Suffering — Its Cause and Cure

Words of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo

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> ... for joy and not for sorrow earth was made.
>
> Sri Aurobindo
>
> *Savitri*, p. 629

The Crust of the Whole Problem

It is obvious that what especially characterises man is this mental capacity of watching himself live. The animal lives spontaneously, automatically, and if it watches itself live, it must be to a very minute and insignificant degree, and that is why it is peaceful and does not worry. Even if an animal is suffering because of an accident or an illness, this suffering is reduced to a minimum by the fact that it does not observe it, does not project it in its consciousness and into the future, does not imagine things about its illness or its accident.

With man there has begun this perpetual worrying about what is going to happen, and this worry is the principal, if not the sole cause of his torment. With this objectivising consciousness there has begun anxiety, painful imaginations, worry, torment, anticipation of future catastrophes, with the result that most men — and not the least conscious, the most conscious — live in perpetual torment. Man is too conscious to be indifferent, he is not conscious enough to know what will happen. Truly it could be said without fear of making a mistake that of all earth's creatures he is the most miserable. The human being is used to being like that because it is an atavistic state which he has inherited from his ancestors, but it is truly a miserable condition. And it is only with this spiritual capacity of rising to a higher level and replacing the animal's unconsciousness by a spiritual super-consciousness that there comes into the being not only the capacity to see the goal of existence and to foresee the culmination of the effort but also a clear-sighted trust in a higher spiritual power to which one can surrender one's whole being, entrust oneself, give the responsibility for one's life and future and so abandon all worries.

Of course, it is impossible for man to fall back to the lev-

el of the animal and lose the consciousness he has acquired; therefore, for him there is only one means, one way to get out of this condition he is in, which I call a miserable one, and to emerge into a higher state where worry is replaced by a trusting surrender and the certitude of a luminous culmination — this way is to change the consciousness.

Truly speaking there is no condition more miserable than being responsible for an existence to which one doesn't have the key, that is, of which one doesn't have the threads that can guide and solve the problems. The animal sets itself no problems: it just lives. Its instinct drives it, it relies on a collective consciousness which has an innate knowledge and is higher than itself, but it is automatic, spontaneous, it has no need to will something and make an effort to bring it about, it is quite naturally like that, and as it is not responsible for its life, it does not worry. With man is born the sense of having to depend on himself, and as he does not have the necessary knowledge the result is a perpetual torment. This torment can come to an end only with a total surrender to a higher consciousness than his own to which he can totally entrust himself, hand over his worries and leave the care of guiding his life and organising everything.

How can a problem be solved when one doesn't have the necessary knowledge? And the unfortunate thing is that man believes that he has to resolve all the problems of his life, and he does not have the knowledge needed to do it. That is the source, the origin of all his troubles—that perpetual question, "What should I do?..." which is followed by another one still more acute, "What is going to happen?" and at the same time, more or less, the inability to answer.

That is why all spiritual disciplines begin with the necessity of surrendering all responsibility and relying on a higher principle. Otherwise peace is impossible.

And yet, consciousness has been given to man so that he can progress, can discover what he doesn't know, develop into what he has not yet become; and so it may be said that there is a higher state than that of an immobile and static peace: it is a trust total enough for one to keep the will to progress, to preserve the effort for progress while ridding it of all anxiety, all care for results and consequences. This is one step ahead of the methods which may be called "quietist", which are founded on the rejection of all activity and a plunging into an immobility and inner silence, which forsake all life because it has been suddenly felt that without peace one can't have any inner realisation and, quite naturally, one thought that one couldn't have peace so long as one was living in outer conditions, in the state of anxiety in which problems are set and cannot be solved, for one does not have the knowledge to do so.

The next step is to face the problem, but with the calm and certitude of an absolute trust in the supreme Power which knows, and can make you act. And then, instead of abandoning action, one can act in a higher peace that is strong and dynamic.

This is what could be called a new aspect of the divine intervention in life, a new form of intervention of the divine forces in existence, a new aspect of spiritual realisation.

The Mother

(CWM 9: 303-05, 1st edition)

Divinisation itself does not mean the destruction of the human elements; it means taking them up, showing them the way to their own perfection, raising them by purification and perfection to their full power and Ananda...

(SABCL 22: 125) Sri Aurobindo

Why Is There Suffering ?

For a long time quite recently, that is to say, for days together, there was a very acute, very intense, very clear perception that the action of the Force translated itself externally by what we call "suffering" because that is the only kind of vibration which can pull Matter out of its inertia.

The supreme Peace, the supreme Calm are deformed and disfigured into inertia and into *tamas*, and precisely because this was the deformation of true Peace and Calm, there was no reason why it should change! A certain vibration of awakening — of reawakening — was necessary to come out of this *tamas*, that could not pass directly from *tamas* to Peace; something was needed to shake the *tamas*, and that is translated externally by suffering.

I am speaking here of physical suffering, because all the other sufferings — vital, mental, emotional sufferings — are due to a wrong working of the mind, and these... may simply be classed together as Falsehood, that's all. But physical suffering gives me the impression of a child being beaten, because here, in Matter, Falsehood has become ignorance; that is to say, there is no bad will — no bad will is there in Matter, all is inertia and ignorance: complete ignorance of the Truth, ignorance of the Origin, ignorance of the Possibility and ignorance even of what is to be done in order not to suffer physically. This ignorance is everywhere in the cells, and it is only the experience, the experience of what is translated in this rudimentary consciousness as suffering, which can awaken, bring forth the need to know and to cure, and the aspiration to transform oneself.

It has become a certainty, because in all the cells there is born the aspiration, which is becoming more and more intense and which wonders at the resistance; but they have

observed that whenever something goes wrong in the working (that is to say, instead of being supple, spontaneous, natural, the working becomes a painful effort, a struggle against something which takes the appearance of a bad will, but is only a reticence that does not understand), at that moment, the intensity of the aspiration, of the call, is tenfold, becomes constant. The difficulty is to remain at that state of intensity. Generally everything falls back, I cannot say into a somnolence, but a kind of relaxation: you take things easy; and it is only when the inner disorder becomes painful that the intensity grows and remains permanent. For hours — hours together — without slackening, the call, the aspiration, the will to be united with the Divine, to become the Divine, is maintained at its maximum. Why? Because there was externally what is called a physical disorder, a suffering. Otherwise, when there is no suffering, from time to time one soars up, then one falls back into a slackening; again another time one soars up once more... there is no end to it. That lasts eternally. If we want things to go fast (relatively fast according to the rhythm of our life), this smack of the whip is necessary. I am convinced of it, because as soon as you are within your inner being you look upon that with contempt (as regards oneself).

But then, all of a sudden, when there comes this true Compassion of the Divine Love, and when one sees all these things that appear so horrible, so abnormal, so absurd, this great pain which is upon all beings and even upon all things... then there takes birth in this physical being the aspiration to soothe, to cure, to remove that. There is in Love, at its Origin, something which is translated constantly as the intervention of Grace: a force, a sweetness, something like a vibration of solace spread everywhere, but which an illumined consciousness can direct, concentrate on some

points. And it is there, there itself that I saw the true use one can make of thought: thought serves as a kind of channel to carry this vibration from place to place, wherever it is necessary. This force, this vibration of sweetness is there in a static way upon the world, pressing in order to be received, but it is an impersonal action. And thought—illumined thought, surrendered thought, thought which is no longer anything but an instrument, which tries no longer to initiate things, which is satisfied with being moved by the higher Consciousness — thought serves as an intermediary to establish a contact, a relation, and to enable this impersonal Force to act wherever it is necessary, upon definite points.

The Mother

(CWM 11: 41-43)

How to Cure Suffering?

It may be said in an absolute way that an evil always carries its own remedy. One might say that the cure of any suffering coexists with the suffering. So, instead of seeing an evil "useless" and "stupid" as it is generally thought to be, you see that the progress, the evolution which has made the suffering necessary — which is the cause of the suffering and the very reason for its existence — attains the intended result; and at the same time the suffering is cured, for those who are able to open themselves and receive. **The three things — suffering as a means of progress, progress, and the cure of suffering — are coexistent,** simultaneous; that is to say, they do not follow each other, they are there at the same time.

If, at the moment when the transforming action creates a suffering, there is in that which suffers the necessary aspi-

ration and opening, the remedy also is taken in at the same time, and the effect is total, complete: transformation, with the action necessary to obtain it, and, at the same time, cure of the false sensation produced by the resistance. And the suffering is replaced by... something which is not known upon this earth, but which is akin to joy, well-being, trust and security. It is a supersensation, in a perfect peace, and which is obviously the only thing that can be eternal.

This analysis expresses very imperfectly what one would call the "content" of Ananda.

I believe it is something that has been felt, experienced, partially and in a very fleeting manner, through all the ages, but which has just begun to concentrate and almost concretise itself upon earth. But physical Matter, in its cellular form, has, one cannot say fear or anxiety, but a kind of apprehension of new vibrations, and this apprehension naturally takes away from the cells their receptivity and assumes the appearance of uneasiness — it is not suffering, but an uneasiness. When, however, this apprehension is counterbalanced and cured by aspiration and the will for total surrender and by the act of total surrender, then this sort of apprehension, having disappeared, becomes a supreme well-being.

... to come back to what we were saying just now, when one is conscious of this Force — this Force, this Compassion in its essential reality* — and when one sees how it can act through the conscious individual, one has the key to the problem.

(CWM 11: 43-45)

The Mother

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* The Mother refers to "There is in Love, at its Origin, something which is translated constantly as the intervention of Grace: a force, a sweetness, something like a vibration of solace spread everywhere ..." (See last five lines on page 8 of this book.) –ed.

The Secret Towards Which Suffering Leads Us

Quite naturally we ask ourselves what this secret is, towards which pain leads us. For a superficial and imperfect understanding, one could believe that it is pain which the soul is seeking. Nothing of the kind. The very nature of the soul is divine Delight, constant, unvarying, unconditioned, ecstatic; but it is true that if one can face suffering with courage, endurance, an unshakable faith in the divine Grace, if one can, instead of shunning suffering when it comes, enter into it with this will, this aspiration to go through it and find the luminous truth, the unvarying delight which is at the core of all things, the door of pain is often more direct, more immediate than that of satisfaction or contentment.

I am not speaking of pleasure because pleasure turns its back constantly and almost completely on this profound divine Delight.

Pleasure is a deceptive and perverse disguise which turns us away from our goal and we certainly should not seek it if we are eager to find the truth. Pleasure vaporises us; it deceives us, leads us astray. Pain brings us back to a deeper truth by obliging us to concentrate in order to be able to bear it, be able to face this thing that crushes us. It is in pain that one most easily finds the true strength again, when one is strong. It is in pain that one most easily finds the true faith again, the faith in something which is above and beyond all pain.

When one enjoys oneself and forgets, when one takes things as they come, tries to avoid being serious and looking life in the face, in a word when one seeks to forget, to forget that there is a problem to solve, that there is something to find, that we have a reason for existence and living, that we are not here just to pass our time and go away without hav-

ing learnt or done anything, then one really wastes one's time, one misses the opportunity that has been given to us, this — I cannot say unique, but marvellous opportunity for an existence which is the field of progress, which is the moment in eternity when you can discover the secret of life; for this physical, material existence is a wonderful opportunity, a possibility given to you to find the purpose of life, to make you advance one step towards this deeper truth, to make you discover this secret which puts you into contact with the eternal rapture of the divine life.

(Silence)

I have already told you many a time that to seek suffering and pain is a morbid attitude which must be avoided, but to run away from them through forgetfulness, through a superficial, frivolous movement, through diversion, is cowardice. When pain comes, it comes to teach us something. The quicker we learn it, the more the need for pain diminishes, and when we know the secret, it will no longer be possible to suffer, for that secret reveals to us the reason, the cause, the origin of suffering, and the way to pass beyond it.

The secret is to emerge from the ego, get out of its prison, unite ourselves with the Divine, merge into Him, not to allow anything to separate us from Him. Then, once one has discovered this secret and realises it in one's being, pain loses its justification and suffering disappears. It is an all-powerful remedy, not only in the deeper parts of the being, in the soul, in the spiritual consciousness, but also in life and in the body.

The Mother

(CWM 9: 40-42)

The Reality of the Universe Is Delight

"God cannot cease from leaning down towards Nature, nor man from aspiring towards the Godhead. It is the eternal relation of the finite to the infinite. When they seem to turn from each other, it is to recoil for a more intimate meeting.

"In man nature of the world becomes again self-conscious so that it may take the greater leap towards its Enjoyer. This is the Enjoyer whom unknowingly it possesses, whom life and sensation possessing deny and denying seek. Nature of the world knows not God, only because it knows not itself; when it knows itself, it shall know unalloyed delight of being.

"Possession in oneness and not loss in oneness is the secret. God and Man, World and Beyond-world become one when they know each other. Their division is the cause of ignorance as ignorance is the cause of suffering."

Thoughts and Glimpses, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 382

According to what Sri Aurobindo says here, the reality of the universe is what is called God or godhead, but essentially it is Delight. The universe is created in Delight and for Delight. But this Delight can exist only in the perfect oneness of the creation with its creator, and Sri Aurobindo describes this oneness as the Possessor — that is, the Creator — the Possessor being possessed by his creation, a sort of reciprocal possession which is the very essence of the Oneness and the source of all delight.

And it is because of division — because the Possessor no longer possesses and because the possessed no longer possesses the Possessor, division is created and the essential Delight is changed into ignorance, and this ignorance

is the cause of all suffering. "Ignorance", not in the sense in which it is usually understood, for that is what Sri Aurobindo calls Nescience: that ignorance is a consequence of the other. True ignorance is ignorance of the oneness, the union, the identity. And that is the cause of all suffering.

Ever since division began and creation lost its direct contact with the Creator, ignorance has reigned, and all suffering is its result.

All those who have had the inner experience have had this experience, that the moment one re-establishes the union with the divine source, all suffering disappears. But there has been a very persistent movement, about which I spoke to you last week, which put at the source of creation not this essential divine Delight but desire. This delight of creation, self-manifestation, self-expression — there is an entire line of seekers and sages who have considered it not as a delight but as a desire; the whole line of Buddhism is of this kind. And instead of seeing the solution in a Oneness which restores to us the essential Delight of the manifestation and the becoming, they consider that the goal and also the way are a total rejection of all desire to be and a return to annihilation.

This conception amounts to an essential misunderstanding. The methods recommended for self-liberation are methods of development which can be very useful, but this conception of a world that's essentially bad, for it is the result of desire, and from which one must escape at all costs and as quickly as possible, has been the greatest and most serious distortion of all spiritual life in the history of mankind.

It might have been useful, perhaps, at a particular time, for everything is useful in the world's history, but this utility has passed, it is outworn, and it is time for this conception

to be superseded and for us to return to a more essential and higher Truth, to go back to the Delight of existence, the Joy of union and manifestation of the Divine.

This new orientation—I mean new in its terrestrial realisation — must replace all the former spiritual orientations and open the way to the new realisation which will be a supramental realisation. That is why I told you last week that only Delight, the true divine Delight can bring about the Victory.

Naturally, there must be no confusion about what this Delight is, and that is why from the beginning Sri Aurobindo puts us on our guard, telling us that it is only when one has passed beyond enjoyings that one can enter into Bliss. Bliss is precisely that state which comes from the manifestation of this Delight. But it is quite the opposite of all that is usually called joy and pleasure, and these must be completely given up in order to have the other.

(CWM 9: 7-9) **The Mother**

And this discipline I spoke about, which one must undergo, if it is practised with the aim of finding Delight, the result is delayed, for an egoistic element is introduced into it, it is done with an aim and is no longer an offering, it is a demand, and then.... It comes, it will come, even if it takes much longer — when one asks nothing, expects nothing, hopes for nothing, when it is simply that, it is self-giving and aspiration, and the spontaneous need without any bargaining — the need to be divine, that's all.

(CWM 9: 23) The Mother

A Powerful Way to Dissolving Difficulties

Virtue claims to seek perfection, but perfection is a totality. So the two movements contradict each other. A virtue that eliminates, reduces, fixes limits, and a perfection that accepts everything, rejects nothing but puts each thing in its place, obviously cannot agree.

Taking life seriously generally consists of two movements: the first one is to give importance to things that probably have none, and the second is to want life to be reduced to a certain number of qualities that are considered pure and worthy of existence. In some people — for example, those Sri Aurobindo speaks about here, the "polite" or the puritans — this virtue becomes dry, arid, grey, aggressive and it finds fault everywhere, in everything that is joyful and free and happy.

The only way to make life perfect — I mean here, life on earth, of course — is to look at it from high enough to see it as a whole, not only in its present totality, but in the whole of the past, present and future: what it has been, what it is and what it will be — one must be able to see everything at once. Because that is the only way to put everything in its place. Nothing can be eliminated, nothing *should* be eliminated, but each thing must be in its place in total harmony with all the rest. And then all these things that seem so "bad", so "reprehensible", so "unacceptable" to the puritan mind, would become movements of delight and freedom in a totally divine life. And then nothing would prevent us from knowing, understanding, feeling and living this wonderful laughter of the Supreme who takes infinite delight in watching Himself live infinitely.

This delight, this wonderful laughter that dissolves every shadow, every pain, every suffering! You only have to

go deep enough within yourself to find the inner Sun, to let yourself be flooded by it; and then there is nothing but a cascade of harmonious, luminous, sunlit laughter, which leaves no room for any shadow or pain.

In fact, even the greatest difficulties, even the greatest sorrows, even the greatest physical pain — if you can look at them from that standpoint, from there, you see the unreality of the difficulty, the unreality of the sorrow, the unreality of the pain — and there is nothing but a joyful and luminous vibration.

In fact, this is the most powerful way of dissolving difficulties, overcoming sorrows and removing pain. The first two are relatively easy — I say relatively — the last one is more difficult because we are in the habit of considering the body and its feelings to be extremely concrete, positive; but it is the same thing, it is simply because we have not learnt, we are not in the habit of regarding our body as something fluid, plastic, uncertain, malleable. We have not learnt to bring into it this luminous laughter that dissolves all darkness, all difficulty, all discord, all disharmony, everything that jars, that weeps and wails.

And this Sun, this Sun of divine laughter is at the centre of all things, the truth of all things: we must learn to see it, to feel it, to live it.

The Mother

(CWM 10: 157-58)

Generally speaking, man is an animal who takes himself terribly seriously. To know how to smile at oneself in all circumstances, to smile at one's sorrows and disillusions, ambitions and sufferings, indignation and revolt – what a powerful weapon with which to overcome oneself!

The Mother

(CWM 14: 189-90)

Section II

Is God a Torturer? — Limitation of Our Vision

God is a great and cruel Torturer because He loves. You do not understand this, because you have not seen and played with Krishna.

Sri Aurobindo: *Thoughts & Aphorisms*

Krishna is the immanent Divine, the Divine Presence in everyone and in all things. He is also, sovereignly, the aspect of Delight and Love of the Supreme; he is the smiling tenderness and the playful gaiety; he is at once the player, the play and all his playmates. And as both the game and its results are wholly known, conceived, willed, organised and played consciously in their entirety, there can be room for nothing but the delight of the play. Thus to see Krishna means to find the inner Godhead, to play with Krishna means to be identified with the inner Godhead and to share in his consciousness. When you achieve this state, you enter immediately into the bliss of the divine play; and the more complete the identification, the more perfect the state.

But if some corner of the consciousness keeps the ordinary perception, the ordinary understanding, the ordinary sensation, then you see the suffering of others, you find the play that causes so much suffering very cruel and you conclude that the God who takes pleasure in such a play must be a terrible Torturer; but on the other hand, when you have had the experience of identification with the Divine, you cannot forget the immense, the wonderful love which he puts into his play, and you understand that it is the limitation of our vision that makes us judge in this way, and that far from being a voluntary Torturer, he is the great beneficent love that guides the world and men, by the

quickest routes, in their progressive march towards perfection, a perfection which, moreover, is always relative and is always being surpassed.

(CWM 10: 51-52) **The Mother**

What One Has to Learn from Blows

It is an experience one can very well have. When, you see, even people who know nothing find themselves in quite difficult circumstances or facing a problem which must be solved or, as I just told you, an impulse which must be overcome or something that has disturbed them... and then they realise they are lost, they don't know what to do — neither their mind nor their will nor their feelings help — they don't know what to do, then it happens; there is within them something like a kind of call, a call to something which can do what one cannot. One aspires to something which is capable of doing what one can't do.

This is the first condition. And then, if you become aware that it is only the Grace which can do that, that the situation in which you find yourself, from there the Grace alone can pull you out, can give you the solution and the strength to come out of it, then, quite naturally an intense aspiration awakes in you, a consciousness which is translated into an opening. If you call, aspire, and if you hope to get an answer, you will quite naturally open yourself to the Grace.

And later — you must pay great attention to this *(Mother puts her finger on her lips)* — the Grace will answer you, the Grace will pull you out of the trouble, the Grace will give you the solution to your problem or will help you to get out of your difficulty. But once you are free from trouble and have come out of your difficulty, don't forget that it is

the Grace which pulled you out, and don't think it is yourself. For this, indeed, is the important point. Most people, as soon as the difficulty has gone, say, "After all, I pulled myself out of the difficulty quite well."

There you are. And then you lock and bolt the door, you see, and you cannot receive anything any more. You need once again some acute anguish, some terrible difficulty for this kind of inner stupidity to give way, and for you to realise once more that you can do nothing. Because it is only when you grow aware that you are powerless that you begin to be just a little open and plastic. But so long as you think that what you do depends on your own skill and your own capacity, truly, not only do you close one door, but, you know, you close lots of doors one upon another, and bolt them. You shut yourself up in a fortress and nothing can enter there. That is the great drawback: one forgets very quickly. Quite naturally one is satisfied with one's own capacity.

Q: But Mother, even when one tries to think that one is powerless, there is something which believes one is powerful. So?

Ah, yes, ah, yes! Ah, it is very difficult to be sincere.... That is why the blows multiply and sometimes become terrible, because that's the only thing which breaks your stupidity. This is the justification of calamities. Only when you are in an acutely painful situation and indeed before something that affects you deeply, then that makes the stupidity melt away a little. But as you say, even when there is something that melts, there is still a little something which remains inside. And that is why it lasts so long...

How many blows are needed in life for one to know to the very depths that one is *nothing*, that one can do *nothing*, that one *does not exist*, that one is *nothing*, that there is no entity without the divine Consciousness and the Grace.

From the moment one knows it, it is over; all the difficulties have gone. When one knows it integrally and there is nothing which resists... but till that moment... And it takes very long.

Q: Why doesn't the blow come all at once?

Because that would kill you. For if the blow is strong enough to cure you, it would simply crush you, it would reduce you to pulp. It is only by proceeding little by little, little by little, very gradually, that you can continue to exist. Naturally this depends on the inner strength, the inner sincerity, and on the capacity for progress, for profiting by experience and, as I said a while ago, on *not forgetting*. If one is lucky enough not to forget, then one goes much faster. One can go very fast. And if at the same time one has that inner moral strength which, when the red-hot iron is at hand, does not extinguish it by trying to pour water over it, but instead goes to the very core of the abscess, then in this case things go very fast also. But not many people are strong enough for this. On the contrary, they very quickly do this *(gesture)*, like this, like this, in order to hide, to hide from themselves. How many pretty little explanations one gives oneself, how many excuses one piles up for all the foolishnesses one has committed.

Q: Does the number of blows depend on people, Sweet Mother?

Yes, it depends on people; it depends, as I said, on their capacity for progress, and on their strength and their resistance. But I know very few people who don't need blows at all.

Q: Mother, is the blow which comes Mahakali's?

The blow? Not necessarily.

If you swallow a poison and are poisoned, it won't be Mahakali's fault. It is you who will have swallowed the poison. If one puts oneself into absolutely ridiculous conditions, one is in a state in which one is bound to break one's head or arm or back; because you are not in a state of true equilibrium, you can't accuse the divine forces. It is the normal mechanical consequence of the stupidity committed, of the inner state.

Q: What is the nature of Mahakali's blow?

It makes you feel very happy. It gives you a sweet warmth in the heart, like that. You feel quite satisfied.

Q: Does one have to aspire for it or does it come naturally?

Yes, one must have a sincerity in the aspiration, really want to progress. One must truly say, "Yes, I want to progress" with sincerity... "Whatever happens, I want to progress." Then it comes.

But as I said, it comes with a power of plenitude which holds an intense joy. When one has taken a decision, has decided to stop something in oneself, just not to repeat a stupidity one has committed, or to do something which one finds impossible or difficult to do and which, one knows, should be done, and when one has taken the decision and has put in the full sincerity of one's will, well, then if a terrible blow comes to compel you to do what you have decided to do, it is a blow, but you feel glorified, you are quite happy, it is magnificent, you see, you feel something magnificent here *(Mother points to the heart).*

There is such a big difference between the mishaps that come to you just because you are in a purely external, mechanical, physical consciousness and in a state of ignorance which makes you commit all possible follies which naturally

bring their consequences, inevitably — there is such a great difference between this and the altogether higher state to which you rise when you have determined to master yourself, to live only in the consciousness of Truth, whatever the cost, no matter what the price of progress, to progress... and the things that happen to you then are so full of meaning, you see so clearly in them that shining truth, that light which illumines you on the path as though you had a beacon, here, to guide you... you see so clearly! It is no longer something that crushes you, like a block of stone falling on your back. It is an overpowering resplendence.

That is why one always says: it is only the first step that needs an effort. The first step means: come out from that level and climb to this one. After that everything, everything changes.

But one must come out completely from that level, one must not remain there, one must not try to keep one foot here and one foot there, for that will not do.

There you are, my children.

*

Q: Sweet Mother, when we are faced with a difficulty, does this mean that the Divine is trying to make us conscious of the defects of our nature?

If you face it, yes. That is, as soon as you are in front of a difficulty, if instead of giving way like a coward you begin trying to conquer it, then you may be sure that the Divine is behind you. But if you are cowardly, the Divine will not be there. That is, your cowardice cuts you off from the Divine. But if you resist and want to conquer, you may be sure that the Divine will be there to help you. There's not the shadow of a doubt about it.

Q: But I want to know — if the difficulty comes — whether the Divine is trying to make us conscious that we have defects?

Whether he deliberately puts difficulties in your path? No. That's not his way.

The Mother

(CWM 6: 322-26, 461)

Sadhu's Recourse to the Bed of Nails

Q: Here you have said: "The sadhu's recourse to the bed of nails or the Christian anchorite's resort to the whip and the hair shirt are the result of a more or less veiled sadistic tendency, unavowed and unavowable; it is an unhealthy seeking or a subconscious need for violent sensations."

Ah! You know there are ascetics who sleep on nails. Have you never seen them? I have seen some photographs myself. This sort of thing is done; they sleep upon a nail-bed. Even quite recently I saw a photograph like that. Well, they do that for... I don't know if it is to prove their saintliness. You know, when they do this in public, one always suspects that it is a bit of histrionics. But still there are those who can do it sincerely, in the sense that they don't do it for display. And so these, if they are asked why they do it, say that it is to prove to themselves that they are detached from the body. And there are others who go still farther: they say that the body must be made to suffer in order to liberate the spirit. Well, if you ask me, I would say that behind this there is a vital taste for suffering which imposes suffering on the body because the vital takes a very perverse pleasure in suffering. I have known children who had hurt them-

selves somewhere or other and who pressed as hard as they could on the injury to make it hurt still more! And they took pleasure in it. I have known grown-ups also. Morally, it is a very well-known fact. I spend my time telling people, "If you are unhappy, it is because you want to be. If you suffer, it is because you like suffering, otherwise you would not suffer." This sort of thing I call unhealthy, for it is against harmony and beauty, it is a kind of morbid need for strong sensations.

I don't know if you know that China is a country where the most frightful tortures have been invented, unthinkable things. When I was in Japan I asked a Japanese, who liked the Chinese very much (which is very rare) and always spoke very highly about China, why this was so. He told me, "It is because all the peoples of the Far East, including the Japanese themselves, have a very blunted sensitivity. They feel very little; unless the suffering is extremely strong, they feel nothing. And so this has compelled them to use their intelligence to invent extremely acute sufferings." Well, all these people who are unconscious, the more unconscious they are, the more tamasic they are; the more blunted their sensibility, the more do they need strong sensations to feel something. And usually this is what makes people cruel, for cruelty gives very strong sensations. That kind of nervous tension obtained through suffering imposed upon somebody, that gives a sensation, and they need it in order to feel; otherwise they feel nothing. And that is why entire races are particularly cruel. They are very unconscious —vitally unconscious. They may not be unconscious mentally or otherwise, but they are unconscious vitally or physically — above all, physically.

The Mother

(CWM 6: 70-71)

Two Categories of Suffering

Q: How can suffering be overcome?

The problem is not as simple as all that. The causes of suffering are innumerable and its quality also varies a great deal, although the origin of suffering is one and the same and comes from the initial action of an anti-divine will. To make this easier to understand, one can divide suffering into two distinct categories, although in practice they are very often mixed.

The first is purely egoistic and comes from a feeling that one's rights have been violated, that one has been deprived of one's needs, offended, despoiled, betrayed, injured, etc. This whole category of suffering is clearly the result of hostile action and it not only opens the door in the consciousness to the influence of the adversary but is also one of his most powerful ways of acting in the world, the most powerful of all if in addition there comes its natural and spontaneous consequence: hatred and the desire for revenge in the strong, despair and the wish to die in the weak.

The other category of suffering, whose initial *cause* is the pain of separation created by the adversary, is totally opposite in nature: it is the suffering that comes from divine compassion, the suffering of love that feels compassion for the world's misery, whatever its origin, cause or effect. But this suffering, which is of a purely psychic character, contains no egoism, no self-pity; it is full of peace and strength and power of action, of faith in the future and the will for victory; it does not pity but consoles, it does not identify itself with the ignorant movement in others but cures and illumines it.

It is obvious that in the purity of its essence, only that

which is *perfectly divine* can feel that suffering; but partially, momentarily, like flashes of lightning behind the dark clouds of egoism, it appears in all who have a vast and generous heart. However, most often, in the individual consciousness it is mixed with that mean and petty self-pity which is the cause of depression and weakness. Nevertheless, when one is vigilant enough to refuse this mixture or at least to reduce it to a minimum, one soon realises that this divine compassion is based on a sublime and eternal joy which alone has the strength and the power to deliver the world from its ignorance and misery.

And this suffering too will disappear from the universe only with the total disappearance of the adversary and all the effects of his action.

*

Q: How can we get rid of abhimana [hurt pride]?

Oh, good heavens! First of all, see how utterly disastrous it is: it is very petty, it is destructive; and then take a step farther and hold yourself up to ridicule, see to what extent you are ludicrous. So, in this way you get rid of it. But so long as you take it seriously, so long as you justify the movement, so long as somewhere in the mind there's the idea, "After all, it is quite natural, I was ill-treated and I suffer from the ill-treatment", then it is finished, it will never go. But if you begin to understand that it is a sign of weakness, of inferiority — naturally, of a very considerable egoism, a narrow-mindedness, and above all of a pettiness of the feelings, a small-heartedness — if you understand that, you can fight it. But your thought should be in agreement. If there is the attitude, "I have been hurt, I am suffering, I am going to show that I am suffering", then it is like that. I am not going

so far as to mention people who nurse a fairly secret spirit of vengeance and say, "I have been made to suffer, I shall make them suffer." This indeed becomes nasty enough for people to notice that it should not exist — though it is not always easy to resist. It indicates something very petty in the nature. It may be very sensitive, it may be very emotional, it may have a certain intensity but it is quite petty, it is all turned back on oneself, and is quite petty.

Of course, you can use your reason, if you have one which works. You can make use of the reason and can tell yourself something which is very true: that in our being it is only egoism which always suffers, and that if there was no egoism there would be no suffering, and that if one wants the spiritual life, one must overcome his egoism. So the first thing to do is to look straight at this suffering, perceive to what an extent it is the expression of a very petty egoism and then sweep the place clean, make a clean ground and say, "I don't want this dirt, I am going to clean my inner chamber."

(CWM 15: 359; 6: 404-05) **The Mother**

My word to you is: Do not cherish suffering and suffering will leave you altogether. Suffering is far from being indispensable to progress. The greatest progress is made through a steady and cheerful equanimity.

(CWM 14: 266) **The Mother**

Physical Suffering — Three Stages of Its Schooling

Pain is the touch of our Mother teaching us how to bear and grow in rapture. She has three stages of her schooling, endurance first, next equality of soul, last ecstasy.

Sri Aurobindo: *Thoughts & Aphorisms*

As far as moral things are concerned, this is absolutely obvious, it is indisputable — all moral suffering moulds your character and leads you straight to ecstasy, when you know how to take it. But when it comes to the body...

It is true that doctors have said that if one can teach the body to bear pain, it becomes more and more resilient and less easily disrupted — this is a concrete result. In the case of people who know how to avoid getting completely upset as soon as they have a pain somewhere, who are able to bear it quietly, to keep their balance, it seems that the body's capacity to bear the disorder without going to pieces increases. This is a great achievement. I have asked myself this question from the purely practical, external standpoint and it seems to be like this. Inwardly, I have been told this many times — told and shown by small experiences — that the body can bear much more than we think, if no fear or anxiety is added to the pain. If we eliminate the mental factor, the body, left to itself, has neither fear nor apprehension nor anxiety about what is going to happen — no anguish— and it can bear a great deal.

The second step is when the body has decided to bear it — you see, it takes the decision to bear it: immediately, the acuteness, what is acute in the pain disappears. I am speaking absolutely materially.

And if you are calm — here, another factor comes in, the need for inner calm — if you have the inner calm, then

the pain changes into an almost pleasant sensation — not "pleasant" in the ordinary sense, but an almost comfortable feeling comes. Again, I am speaking purely physically, materially.

And the last stage, when the cells have faith in the divine Presence and in the sovereign divine Will, when they have this trust that all is for the good, then ecstasy comes — the cells open, like this, become luminous and ecstatic. ...

*

Physical sufferings? One thing is certain, you know; I think this was in the system, in the nature, that it was invented as an indicator; because, for example, if the body was disorganised in some way or other and this caused no suffering at all, one would never look for a way to stop the disorganisation. One thinks of curing an illness only because one suffers. If it caused you no unpleasantness, you would never think of being cured of it. So, in the economy of Nature I think that the first purpose of physical suffering was to give you a warning.

Unfortunately, there is the vital which pokes its nose into the affair and takes a very perverse pleasure in increasing, twisting, sharpening the suffering. Now this deforms the whole system because instead of being an indicator, sometimes it becomes an occasion for enjoying the illness, for making oneself interesting, and also having the opportunity to pity oneself — all kinds of things which all come from the vital and are all detestable, one more than another. But originally I think that it was this: "Take care!" You see, it's like a danger-signal: "Take care, there's something out of order."

The Mother

(CWM 10: 170-71; 6: 406)

Section III

A Message to Rekindle Hope In the Hearts of Those Who Suffer

Before I close, I shall add a few pages for those who have already made apparently fruitless efforts, for those who have encountered the pitfalls on the way and seen the measure of their weakness, for those who are in danger of losing their self-confidence and courage. These pages, intended to rekindle hope in the hearts of those who suffer, were written by a spiritual worker at a time when ordeals of every kind were sweeping down on him like purifying flames.

You who are weary, downcast and bruised, you who fall, who think perhaps that you are defeated, hear the voice of a friend. He knows your sorrows, he has shared them, he has suffered like you from the ills of the earth; like you he has crossed many deserts under the burden of the day, he has known thirst and hunger, solitude and abandonment, and the cruellest of all wants, the destitution of the heart. Alas! he has known too the hours of doubt, the errors, the faults, the failings, every weakness.

But he tells you: Courage! Hearken to the lesson that the rising sun brings to the earth with its first rays each morning. It is a lesson of hope, a message of solace.

You who weep, who suffer and tremble, who dare not expect an end to your ills, an issue to your pangs, behold: there is no night without dawn and the day is about to break when darkness is thickest; there is no mist that the sun does not dispel, no cloud that it does not gild, no tear that it will

not dry one day, no storm that is not followed by its shining triumphant bow; there is no snow that it does not melt, nor winter that it does not change into radiant spring.

And for you too, there is no affliction which does not bring its measure of glory, no distress which cannot be transformed into joy, nor defeat into victory, nor downfall into higher ascension, nor solitude into radiating centre of life, nor discord into harmony — sometimes it is a misunderstanding between two minds that compels two hearts to open to mutual communion; lastly, there is no infinite weakness that cannot be changed into strength. And it is even in supreme weakness that almightiness chooses to reveal itself!

Listen, my little child, you who today feel so broken, so fallen perhaps, who have nothing left, nothing to cover your misery and foster your pride: never before have you been so great! How close to the summits is he who awakens in the depths, for the deeper the abyss, the more the heights reveal themselves!

Do you not know this, that the most sublime forces of the vasts seek to array themselves in the most opaque veils of Matter? Oh, the sublime nuptials of sovereign love with the obscurest plasticities, of the shadow's yearning with the most royal light!

If ordeal or fault has cast you down, if you have sunk into the nether depths of suffering, do not grieve — for there indeed the divine love and the supreme blessing can reach you! Because you have passed through the crucible of purifying sorrows, the glorious ascents are yours.

You are in the wilderness: then listen to the voices of the silence. The clamour of flattering words and outer applause has gladdened your ears, but the voices of the silence will gladden your soul and awaken within you the echo of the depths, the chant of divine harmonies!

You are walking in the depths of night: then gather the priceless treasures of the night. In bright sunshine, the ways of intelligence are lit, but in the white luminosities of the night lie the hidden paths of perfection, the secret of spiritual riches.

You are being stripped of everything: that is the way towards plenitude. When you have nothing left, everything will be given to you. Because for those who are sincere and true, from the worst always comes the best.

Every grain that is sown in the earth produces a thousand. Every wing-beat of sorrow can be a soaring towards glory.

And when the adversary pursues man relentlessly, everything he does to destroy him only makes him greater.

Hear the story of the worlds, look: the great enemy seems to triumph. He casts the beings of light into the night, and the night is filled with stars. He rages against the cosmic working, he assails the integrity of the empire of the sphere, shatters its harmony, divides and subdivides it, scatters its dust to the four winds of infinity, and lo! the dust is changed into a golden seed, fertilising the infinite and peopling it with worlds which now gravitate around their eternal centre in the larger orbit of space — so that even di-

vision creates a richer and deeper unity, and by multiplying the surfaces of the material universe, enlarges the empire that it set out to destroy.

Beautiful indeed was the song of the primordial sphere cradled in the bosom of immensity, but how much more beautiful and triumphant is the symphony of the constellations, the music of the spheres, the immense choir that fills the heavens with an eternal hymn of victory!

Hear again: no state was ever more precarious than that of man when he was separated on earth from his divine origin. Above him stretched the hostile borders of the usurper, and at his horizon's gates watched jailers armed with flaming swords. Then, since he could climb no more to the source of life, the source arose within him; since he could no more receive the light from above, the light shone forth at the very centre of his being; since he could commune no more with the transcendent love, that love offered itself in a holocaust and chose each terrestrial being, each human self as its dwelling-place and sanctuary.

That is how, in this despised and desolate but fruitful and blessed Matter, each atom contains a divine thought, each being carries within him the Divine Inhabitant. And if no being in all the universe is as frail as man, neither is any as divine as he!

In truth, in truth, in humiliation lies the cradle of glory!

The Mother

(CWM 2: 41-44)





If at Any Time a Deep Sorrow Overwhelms You

If at any time a deep sorrow, a searing doubt or an intense pain overwhelms you and drives you to despair, there is an infallible way to regain calm and peace.

In the depths of our being there shines a light whose brilliance is equalled only by its purity; a light, a living and conscious portion of a universal godhead who animates and nourishes and illumines Matter, a powerful and unfailing guide for those who are willing to heed his law, a helper full of solace and loving forbearance towards all who aspire to see and hear and obey him. No sincere and lasting aspiration towards him can be in vain; no strong and respectful trust can be disappointed, no expectation ever deceived. ... ...

Suffering is not something inevitable or even desirable, but when it comes to us, how helpful it can be!

Each time we feel that our heart is breaking, a deeper door opens within us, revealing new horizons, ever richer in hidden treasures, whose golden influx brings once more a new and intenser life to the organism on the brink of destruction.

And when, by these successive descents, we reach the veil that reveals thee as it is lifted, O Lord, who can describe the intensity of Life that penetrates the whole being, the radiance of the Light that floods it, the sublimity of the Love that transforms it for ever!

(CWM 2: 19-20)

The Mother

Thoughts and Aphorisms

25. When I pine at misfortune and call it evil, or am jealous and disappointed, then I know that there is awake in me again the eternal fool.

35. O Misfortune, blessed be thou; for through thee I have seen the face of my Lover.

135. All disease is a means towards some new joy of health, all evil & pain a tuning of Nature for some more intense bliss & good, all death an opening on widest immortality. Why and how this should be so, is God's secret which only the soul purified of egoism can penetrate.

522. God drives us out [of] every Eden that we may be forced to travel through the desert to a diviner Paradise. If thou wonder why should that parched & fierce transit be necessary, then art thou befooled by thy mind and hast not studied thy soul behind and its dim desires and secret raptures.

501. Yet, O soul of man, seek not after pain, for that is not His will, seek after His joy only; as for suffering, it will come to thee surely in His providence as often and as much as is needed for thee. Then bear it that thou mayst find out at last its heart of rapture.

470. This I have seen that whatever God has withheld from me, He withheld in His love & wisdom. Had I grasped it then, I would have turned some great good into a great poison. Yet sometimes when we insist, He gives us poison to drink that we may learn to turn from it and taste with

knowledge His ambrosia & His nectar.

137. There is no iron or ineffugable law that a given contact shall create pain or pleasure; it is the way the soul meets the rush or pressure of Brahman upon the members from outside them that determines either reaction.

138. The force of soul in thee meeting the same force from outside cannot harmonise the measures of the contact in values of mind-experience & body-experience, therefore thou hast pain, grief or uneasiness. If thou canst learn to adjust the replies of the force in thyself to the questions of world-force, thou shalt find pain becoming pleasurable or turning into pure delightfulness. Right relation is the condition of blissfulness, ritam the key of ananda.

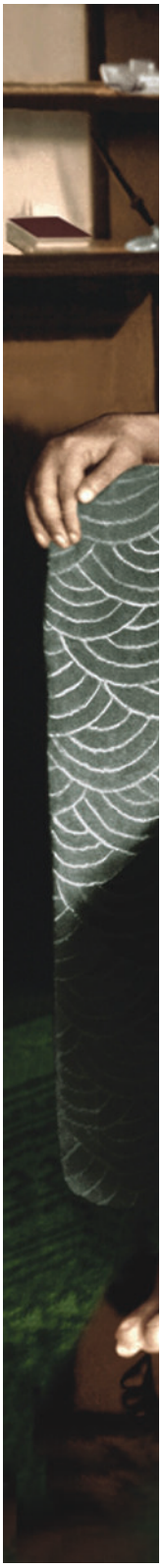
177. The perfect cosmic vision & cosmic sentiment is the cure of all error & suffering; but most men succeed only in enlarging the range of their ego.

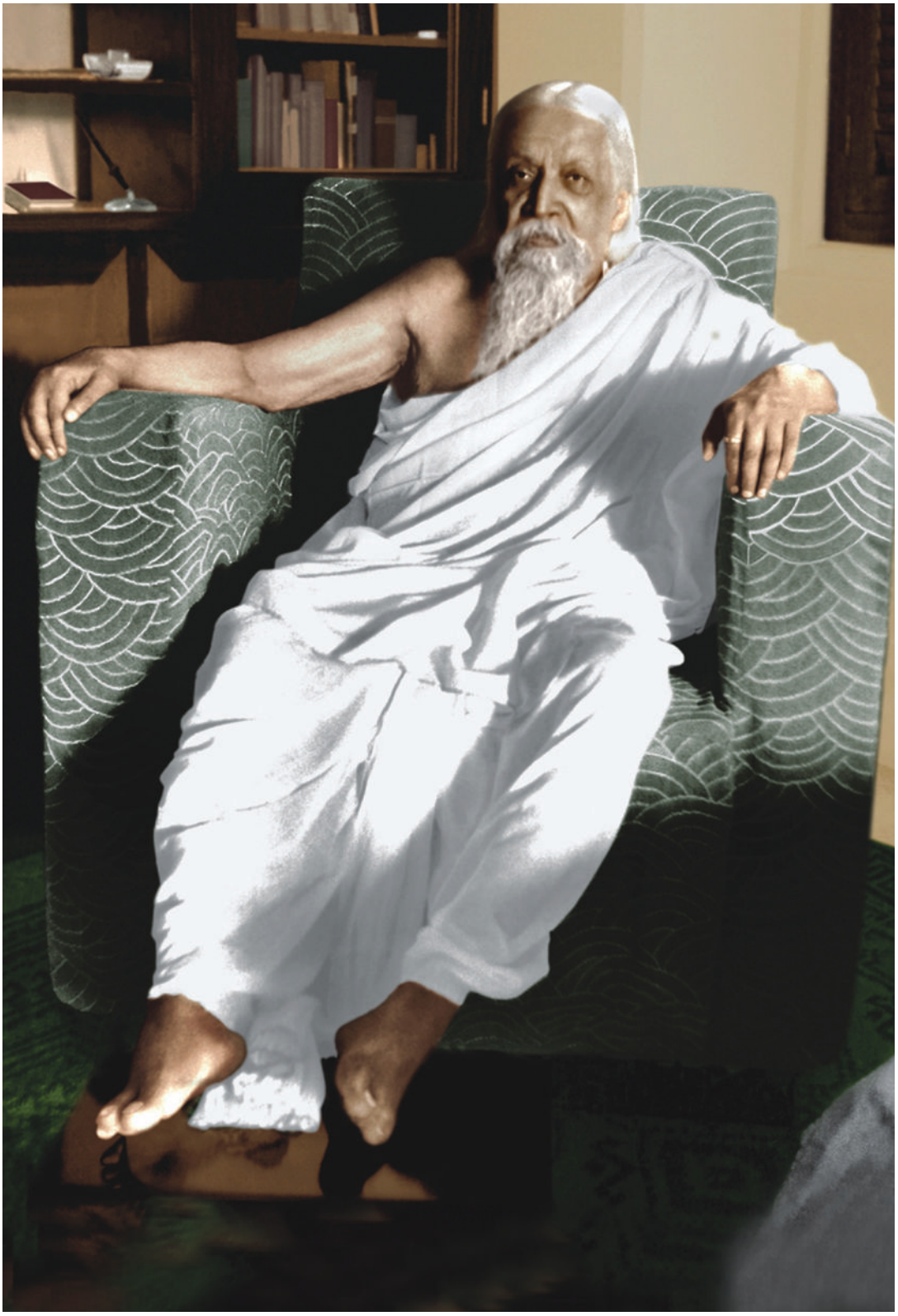
285. Think this when thy members would fain make love with depression and weakness, "I am Bacchus and Ares and Apollo; I am Agni pure and invincible; I am Surya ever burning mightily."

278. O soldier and hero of God, where for thee is sorrow or shame or suffering? For thy life is a glory, thy deeds a consecration, victory thy apotheosis, defeat thy triumph.

Sri Aurobindo

(CWSA 12: 426-96)





Excerpts from "Savitri"

Thy mind's light hides from thee the Eternal's thought,
Thy heart's hopes hide from thee the Eternal's will,
Earth's joys shut from thee the Immortal's bliss.
Thence rose the need of a dark intruding god,
The world's dread teacher, the creator, pain.
Where Ignorance is, there suffering too must come ...

*

A dark concealed hostility is lodged
In the human depths, in the hidden heart of Time
That claims the right to change and mar God's work.
A secret enmity ambushes the world's march;
It leaves a mark on thought and speech and act:
It stamps stain and defect on all things done;
Till it is slain peace is forbidden on earth.

*

A whisper lures to evil the human heart,
It seals up wisdom's eyes, the soul's regard,
It is the origin of our suffering here,
It binds earth to calamity and pain.

*

O mortal, bear this great world's law of pain,
In thy hard passage through a suffering world
Lean for thy soul's support on Heaven's strength,
Turn towards high Truth, aspire to love and peace.
A little bliss is lent thee from above,
A touch divine upon thy human days.
Make of thy daily way a pilgrimage,
For through small joys and griefs thou mov'st towards God.

(*Savitri*, pp. 443, 447, 448, 451)

Sri Aurobindo

Words of the Mother

All depends on the use that's made of things. Each thing in the world has its place, its work, a real use; and if used for something else it creates a disorder, confusion, chaos. And that's because in the world as it is, very few things are utilised for their true work, very few things are really in their place, and it is because the world is in a frightful chaos that there is all this misery and suffering. If each thing was in its place, in a harmonious balance, the whole world could progress without needing to be in the state of misery and suffering in which it is. There!

So there is nothing that's bad in itself, but there are many things — almost all — which are not in their place.

Perhaps in the body also it is like that. There is nothing that's bad in itself; but many things are not in their place, and that is why one becomes ill. There is created an inner disharmony. So the result is that one is ill. And people always think that it is not their fault that they are ill, and it is always their fault, and they are very angry when they are told this. "You have no pity." And yet it is true.

(CWM 7: 56) **The Mother**

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