

Until now all the victories which have been won have reactions that are finally defeats. There is never anything definitive and complete. Every time one has the feeling of having gained a victory, one finds out that this victory was incomplete, partial, fugitive. This is a fact one can always observe if one looks carefully at oneself. Not that things are necessarily what they were before, no, something has changed, but everything has not changed and not changed completely.

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This is very apparent, very noticeable in physical conquests over the body. Through a very assiduous labour one succeeds in overcoming a weakness, a limitation, a bad habit, and one believes this is a definitive victory; but after some time or at times immediately one realises that nothing is completely done, nothing is definitive, that what one thought to have accomplished has to be done again. For only a total change of consciousness and the intervention of a new force, a reversal of consciousness can make the victory complete.

In the old Chaldean tradition, very often the young novices were given an image when they were invested with the white robe; they were told: "Do not try to remove the stains one by one, the whole robe must be purified." Do not try to correct your faults one by one, to overcome your weaknesses one by one, it does not take you very far. The entire consciousness must be changed, a reversal of consciousness must be achieved, a springing up out of the state in which one is towards a higher state from which one dominates all the weaknesses one wants to heal, and from which one has a full vision of the work to be accomplished.

I believe Sri Aurobindo has said this: things are such that it may be said that nothing is done until everything is done. One step ahead is not enough, a total conversion is necessary.

How many times have I heard people who were making an effort say, "I try, but what's the use of my trying? Every time I think I have gained something, I find that I must begin all over again." This happens because they are trying to go forward while standing still, they are trying to progress without changing their consciousness. It is the entire point of view which must be shifted, the whole consciousness must get out of the rut in which it lies so as to rise up and see things from above. It is only thus that victories will not be changed into defeats.

Anything else? No, nothing more?

Mother, how to change one's consciousness?

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Naturally, there are many ways, but each person must do it by the means accessible to him; and the indication of the way usually comes spontaneously, through something like an unexpected experience. And for each one, it appears a little differently.

For instance, one may have the perception of the ordinary consciousness which is extended on the surface, horizontally, and works on a plane which is simultaneously the surface of things and has a contact with the superficial outer side of things, people, circumstances; and then, suddenly, for some reason or other — as I say for each one it is different — there is a shifting upwards, and instead of seeing things horizontally, of being at the same level as they are, you suddenly dominate them and see them from above, in their totality, instead of seeing a small number of things immediately next to yourself; it is as though something were drawing you above and making you see as from a mountain-top or an aeroplane. And instead of seeing each detail and seeing it on its own level, you see the whole as one unity, and from far above.

There are many ways of having this experience, but it usually comes to you as if by chance, one fine day.

Or else, one may have an experience which is almost its very opposite but which comes to the same thing. Suddenly one plunges into a depth, one moves away from the thing one perceived, it seems distant, superficial, unimportant; one enters an inner silence or an inner calm or an inward vision of things, a profound feeling, a more intimate perception of circumstances and things, in which all values change. And one becomes aware of a sort of unity, a deep identity which is one in spite of the diverse appearances.

Or else, suddenly also, the sense of limitation disappears and one enters the perception of a kind of indefinite duration beginningless and endless, of something which has always been and always will be.

These experiences come to you suddenly in a flash, for a second, a moment in your life, you don't know why or how.... There

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are other ways, other experiences — they are innumerable, they vary according to people; but with this, with one minute, one second of such an existence, one catches the tail of the thing. So one must remember that, try to relive it, go to the depths of the experience, recall it, aspire, concentrate. This is the starting-point, the end of the guiding thread, the clue. For all those who are destined to find their inner being, the truth of their being, there is always at least one moment in life when they were no longer the same, perhaps just like a lightning-flash — but that is enough. It indicates the road one should take, it is the door that opens on this path. And so you must pass through the door, and with perseverance and an unflinching steadfastness seek to renew the state which will lead you to something more real and more total.

Many ways have always been given, but a way you have been taught, a way you have read about in books or heard from a teacher, does not have the effective value of a spontaneous experience which has come without any apparent reason, and which is simply the blossoming of the soul's awakening, one second of contact with your psychic being which shows you the best way for you, the one most within your reach, which you will then have to follow with perseverance to reach the goal — one second which shows you how to start, the beginning.... Some have this in dreams at night; some have it at any odd time: something one sees which awakens in one this new consciousness, something one hears, a beautiful landscape, beautiful music, or else simply a few words one reads, or else the intensity of concentration in some effort — anything at all, there are a thousand reasons and thousands of ways of having it. But, I repeat, all those who are destined to realise have had this at least once in their life. It may be very fleeting, it may have come when they were very young, but always at least once in one's life one has the experience of what true consciousness is. Well, that is the best indication of the path to be followed.

One may seek within oneself, one may remember, may

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observe; one must notice what is going on, one must pay attention, that's all. Sometimes, when one sees a generous act, hears of something exceptional, when one witnesses heroism or generosity or greatness of soul, meets someone who shows a special talent or acts in an exceptional and beautiful way, there is a kind of enthusiasm or admiration or gratitude which suddenly awakens in the being and opens the door to a state, a new state of consciousness, a light, a warmth, a joy one did not know before. That too is a way of catching the guiding thread. There are a thousand ways, one has only to be awake and to watch.

First of all, you must feel the necessity for this change of consciousness, accept the idea that it is this, the path which must lead to the goal; and once you admit the principle, you must be watchful. And you will find, you do find it. And once you have found it, you must start walking without any hesitation.

Indeed, the starting-point is to observe oneself, not to live in a perpetual nonchalance, a perpetual apathy; one must be attentive.

Is that all?

(Silence)

Here is a question I have been asked — it seems many people are asking themselves the same thing! I am going to read to you what is written, then I shall speak to you afterwards. It looks so convincing, this question!

“How should we understand ‘not to have preferences’? Shouldn’t we prefer order to disorder, cleanliness to dirt, etc? Not to have preferences — does it mean treating everybody in the same way?”

Now, here is my answer: this is playing on words! What you call preference, I call choice. You must be in a perpetual state

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of choice; at every minute of your life you must make a choice between what drags you down and what draws you up, between what makes you progress and what makes you go backwards; but I do not call this having preferences, I call this making a choice — making a choice, choosing. At every minute one has to choose, this is indispensable, and infinitely more so than choosing once for all between cleanliness and dirt, whether moral or physical. The choice: at every second the choice is before you, and you may take a step downward or a step upward, take a step backward or a step forward; and this state of choice must be constant, perpetual, you must never fall asleep. But this is not what I call having preferences. Preferences — this means precisely not choosing. There is something for which you feel sympathy or antipathy, repulsion or attraction, and blindly, without any reason, you become attached to this thing; or else, when you have a problem to solve, you prefer the solution of this problem or this difficulty to be of one particular kind or another. But that is not at all choosing — don't you see, what the truest thing is doesn't come into question, it is a matter of having a preference. For me the meaning of the word is very clear: a preference is something blind, an impulse, an attachment, an unconscious movement which is usually terribly obstinate.

You are placed in certain circumstances; one thing or another may happen, and you yourself have an aspiration, you ask to be guided, but within you there is something which prefers the answer to be of a certain kind, the indication to be a particular one, or the event to come about in one way rather than another; but all this is not a question of choice, it is a preference. And when the answer to your aspiration or prayer is not in accord with your desire, this preference makes you feel unhappy, you find it difficult to accept the answer, you must fight to accept it; whereas if you had no preferences, whatever the answer to your aspiration, when it comes, you cling to it joyfully, spontaneously with a sincere *élan*. Otherwise you are compelled to make an effort to accept what comes, the decision which comes in answer

to your aspiration; you wish, desire, prefer things to be like this and not like that. But that, indeed, is not a choice. The choice is there at every minute; every minute you are faced with a choice: the choice to climb up or go down, the choice to progress or go backwards. But this choice does not imply that you prefer things to be like this or like that; it is a fact of every moment, an *attitude* you take.

Choice means a decision and an action. Preference is a desire. A choice is made and *ought* to be made, and if it is truly a choice, it is made without care for the consequences, without expecting any result. You choose; you choose according to your inner truth, your highest consciousness; whatever happens does not touch you, you have made your choice, the true choice, and what comes about is not your concern. While, on the contrary, if you have preferences, you will choose through preference in one way or another, your preference will distort your choice: it will be calculation, bargaining, you will act with the idea that a particular thing must happen because this is what you prefer and not because that is the truth, the right thing to do. Preference is attached to the result, acts with a view to the result, wishes things to be in a particular way and acts to bring about its wish; and so this opens the door to all kinds of things. Choice is independent of the result. And certainly, at every minute you can choose, you are faced with the necessity of choosing at every second. And you do not choose really well, in all sincerity, unless it is the truth of the choice which interests you, and not the result of your choice. If you choose with the result in view, that falsifies your choice.

So I say it is playing on words, it is mixing up two different things; and so you ask questions which seem insoluble, for it is a mixture. There is a confusion in the question.

As for treating everybody in the same way, it is a worse confusion still! It is the kind of confusion one makes when one says that the Divine must treat everybody in the same way. So it would not be worth the trouble to have diversity in the world,

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not worth the trouble of not having two identical individuals; for this contradicts the very principle of diversity.

You may — or you ought to if you can't — aspire to have the same deep attitude of understanding, unity, love, perfect compassion for all that is in the universe; but this very attitude will be applied to each case in a different way, according to the truth of that case and its necessity. What could be called the motive or rather the origin of the action is the same, but the action may even be totally and diametrically opposite in accordance with the case and the deeper truth of each case. But for that, precisely, one must have the highest attitude, the most profound, the most essentially true, that which is free from all outer contingencies. Then one can see at every minute not only the essential truth but also the truth of the action; and in each case it is different. And yet, what we may call “feeling” — though this is an inadequate word — or the state of consciousness in which one acts, is essentially the same.

But this cannot be understood unless one enters the essential depth of things and sees them from the highest summits. And then it is like a centre of light and consciousness high enough or deep enough to be able to see all things at the same time, not only in their essence but in their manifestation; and although the centre of consciousness is one, the action will be as diverse as the manifestation is diverse: it is the realisation of the divine Truth in its manifestation. Otherwise it would be doing away with all the diversity of the world and bringing it back to the essential unmanifest Oneness, for it is only in the non-manifestation that the One is manifested as the One. But as soon as one enters the manifestation, the One manifests as the multiplicity, and multiplicity implies a multitude of actions and ways.

So, to sum up: the choice must be made without care for the consequences, and the action must be performed in accordance with the truth of the multiplicity in the manifestation.

There we are.