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*Religion and Spirituality*

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# *Religion and Spirituality*

*Matter shall reveal the Spirit's face. — Sri Aurobindo*

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*Editorial note: Religion and Spirituality are two distinct approaches man has undertaken towards That which is beyond his normal sphere of reckoning and experience. Much confusion however exists in our understanding of these two different, even if interlacing aspects of higher human activity. The reason for this confusion is understandable when we see that most religions owe their birth to some spiritual revelation, however limited in its scope and understanding. With passage of time the whole thing turns into a rigid and fixed belief system. A narrow skeletal of common enforced rituals or a body of soulless tradition remains of what once might have been a living and conscious approach towards the Eternal and True. Thus seen it becomes a bar to man's advancing soul ever in quest of higher and higher truths. It is however equally true that some can revive this dead skeleton with its flesh and blood of Scriptures by breathing into it the life-giving spirit of their faith and aspiration. Seen thus Religion can become, for the fortunate few, a step towards spirituality. This issue focuses on a deeper understanding of Religion and Spirituality, their differences, limitations and the common thread of an evolving human aspiration that runs through both.*



You must not confuse a religious teaching with a spiritual one.

Religious teaching belongs to the past and halts progress. Spiritual teaching is the teaching of the future — it illumines the consciousness and prepares it for future realisation.

Spiritual teaching is above religions and strives towards a global Truth.

It teaches us to enter into direct relation with the Divine.

*CWM 12:120*

The Mother

## Religious Life

### Nature and formation of Religion

Religion belongs to the higher mind of humanity. It is the effort of man's higher mind to approach, as far as lies in its power, something beyond it, something to which humanity gives the name God or Spirit or Truth or Faith or Knowledge or the Infinite, some kind of Absolute, which the human mind cannot reach and yet tries to reach. Religion may be divine in its ultimate origin; in its actual nature it is not divine but human. In truth we should speak rather of religions than of religion; for the religions made by man are many. ... All religions have each the same story to tell. The occasion for its birth is the coming of a great Teacher of the world. He comes and reveals and is the incarnation of a Divine Truth. But men seize upon it, trade upon it, make an almost political organisation out of it. The religion is equipped by them with a government and policy and laws, with its creeds and dogmas, its rules and regulations, its rites and ceremonies, all binding upon its adherents, all absolute and inviolable. Like the State, it too administers rewards to the loyal and assigns punishments for those that revolt or go astray, for the heretic and the renegade.

The first and principal article of these established and formal religions runs always, "Mine is the supreme, the only truth, all others are in falsehood or inferior." For without this fundamental dogma, established credal religions could not have existed. If you do not believe and proclaim that you alone possess the one or the highest truth, you will not be able to impress people and make them flock to you.

CWM 3: 76-77

## **The articles and dogmas of a religion**

The articles and dogmas of a religion are mind-made things and, if you cling to them and shut yourself up in a code of life made out for you, you do not know and cannot know the truth of the Spirit that lies beyond all codes and dogmas, wide and large and free. When you stop at a religious creed and tie yourself in it, taking it for the only truth in the world, you stop the advance and widening of your inner soul. But if you look at religion from another angle, it need not always be an obstacle to all men. If you regard it as one of the higher activities of humanity and if you can see in it the aspirations of man without ignoring the imperfection of all man-made things, it may well be a kind of help for you to approach the spiritual life. Taking it up in a serious and earnest spirit, you can try to find out what truth is there, what aspiration lies hidden in it, what divine inspiration has undergone transformation and deformation here by the human mind and a human organisation, and with an appropriate mental stand you can get religion even as it is to throw some light on your way and to lend some support to your spiritual endeavour.

In all religions we find invariably a certain number of people who possess a great emotional capacity and are full of a real and ardent aspiration, but have a very simple mind and do not feel the need of approaching the Divine through knowledge. For such natures religion has a use and it is even necessary for them; for, through external forms, like the ceremonies of the Church, it offers a kind of support and help to their inner spiritual aspiration. In every religion there are some who have evolved a high spiritual life. But it is not the religion that gave them their spirituality; it is they who have put their spirituality into the religion. Put anywhere else, born into any other cult, they would have

found there and lived there the same spiritual life. It is their own capacity, it is some power of their inner being and not the religion they profess that has made them what they are.

CWM 3: 78

### **Discovering one's religion**

If you want to appraise the real value of the religion in which you are born or brought up or to have a correct perspective of the country or society to which you belong by birth, if you want to find out how relative a thing the particular environment is into which you happened to be thrown and confined, you have only to go round the earth and see that what you think good is looked upon as bad elsewhere and what is considered as bad in one place is welcomed as good in another. All countries and all religions are built up out of a mass of traditions. In all of them you will meet saints and heroes and great and mighty personalities as well as small and wicked people. You will then perceive what a mockery it is to say, "Because I am brought up in this religion, therefore it is the only true religion; because I am born in this country, therefore it is the best of all countries." One might as well make the same claim for his family, "Because I come of this family that has lived in the same place for so many years or so many centuries, therefore I am bound by its traditions; they alone are the ideal."

Things have an inner value and become real to you only when you have acquired them by the exercise of your free choice, not when they have been imposed upon you. If you want to be sure of your religion, you must choose it; if you want to be sure of your country, you must choose it; if you want to be sure of your family, even that you must choose. If you accept without question what has been given you by

Chance, you can never be sure whether it is good or bad for you, whether it is the true thing for your life. Step back from all that forms your natural environment or inheritance, made up and forced upon you by Nature's blind mechanical process; draw within and look quietly and dispassionately at things. Appraise them, choose freely. Then you can say with an inner truth, "This is my family, this my country, this my religion."

CWM 3: 80-81

### **Religion cannot be imposed**

All your relations must be newly built upon an inner freedom of choice. The traditions in which you live or are brought up have been imposed on you by the pressure of the environment or by the general mind or by the choice of others. There is an element of compulsion in your acquiescence. Religion itself has been imposed on men; it is often supported by a suggestion of religious fear or by some spiritual or other menace. There can be no such imposition in your relation with the Divine; it must be free, your own mind's and heart's choice, taken up with enthusiasm and joy. What union can that be in which one trembles and says, "I am compelled, I cannot do otherwise"? Truth is self-evident and has not to be imposed upon the world. It does not feel the need of being accepted by men. For it is self-existent; it does not live by what people say of it or on their adherence. But one who is founding a religion needs to have many followers. The strength and greatness of a religion is adjudged by men according to the number of those that follow it, although the real greatness is not there. The greatness of spiritual truth is not in numbers. I knew the head of a new religion, the son of its founder, and heard him say once that such and such a religion took so many hundreds



of years to be built up, and such another so many hundreds of years, but they within fifty years had already over four million followers. "And so you see", he added, "what a great religion is ours!" Religions may reckon their greatness by the number of their believers, but Truth would still be Truth if it had not even a single follower.

CWM 3: 82-83

**The Mother**

### **Religious places and vital beings**

In all religious monuments, in monuments considered the most... well, as belonging to the highest religion, whether in France or any other country or Japan — it was never the same temples or churches nor the same gods, and yet my experience was everywhere almost the same, with very small differences — I saw that whatever concentrated force there was in the church depended exclusively upon the faithful, the faith of the devotees. And there was still a difference between the force as it really was and the force as they felt it. For instance, I saw in one of the most beautiful cathedrals of France, which, from the artistic point of view, is one of the most magnificent monuments imaginable — in the most sacred spot I saw an *enormous* black, vital spider which had made its web and spread it over the whole place, and was catching in it and then absorbing all the forces emanating from people's devotion, their prayers and all that. It was not a very cheering sight; the people who were there and were praying, felt a divine touch, they received all kinds of boons from their prayers, and yet what was there was this, this thing. But they had their faith which could change that evil thing into something good in them; they had their faith. So, truly, if I had gone and told them, "Do you think you are praying to God? It is an enormous vital spider that's feeding upon all your forces!", that would

really not have been very charitable. And that's how it is most of the time, almost everywhere; it is a vital force which is there, for these vital entities feed upon the vibration of human emotions, and very few people, very few, an insignificant number, go to church or temple with a true religious feeling, that is, not to pray and beg for something from God but to offer themselves, give thanks, aspire, give themselves. There is hardly one in a million who does that. So they do not have the power of changing the atmosphere. Perhaps when they are there, they manage to get across, break through and go somewhere and touch something divine. But the large majority of people who go only because of superstition, egoism and self-interest, create an atmosphere of this kind, and that is what you breathe in when you go to a church or temple. Only, as you go there with a very good feeling, you tell yourself, "Oh, what a quiet place for meditation!"

CWM 6: 194-95

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### **Worship and Religious life**

The kind of worship (*pūjā*) spoken of in the letter belongs to the religious life. It can, if rightly done in the deepest religious spirit, prepare the mind and heart to some extent but no more. But if worship is done as part of meditation or with a true aspiration to the spiritual reality and the spiritual consciousness and with the yearning for contact and union with the Divine, then it can be spiritually effective.

If you have a sincere aspiration to the spiritual change in your heart and soul, then you will find the way and the Guide. A mere mental seeking and questioning are not enough to open the doors of the Spirit.

CWSA 28: 420

**Sri Aurobindo**

## Reason and Religion

If you want to judge any religion with your reason, you are sure to make mistakes, for it is outside and beyond the field of reason. Reason can judge things which belong to the rational domain of ordinary life. And as he says later, the true role of reason is to be like a control and an organiser of the movements of human life in the mind and the vital.

Each time, for example, that one has some kind of vital disorder, of the passions, desires, impulses and all these things, if one calls the reason and looks at these things from the point of view of reason, one can put them back into order. It is truly the role of reason to organise and regulate all the movements of the vital and the mind. ...

But in order to know the value of a religion, whether it truly has the power to put you into contact with the Divine, with the spiritual life, to lead you to it, how can the reason judge, since it is beyond its domain? It knows nothing about it. It is not its field, it understands nothing there. We must use other means.

CWM 7: 166-67

## Necessity of Religion in ordinary life

*Sweet Mother, is religion a necessity in the life of the ordinary man?*

In the life of societies it is a necessity, for it serves as a corrective to collective egoism which, without this control, could take on excessive proportions.

The level of collective consciousness is always lower than the individual level. It is very noticeable, for example, that when men gather in a group or collect in great numbers, the level of consciousness falls a great deal. The consciousness of crowds is much lower than individual

consciousness, and the collective consciousness of society is certainly lower than the consciousness of the individuals constituting it. There it is a necessity. In ordinary life, an individual, whether he knows it or not, always has a religion but the object of his religion is sometimes of a very inferior kind.... The god he worships may be the god of success or the god of money or the god of power, or simply a family god: the god of children, the god of the family, the god of the ancestors. There is always a religion. The quality of the religion is very different according to the individual, but it is difficult for a human being to live and to go on living, to survive in life without having something like a rudiment of an ideal which serves as the *centre* for his existence. Most of the time he doesn't know it and if he were asked what his ideal is, he would be unable to formulate it; but he has one, vaguely, something that seems to him the most precious thing in life.

CWM 9: 354-55

### **Socio-political ideologies and Religion**

Every political or social idea is a sort of lower expression of an ideal which is a rudimentary religion. As soon as there is a faculty of thought, there is necessarily an aspiration for something higher than the most brutal daily existence from minute to minute, and this is what gives the energy and possibility of living.

Of course, one could say that it is the same thing for individuals as for collectivities, that their value is exactly proportionate to the value of their ideal, their religion, that is, of the thing they make the summit of their existence.

Of course, when we speak of religion, if we mean the recognised religions, truly, everyone has his own religion, whether he knows it or not, even when he belongs to the

great religions that have a name and a history. It is certain that even if one learns the dogmas by heart and complies with a prescribed ritual, everybody understands and acts in his own way, and only the name of the religion is the same, but this same religion is not the same for all the individuals who think they are practising it.

We can say that without some expression of this aspiration for the Unknown and the highest, human existence would be very difficult. If there were not at the heart of every being the hope of something better — of whatever kind — he would have difficulty in finding the energy needed to go on living.

But as very few individuals are capable of thinking freely, it is much easier to join a religion, accept it, adopt it and become a part of that religious collectivity than to formulate one's own cult for oneself. So, apparently, one is this or that, but in fact it is only an appearance.

CWM 9: 355-56

### **The error of Religions**

Probably no two ways are identical, everyone must find his own. But one must not be mistaken, it is not "finding" by reasoning, it is "finding" by aspiration; it is not by study and analysis, but by the intensity of the aspiration and the sincerity of the inner opening.

When one is truly and exclusively turned to the spiritual Truth, whatever name may be given to it, when all the rest becomes secondary, when that alone is imperative and inevitable, then, *one single moment* of intense, absolute, total concentration is enough to receive the answer.

The experience comes first, in this case, and it is only later, as a consequence and a memory that the formulation becomes clear. In this way one is sure not to make a mistake.

The formulation may be more or less exact, that is of no importance, so long as one doesn't make a dogma out of it.

It is good for you, that is all that is needed. If you want to impose it on others, whatever it may be, even if it is perfect in itself, it becomes false.

That is why religions are always mistaken — always — because they want to standardise the expression of an experience and impose it on everyone as an irrefutable truth. The experience was true, complete in itself, convincing — for the one who had it. The formulation he made of it was excellent — for himself. But to want to impose it on others is a fundamental error which has altogether disastrous consequences, always, which always leads far, very far from the Truth.

That is why all the religions, however beautiful they may be, have always led man to the worst excesses. All the crimes, the horrors perpetrated in the name of religion are among the darkest stains on human history, and simply because of this little initial error: wanting what is true for one individual to be true for the mass or collectivity.

The path must be shown and the doors opened but everyone must *follow* the path, pass through the doors and go towards his personal realisation.

The only help one can and should receive is that of the Grace which formulates itself in everyone according to his own need.

CWM 9: 406-07

### **The dogmas of sects and intolerance of religions**

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

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

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

CWM 10: 20-21

**The Mother**

*All religions have saved a number of souls, but none yet has been able to spiritualise mankind. For that there is needed not cult and creed, but a sustained and all-comprehending effort at spiritual self-evolution.*

CWSA 13: 211

*Sri Aurobindo*

## **All fanaticism is false**

All fanaticism is false, because it is a contradiction of the very nature of God and of Truth. Truth cannot be shut up in a single book, Bible or Veda or Koran, or in a single religion. The Divine Being is eternal and universal and infinite and cannot be the sole property of the Mussulmans or of the Semitic religions only, — those that happened to be in a line from the Bible and to have Jewish or Arabian prophets for their founders. Hindus and Confucians and Taoists and all others have as much right to enter into relation with God and find the Truth in their own way. All religions have some truth in them, but none has the whole truth; all are created in time and finally decline and perish. Mahomed himself never pretended that the Koran was the last message of God and there would be no other. God and Truth outlast these religions and manifest themselves a new in whatever way or form the Divine Wisdom chooses. You cannot shut up God in the limitations of your own narrow brain or dictate to the Divine Power and Consciousness how or where or through whom it shall manifest; you cannot put up your puny barriers against the divine Omnipotence. ...

... I am here to establish the divine life and the divine Consciousness in those who of themselves feel the call to come to me and cleave to it and in no others. I am not asking you and the Mother is not asking you to accept us. You can go any day to Hyderabad and live either the worldly life or a religious life according to your own preference. But as you are free so also are others free to stay here and follow their own way.

CWSA 32: 109-11

**Sri Aurobindo**





Religion has been an impulse to the worst things and the best; if the fiercest wars have been waged and the most hideous persecutions carried on in its name, it has stimulated too supreme heroism and self-sacrifice in its cause. Along with philosophy it marks the limit the human mind has reached in its highest activities. It is an impediment and a chain if you are a slave to its outer body; if you know how to use its inner substance, it can be your jumping-board into the realm of the Spirit.

CWM 3 : 179

So long as religions exist, atheism will be indispensable to counter-balance them. Both must disappear to make way for a sincere and disinterested search for Truth and a total consecration to the object of this search.

CWM 10: 284

The Mother



Spiritual experience means the contact with the Divine in oneself (or without, which comes to the same thing in that domain). And it is an experience identical everywhere in all countries, among all peoples and even in all ages. If you meet the Divine, you meet it always and everywhere in the same way. Difference comes in because between the experience and its formulation there is almost an abyss. Directly you have spiritual experience, which takes place always in the inner consciousness, it is translated into your external consciousness and defined there in one way or another according to your education, your faith, your mental predisposition. There is only one truth, one reality; but the forms through which it may be expressed are many.

*CWM 3: 17*

Here we do not have religion. We replace religion by the spiritual life, which is truer, deeper and higher at the same time, that is to say, closer to the Divine. For the Divine is in everything, but we are not conscious of it. This is the immense progress that man must make.

*CWM 13:110*

**The Mother**



## Spiritual Life

### Spiritual Life and the Ordinary Life

The spiritual life (*adhyātma jīvana*), the religious life (*dharma jīvana*) and the ordinary human life of which morality is a part are three quite different things and one must know which one desires and not confuse the three together. The ordinary life is that of the average human consciousness separated from its own true self and from the Divine and led by the common habits of the mind, life and body which are the laws of the Ignorance. The religious life is a movement of the same ignorant human consciousness, turning or trying to turn away from the earth towards the Divine but as yet without knowledge and led by the dogmatic tenets and rules of some sect or creed which claims to have found the way out of the bonds of the earth-consciousness into some beatific Beyond. The religious life may be the first approach to the spiritual, but very often it is only a turning about in a round of rites, ceremonies and practices or set ideas and forms without any issue. The spiritual life, on the contrary, proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its true self and from God, to a greater consciousness in which one finds one's true being and comes first into direct and living contact and then into union with the Divine. For the spiritual seeker this change of consciousness is the one thing he seeks and nothing else matters.

Morality is a part of the ordinary life; it is an attempt to govern the outward conduct by certain mental rules or to form the character by these rules in the image of a certain mental ideal. The spiritual life goes beyond the mind; it enters into the deeper consciousness of the Spirit and acts out of the truth of the Spirit. As for the question about the

ethical life and the need to realise God, it depends on what is meant by fulfilment of the objects of life. If an entry into the spiritual consciousness is part of it, then mere morality will not give it to you.

*CWSA 28: 419-20*

### **Spiritual life and Miracles**

It is on this demand that most religions are established and, for reasons which I may very frankly call “political”, they have put at the origin of their religion a more or less considerable number of miracles as having been performed by the founders, and they have thus more or less crudely encouraged among ignorant people the taste, the necessity for seeing what they call “miracles” in order to believe in the divine power of a person. This is an extraordinary ignorance, because it is not at all necessary to have a divine power or consciousness to perform miracles. It is infinitely more easy to perform miracles with the help of small entities of the vital world who are material enough to be in touch with the physical world and act upon it, than to live in the consciousness of the higher regions and to work upon Nature only through the intermediary of all the other domains. It has been repeated over and over again to all human intellects that the proof of a being’s divinity is that he can raise the dead, cure maladies, and do many other things of the same kind. Well, I guarantee that this is not a proof; it proves only one thing, that these “Masters” are in contact with the powers of the vital world and that with the help of those beings they can perform these miracles, that’s all.

*CWM 4: 82-83*

## Spiritual life and Meditation

The number of hours spent in meditation is no proof of spiritual progress. It is a proof of your progress when you no longer have to make an effort to meditate. Then you have rather to make an effort to stop meditating: it becomes difficult to stop meditation, difficult to stop thinking of the Divine, difficult to come down to the ordinary consciousness. Then you are sure of progress, then you have made real progress when concentration in the Divine is the necessity of your life, when you cannot do without it, when it continues naturally from morning to night whatever you may be engaged in doing. Whether you sit down to meditation or go about and do things and work, what is required of you is consciousness; that is the one need, — to be constantly conscious of the Divine.

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What we are seeking is to be concentrated on the Divine in all that we do, at all times, in all our acts and in every movement. There are some here who have been told to meditate; but also there are others who have not been asked to do any meditation at all. But it must not be thought that they are not progressing. They too follow a discipline, but it is of another nature. To work, to act with devotion and an inner consecration is also a spiritual discipline. The final aim is to be in constant union with the Divine, not only in meditation but in all circumstances and in all the active life.

There are some who, when they are sitting in meditation, get into a state which they think very fine and delightful. They sit self-complacent in it and forget the world; but if they are disturbed, they come out of it angry and restless, because their meditation was interrupted. This is not a sign of spiritual progress or discipline. There are some people who act and seem to feel as if their meditation were a debt

they have to pay to the Divine; they are like men who go to church once a week and think they have paid what they owe to God.

If you need to make an effort to go into meditation, you are still very far from being able to live the spiritual life. When it takes an effort to come out of it, then indeed your meditation can be an indication that you are in the spiritual life.

CWM 3: 20-21

### **Spiritual disciplines and Spirituality**

There are disciplines such as Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga that one can practise and yet have nothing to do with the spiritual life; the former arrives mostly at body control, the latter at mind control. But to enter the spiritual life means to take a plunge into the Divine, as you would jump into the sea. And that is not the end but the very beginning; for after you have taken the plunge, you must learn to live in the Divine. How are you to do it? You have simply to jump straight in and not to think, "Where shall I fall? What will happen to me?" It is the hesitation of your mind that prevents you. You must simply let yourself go. If you wish to dive into the sea and are thinking all the time, "Ah, but there may be a stone here or a stone there", you cannot dive....

Of course, you must have had some glimpse of the Divine Reality, as you must see the sea and know something of it before you can jump into it. That glimpse is usually the awakening of the psychic consciousness. But some realisation you must have — a strong mental or vital, if not a deep psychic or integral contact. You must have felt strongly the Divine Presence in or about you; you must have felt the breath of the Divine world. And you must have felt too as a suffocating pressure the opposite breath of the ordinary

world, drawing you to an endeavour to come out of that oppressive atmosphere. If you have that, then you have only to seek refuge unreservedly in the Divine Reality and live in its help and protection, in it alone. What you may have done in the course of your ordinary life only partially or in some parts of your being or at times and on occasions, you must do completely and for good. That is the plunge you have to take, and unless you do it, you may do Yoga for years and yet know nothing of a true spiritual living. Take the whole and entire plunge and you will be free from this outer confusion and get the true experience of the spiritual life.

CWM 3: 21-22

### **Spirituality and Asceticism**

An attachment to a rule of the mind is an indication of a blindness still hiding somewhere. Take, for example, the very universal superstition, prevalent all over the world, that asceticism and spirituality are one and the same thing. If you describe someone as a spiritual man or a spiritual woman, people at once think of one who does not eat or sits all day without moving, one who lives in a hut in great poverty, one who has given away all he had and keeps nothing for himself. This is the picture that immediately arises in the minds of ninety nine people out of a hundred, when you speak of a spiritual man; the one proof of spirituality for them is poverty and abstinence from everything that is pleasant or comfortable. This is a mental construction which must be thrown down if you are to be free to see and follow the spiritual truth. For you come to the spiritual life with a sincere aspiration and you want to meet the Divine and realise the Divine in your consciousness and in your life; and then what happens is that you arrive in a

place which is not at all a hut and meet a Divine One who is living a comfortable life, eating freely, surrounded by beautiful or luxurious things, not distributing what he has to the poor, but accepting and enjoying all that people give him. At once with your fixed mental rule you are bewildered and cry, "Why, what is this? I thought I was to meet a spiritual man!" This false conception has to be broken down and disappear. Once it is gone, you find something that is much higher than your narrow ascetic rule, a complete openness that leaves the being free. If you are to get something, you accept it, and if you are to give up the very same thing, you with an equal willingness leave it. Things come and you take them up; things go and you let them pass, with the same smile of equanimity in the taking or the leaving.

CWM 3: 53-54

### **Ascetic methods and self-mastery**

*Mother, for self-mastery are not the ascetic methods useful sometimes?*

No! You cure nothing. You only give yourself the illusion that you have progressed, but you cure nothing. The proof is that if you stop your ascetic methods, the thing is even stronger than before; it comes back with a vengeance. It depends upon what you call ascetic methods. If it is not to indulge in satisfying all your desires, this indeed is not asceticism, it is common sense. It is something else. Ascetic methods are things like repeated fasting, compelling yourself to endure the cold... in fact, to torture your body a little. This indeed gives you only a spiritual pride, nothing more. It masters nothing at all. It is infinitely easier. People do it because it is very easy, it is simple. Just because the pride is quite satisfied and the vanity can get puffed up, it becomes



very easy. One makes a great demonstration of one's ascetic virtues, and so considers oneself an extremely important personage, and that helps one to endure many things. It is much more difficult to master one's impulses quietly, composedly, and to prevent them from showing themselves — much more! — without taking ascetic measures.

It is much more difficult not to be attached to the things you possess than to possess nothing. This is something that has been known for centuries. It requires a much greater quality not to be attached to the things one possesses than to be without any possessions or to reduce one's possessions to a strict minimum. It is much more difficult. It is a much higher degree of moral worth. Simply this attitude: when a thing comes to you, to take it, use it; when for one reason or another it goes away, to let it go and not regret it. Not to refuse it when it comes, to know how to adapt yourself and not to regret it when it goes.

CWM 6: 428-29

### **Spiritual life and the Moral life**

The spiritual life reveals the one essence in all, but reveals too its infinite diversity; it works for diversity in oneness and for perfection in that diversity. Morality lifts up one artificial standard contrary to the variety of life and the freedom of the spirit. Creating something mental, fixed and limited, it asks all to conform to it. All must labour to acquire the same qualities and the same ideal nature. Morality is not divine or of the Divine; it is of man and human. Morality takes for its basic element a fixed division into the good and the bad; but this is an arbitrary notion. It takes things that are relative and tries to impose them as absolutes; for this good and this bad differ in differing climates and times, epochs and countries. The moral notion

goes so far as to say that there are good desires and bad desires and calls on you to accept the one and reject the other. But the spiritual life demands that you should reject desire altogether. Its law is that you must cast aside all movements that draw you away from the Divine. You must reject them, not because they are bad in themselves, — for they may be good for another man or in another sphere, — but because they belong to the impulses or forces that, being unillumined and ignorant, stand in the way of your approach to the Divine. All desires, whether good or bad, come within this description; for desire itself arises from an unillumined vital being and its ignorance. On the other hand you must accept all movements that bring you into contact with the Divine. But you accept them, not because they are good in themselves, but because they bring you to the Divine. Accept then all that takes you to the Divine. Reject all that takes you away from it, but do not say that this is good and that is bad or try to impose your outlook on others; for, what you term bad may be the very thing that is good for your neighbour who is not trying to realise the Divine Life.

*CWM 3: 118-19*

### **Moral and Spiritual purity**

For example, if you take your stand on a moral viewpoint — which is itself altogether wrong from the spiritual point of view — there are people who apparently lead an altogether perfectly moral life, who conform to all the social laws, all the customs, the moral conventions, and who are a mass of impurity — from the spiritual point of view these beings are profoundly impure. On the other hand there are some poor people who do things... who are born, for instance, with a sense of freedom, and do things which

are not considered very respectable from the social or moral point of view, and who can be in a state of inner aspiration and inner sincerity which makes them infinitely purer than the others. This is one of the big difficulties. As soon as one speaks of these things, there arises the deformation produced in the consciousness by all the social and moral conventions. As soon as you speak of purity, a moral monument comes in front of you which completely falsifies your notion. And note that it is infinitely easier to be moral from the social point of view than to be moral from the spiritual point of view. To be moral from the social viewpoint one has only to take good care to do nothing which is not approved of by others; this may be somewhat difficult, but still it is not impossible; and one may be, as I said, a monument of insincerity and impurity while doing this; whereas to be pure from the spiritual point of view means a vigilance, a consciousness, a sincerity that stand all tests.

CWM 6: 439

### **Readiness for Spiritual life**

*Are there any signs which indicate that one is ready for the path, especially if one has no spiritual teacher?*

Yes, the most important indication is a perfect equality of soul in all circumstances. It is an absolutely indispensable basis; something very quiet, calm, peaceful, the feeling of a great force. Not the quietness that comes from inertia but the sensation of a concentrated power which keeps you always steady, whatever happens, even in circumstances which may appear to you the most terrible in your life. That is the first sign.

A second sign: you feel completely imprisoned in your

ordinary normal consciousness, as in something extremely hard, something suffocating and intolerable, as though you had to pierce a hole in a brass wall. And the torture becomes almost unbearable, it is stifling; there is an inner effort to break through and you cannot manage to break through. This also is one of the first signs. It means that your inner consciousness has reached a point where its outer mould is much too small for it — the mould of ordinary life, of ordinary activities, ordinary relations, all that becomes so small, so petty; you feel within you a force to break all that.

There is yet another sign: when you concentrate and have an aspiration, you feel something coming down into you, you receive an answer; you feel a light, a peace, a force coming down; and almost immediately — you need not wait or spend a very long time — nothing but an inner aspiration, a call, and the answer comes. This also means that the relation has been well established.

CWM 4: 97-98

## **Entering the Spiritual path**

*When can one say that one has truly entered the spiritual path?*

The first sign (it is not the same for everybody) but in a chronological order, I believe, is that everything else appears to you absolutely without importance. Your entire life, all your activities, all your movements continue, if circumstances so arrange things, but they all seem to you utterly unimportant, this is no longer the meaning of your existence. I believe this is the first sign.

There may be another; for example, the feeling that everything is different, of living differently, of a light in the mind which was not there before, of a peace in the heart

which was not there before. That does make a change; but the positive change usually comes later, very rarely does it come at first except in a flash at the time of conversion when one has decided to take up the spiritual life. Sometimes, it begins like a great illumination, a deep joy enters into you; but generally, afterwards this goes into the background, for there are too many imperfections still persisting in you.... It is not disgust, it is not contempt, but everything appears to you so uninteresting that it is truly not worth the trouble of attending to it. For instance, when you are in the midst of certain physical conditions, pleasant or unpleasant (the two extremes meet), you say to yourself, "It was so important to me, all that? But it has no importance at all!" You have the impression that you have truly turned over to the other side.

Some imagine that the sign of spiritual life is the capacity to sit in a corner and meditate! That is a very, very common idea. I do not want to be severe, but most people who make much of their capacity for meditation — I do not think they meditate even for one minute out of one hour. Those who meditate truly never speak about it; for them it is quite a natural thing. When it has become a natural thing, without any glory about it, you may begin to tell yourself that you are making progress. Those who talk about it and think that this gives them a superiority over other human beings, you may be sure, are most of the time in a state of complete inertia.

CWM 4: 103-04

### **'Experiences' and their usefulness**

If one has vital experiences — for example, visions — certain vital experiences without having a sufficient mental preparation, this may result in destroying one's balance and, in any case, one understands nothing of what

is happening and it is practically useless, if not harmful. On the other hand, if to begin with, one has developed his understanding, has studied, has understood and knows the reasons for things, and the goal of yoga, for instance, and if one has studied the methods of attaining it — indeed, the whole mental approach to the subject — then, when an experience comes one has a chance of being able to understand what it is; otherwise one understands nothing. A sufficient mental preparation is needed — if not a complete one at least a sufficient one — to be able to understand a little the experiences which come.

CWM 6: 351

### **What is meant by having an 'experience'**

Usually people mean by “experience” either altogether extravagant phenomena, levitation and things like that, or else sensational visions: being able to see the future or seeing at a distance or maybe ordinary things like being able to tell where a lost object can be found or all kinds of little tricks like that. This is what people call “experiences”.

Well, usually people who have these faculties are not well educated, but for some reason they are born with a gift, as some are born musicians, others painters, and others scientists. These are born clairvoyants, and so it may be, when they are in need they use this faculty to earn their living, and they spoil it completely. If they happen to be in comfortable circumstances and do not need to earn their living, then they become famous among their friends. In any case, this is always an opportunity for a certain kind of commercialism. There are very few who can have these gifts without using them either to make a name for themselves or to earn money. But these gifts are not of a very high level. One can have them without having a very

spiritual life. They do not depend at all on an inner spiritual height. One should not mistake them for signs of progress.

CWM 6: 353

## **Spiritual experiences**

*You speak of spiritual experience. What is an experience and how can one have it?*

It is something which puts you in contact with a consciousness higher than the one you usually have. You have a certain feeling about yourself, you are not even aware of it, it is for you your ordinary condition, you understand. Well, if suddenly you become conscious within of something very different and much higher, then, whatever it may be, this will be a spiritual experience. You may formulate it with a mental idea, you may not formulate it; you may explain it to yourself, you may not; it may last, it may not, it may be instantaneous. But when there is this essential difference in the consciousness and when, naturally, the quality that comes is very... much higher, clearer, purer than what one usually has, then one can call this a spiritual experience; this means that there are thousands of different things which can be called spiritual experiences.

*Should we aspire to have a spiritual experience?*

I think it is wiser to aspire to make progress or to be more conscious or to be better or do better than aspire for a spiritual experience; because that might open the door to more or less imaginary and falsified experiences, to movements of the vital which take on the appearance of higher things. One may deceive oneself by having an aspiration for experiences. In fact, the experience must

come spontaneously, as the result of inner progress, but not for itself or in itself.

CWM 6: 432

### **Material life and Spiritual life**

I consider those who always want to evade life in order to have self-realisation as abnormal and incomplete. And in fact, these are usually weak natures. But those who have strength, force and a kind of healthy equilibrium in themselves, feel an absolute need to realise materially their spiritual realisation; they are not satisfied with going away into the clouds or into worlds where forms no longer exist. They must have their physical consciousness and even their body participate in their inner experience.

Now, it may be said that the need to adopt or follow or participate in a religion as it is found all ready — made, arises rather from the “herd instinct” in human beings. The true thing would be for each one to find that form of adoration or cult which is his own and expresses spontaneously and individually his own special relation with the Divine; that would be the ideal condition.

To adopt a religion because one is born in that religion or because the people one loves and trusts practise that religion or because when one goes to a particular place where others pray and worship, one feels helped in one’s own prayer and worship, is not the sign of a very strong nature; I should say it is rather the sign of a weakness or at any rate of a lack of originality.

But to want to translate into the forms of one’s physical life the inner aspiration and adoration is quite legitimate, and it is much more sincere than what is done by a man who splits himself into two, leads a physical life quite mechanically and ordinarily and, when he can do it, when he



has the time or when it suits him, withdraws within himself, escapes from physical life and the physical consciousness and goes to far-off heights to find his spiritual joys.

Someone who tries to make his material life the expression of his highest aspiration is certainly more noble, more upright and sincere in character than a man who splits himself into two saying that the outer life is of no importance and will never change and must be accepted as it is, and that, in reality only the inner attitude counts.

CWM 8: 246-47

**The Mother**

*Truth requires no advertisement; it does not hide itself but it does not proclaim itself either. It is content to manifest, regardless of results, not seeking approbation or shunning disapprobation, not attracted or troubled by the world's acceptance or denial.*

*When you come to the Yoga, you must be ready to have all your mental buildings and all your vital scaffoldings shattered to pieces. You must be prepared to be suspended in the air with nothing to support you except your faith. You will have to forget your past self and its clings altogether, to pluck it out of your consciousness and be born anew, free from every kind of bondage. Think not of what you were, but of what you aspire to be; be altogether in what you want to realise. Turn from your dead past and look straight towards the future. Your religion, country, family lie there; it is the DIVINE.*

CWM 3: 83-84

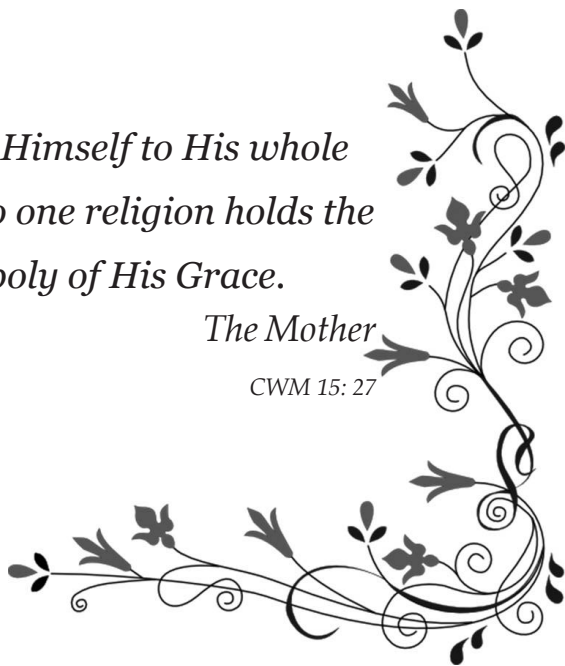
**The Mother**



*God gives Himself to His whole  
creation; no one religion holds the  
monopoly of His Grace.*

*The Mother*

CWM 15: 27



## Religion and Spirituality

### Installation of images and statues

As for the images (statues or pictures) which have to be installed in a temple, a religious ceremony is performed, and if the priest or the assistant is a man with occult powers, even limited ones, he can, with his aspiration and through the ritual, bring a supraterrrestrial consciousness into these forms. That is the principle; you are told, "This is not a piece of wood, this is not a stone, this is not a picture; there is within it a force which the religious ritual has brought down and to this you may speak." This is right, but the nature of the priest must be known, his occult knowledge and also the forces with which he has an affinity. So, there may be many things in there.... There is "something" (unless it is a stupid ignoramus who has performed the ceremony, one who has no power at all, has brought down nothing, made only a show — but this is rather rare; I can't say it happens frequently, it is quite rare), generally there is something, but then the nature, the quality of this something, you know...

CWM 4: 396

### Religious forms and the spiritual life

Religion is always a limitation for the spirit.

If a man has a spiritual life independently of his mental formations and the set limits in which he lives, then this spiritual life makes him, so to say, cross the religious principles and enter something higher. But his consecration must come from within and not be formal. If it comes exclusively from the form, then the limitation is so great that he cannot go farther.

There are people who have necessarily to come out of their religion if they do not want to be halted in their

progress. But those who have practically no mental activity, who do not ask themselves any questions, who have only an intense devotion in their heart and an urge to give themselves to something that is infinitely greater, for these it does not matter whether they have a religion or not. It is all the same. But if one is attached to forms, one can never go any farther.

It is difficult to go so far unless the mind is free and dwells in the light. It is one of the fairly indispensable conditions (although not absolutely indispensable). However, there are people who have no mental power and accept any dogma whatever without discussion; they feel that nothing can prevent them from having this inner urge which will put them in contact with the Divine. But generally they do not have a mental life: it is very much restricted.

CWM 5: 245

### **The meaning we put into the word "God"**

It all depends on what meaning you put into the word "God". It is a word (I have told you this at least four or five times) to express "something" you do not know but are trying to attain. Well, if you have received a religious education, you are accustomed to call this "God". If you have received a more positivist and also a more philosophical education, you are accustomed to call this by all sorts of names, and you may at the same time have the idea that it is the supreme truth. If one wants to speak of God and describe him, one is obliged to make use of things which are the most inaccessible to our consciousness, and to call God what is beyond anything we know and can grasp and be — all that is too far for us to be able to understand, we call God. Only some religions (there are some) give a

precise form to the godhead; and sometimes they give several forms and they have several gods; sometimes they give one form and have only one God; but all this is human fabrication. There is “something”, there is a reality which is beyond all our expressions, but which we can succeed in contacting by practising a discipline. We can identify ourselves with it. Once one is identified with it one knows what it is, but one cannot express it, for words cannot say it. So, if you use one kind of vocabulary, if you have a particular mental conviction, you will use the vocabulary corresponding to that conviction. If you belong to another group which has another way of speaking, you will call it or even think about it in that way. I am telling you this to give you the true impression, that there is something there which cannot be grasped — grasped by thought — but which *exists*. But the name you give it matters little, that’s of no importance, it exists. And so the only thing to do is to enter into contact with it — not to give it a name or describe it.

CWM 6: 25

### **Divine beings and worship**

But if you take real divine beings, this is not at all something they value. They do not like to be worshipped. No, it does not give them any special pleasure at all! Don’t think they are happy, for they have no pride. It is because of pride that a man likes to be worshipped; if a man has no pride he doesn’t like to be worshipped; and if, for instance, they see a good intention or a fine feeling or a movement of unselfishness or enthusiasm, a joy, a spiritual joy, these things have for them an infinitely greater value than prayers and acts of worship and pujas...

I assure you what I am telling you is very serious: if

you seat a real god in a chair and oblige him to remain there all the while you are doing puja, he may perhaps have a little fun watching you do it, but it certainly gives him no satisfaction. None at all! He does not feel either flattered or happy or glorified by your puja. You must get rid of that idea. There is an entire domain between the spiritual and the material worlds which belongs to vital beings, and it is this domain that is full of all these things, because these beings live upon that, are happy with it, and it immediately gives them importance; and the one who has the greatest number of believers, devotees and worshippers is the happiest and the most puffed up. But how can anyone imagine that the gods could value... The gods — I am speaking of the true gods, even those of the Overmind, though they are still a bit... well, so — so... they seem to have taken on many human defects, but still, despite all that, they really have a higher consciousness — it does not please them at all. An act of true goodness, intelligence, unselfishness or a subtle understanding or a very sincere aspiration are for them infinitely higher than a small religious ceremony. Infinitely! There is no comparison.

*CWM 6: 195-96*

### **Religious ceremony**

Religious ceremony! For example, there are so many of these entities called Kali — who are given, besides, quite terrible appearances — so many are even placed in houses as the family-goddess; they are full of a terrible vital force! I knew people who were so frightened of the Kali they had at home that indeed they trembled to make the least mistake, for when catastrophes came they thought it was Kali who sent them! It is a frightful thing, thought. I know them, those entities. I know them very well, but they are

vital beings, vital forms which, so to say, are given a form by human thought, and what forms! And to think that men worship such terrible and monstrous things; and what's more that these poor gods are given, are paid the compliment of believing that it is. ...

From this point of view, it is good that for some time men get out of this religious atmosphere, so full of fear, and this sort of blind, superstitious submission of which the hostile forces have taken a dreadful advantage. The period of denial, positivism, is from this viewpoint quite indispensable in order to free men from superstition. It is only when one comes out of that and the abject submission to monstrous vital forces that one can rise to truly spiritual heights and there become the collaborator and true instrument of the forces of Truth, the real Consciousness, the true Power.

One must leave all this far behind before one can climb higher.

*CWM 6: 195-96*

### **Integral consecration**

There is a purely physical form of the act, like those forms in cults in which a particular gesture, a particular movement is meant to express the consecration. That is purely material, as for example, lighting incense, arranging offerings, or even looking after a temple, decorating an idol, indeed all such purely physical acts.

The second part is a sort of mental consecration which makes the act that is performed a symbol. One is not satisfied with merely lighting the incense, but while lighting the incense one makes this gesture symbolic — for example, of the aspiration burning in the body or of self-giving in a dissolution, in the purification of the fire. That is to say, first the act, then the symbol in this act and the symbolic

understanding of what is done.

And finally, behind these two, an aspiration for union; that all this, these acts and the symbol you make of them, may be only a means of drawing closer and closer to the Divine and making yourself fit to unite with Him.

These three things must be there for the act to be complete: that is, something purely material, something mental, and something psychic, the psychic aspiration. If one of the three is there without the other two, it is incomplete. As a rule, very rarely are the three consciously combined. That produces beings of exceptional sincerity and consecration: the entire being, in all its parts, participates in the action.

CWM 8: 234-35

### **One must be able to live that Reality**

Sometimes one may read a whole book of philosophy and not progress a step farther. Sometimes one may be quite a fervent devotee of a religion and not progress. There are people who have spent entire lifetimes seated in contemplation and attained nothing. There are people (we have well-known examples) who used to do the most modest of manual works, like a cobbler mending old shoes, and who had an experience. It is altogether beyond what one thinks and says of it. It is a gift, that's all. And all that is needed is to be that — to succeed in identifying oneself with it and live it. At times you read one sentence in a book and that leads you there. Sometimes you read entire books of philosophy or religion and they get you nowhere. There are people, however, whom the reading of philosophy books helps to go ahead. But all these things are secondary. There is only one thing that's important: that is a sincere and persistent will, for these things don't happen



in a twinkling. So one must persevere. When someone feels that he is not advancing, he must not get discouraged; he must try to find out what it is in the nature that is opposing, and then make the necessary progress. And suddenly one goes forward. And when you reach the end you have an experience. And what is remarkable is that people who have followed altogether different paths, with altogether different mental constructions, from the greatest believer to the most unbelieving, even materialists, have arrived at that experience, it is the same for everyone. Because it is true — because it is real, because it is the sole reality. And it is quite simply *that*. I do not say anything more. This is of no importance, the way one speaks about it, what is important is to follow the path, *your* path, no matter which — yes, to go there.

CWM 6: 26-27

## **Yoga and Religion**

Imagine someone who, in some way or other, has heard of something like the Divine or has a personal feeling that something of the kind exists, and begins to make all sorts of efforts: efforts of will, of discipline, efforts of concentration, all sorts of efforts to find this Divine, to discover what He is, to become acquainted with Him and unite with Him. Then this person is doing yoga.

Now, if this person has noted down all the processes he has used and constructs a fixed system, and sets up all that he has discovered as absolute laws — for example, he says: the Divine is like this, to find the Divine you must do this, make this particular gesture, take this attitude, perform this ceremony, and you must admit that this is the truth, you must say, “I accept that *this* is the Truth and I fully adhere to it; and your method is the only right one,

the only one which exists" — if all that is written down, organised, arranged into fixed laws and ceremonies, it becomes a religion.

*Can one realise the Divine by this method [of religion]?*

Those who carry within themselves a spiritual destiny and are born to realise the Divine, to become conscious in Him and live Him, will arrive, no matter what path, what way they follow. That is to say, even in religion there are people who have had the spiritual experience and found the Divine — not because of the religion, usually in spite of it, notwithstanding it — because they had the inner urge and this urge led them there despite all obstacles and through them. Everything served their purpose.

But if these very people want to express their experience, they naturally use the terms of the religion in which they were brought up, so they restrict their experience and inevitably limit it very much, they make it sectarian, so to say. But they themselves may very well have gone beyond all the forms and all the limitations and all the conventions and may have had the true experience in its pure simplicity.

*CWM 8: 146-47*

### **Yogic discipline and spiritual ego**

There is nothing which cannot be a yogic discipline if one does it properly. And if it is not done properly, even tapasya will be of no use and will lead you nowhere. For it is the same thing, if you do your tapasya, all the time observing yourself doing it and telling yourself, "Am I making any progress, is this going to be better, am I going to succeed?", then it is your ego, you know, which becomes more and more enormous and occupies the whole place, and there is no room for anything else. And we said the other day that

the spiritual ego is the worst of all, for it is altogether unconscious of its inferiority, it is convinced it is something very superior, if not absolutely divine!

CWM 4: 363

### **Harmony of different Religions**

It is not in the mental consciousness that these things can be harmonised and synthesised. For this it is necessary to rise above and find the idea behind the thought. Sri Aurobindo shows here, for example, what each of these religions represents in human effort, aspiration and realisation. Instead of taking these religions in their outward forms which are precisely dogmas and intellectual conceptions, if we take them in their spirit, in the principle they represent, there is no difficulty in unifying them. They are simply different aspects of human progress which complete each other perfectly well and should be united with many others yet to form a more total and more complete progress, a more perfect understanding of life, a more integral approach to the Divine. And even this unification which already demands a return to the Spirit behind things, is not enough; there must be added to it a vision of the future, the goal towards which humanity is moving, the future realisation of the world, that last "spiritual revolution" Sri Aurobindo speaks about, which will open a new age, that is, the supramental revolution.

In the supramental consciousness all these things are no longer contradictory or exclusive. They all become complementary. It is only the mental form which divides. What this mental form represents should be united to what all the other mental forms represent in order to make a harmonious whole. And that is the essential difference between a religion and the true spiritual life.

Religion exists almost exclusively in its forms, its cults, in a certain set of ideas, and it becomes great only through the spirituality of a few exceptional individuals, whereas true spiritual life, and above all what the supramental realisation will be, is independent of every precise, intellectual form, every limited form of life. It embraces all possibilities and manifestations and makes them the expression, the vehicle of a higher and more universal truth.

A new religion would not only be useless but very harmful. It is a new *life* which must be created; it is a new *consciousness* which must be expressed. This is something beyond intellectual limits and mental formulae. It is a living truth which must manifest.

Everything in its essence and its truth should be included in this realisation. This realisation must be an expression as total, as complete, as universal as possible of the divine reality. Only that can save humanity and the world. That is the great spiritual revolution of which Sri Aurobindo speaks. And this is what he wanted us to realise.

CWM 9: 77-78

### **Religion tends to make God in the image of man**

Religion always tends to make God in the image of man, a magnified and aggrandised image, but in the end it is always a god with human qualities. This is what makes it possible for people to treat him as they would treat a human enemy. In some countries, when their god does not do what they want, they take him and throw him into the river!

*But are these idols not merely human creations? Do they have any existence in themselves?*

Whatever the image — what we disdainfully call an idol

— whatever the external form of the deity, even if to our physical eye it appears ugly or commonplace or horrible, a caricature, there is always within it the presence of the thing it represents. And there is always someone, a priest or an initiate, or a sadhu, a sannyasin, who has the power and who draws — this is usually the work of the priests — who draws the force, the presence within. And it is real: it is quite true that the force, the presence is there; and it is that, not the form of wood or stone or metal, which people worship — it is the presence.

*CWM 10:95*

### **A story from the Mother's life**

The first time I came to India I came on a Japanese boat. And on this Japanese boat there were two clergymen, that is, Protestant priests, of different sects. I don't remember exactly which sects, but they were both English; I think one was an Anglican and the other a Presbyterian.

Now, Sunday came. There had to be a religious ceremony on the boat, or else we would have looked like heathens, like the Japanese! There had to be a ceremony, but who should perform it? Should it be the Anglican or should it be the Presbyterian? They just missed quarrelling. Finally, one of them withdrew with dignity — I don't remember now which one, I think it was the Anglican — and the Presbyterian performed his ceremony.

It took place in the lounge of the ship. We had to go down a few steps to this lounge. And that day, all the men had put on their jackets — it was hot, I think we were in the Red Sea — they put on their jackets, stiff collars, leather shoes; neckties well set, hats on their heads, and they went with a book under their arm, almost in a procession from the deck to the lounge. The ladies wore their hats, some

carried even a parasol, and they too had their book under the arm, a prayer-book.

And so they all crowded down into the lounge, and the Presbyterian made a speech, that is to say, preached his sermon, and everybody listened very religiously. And then, when it was over, they all came up again with the satisfied air of someone who has done his duty. And, of course, five minutes later they were in the bar drinking and playing cards, and their religious ceremony was forgotten. They had done their duty, it was over, there was nothing more to be said about it.

And the clergyman came and asked me, more or less politely, why I had not attended. I told him, "Sir, I am sorry, but I don't believe in religion."

"Oh! oh! you are a materialist?"

"No, not at all."

"Ah! then why?"

"Oh!" I said, "if I were to tell you, you would be quite displeased, perhaps it is better for me not to say anything."

But he insisted so much that at last I said, "Just try to see, I don't feel that you are sincere, neither you nor your flock. You all went there to fulfil a social duty and a social custom, but not at all because you really wanted to enter into communion with God."

"Enter into communion with God! But we can't do that!

All that we can do is to say some good words, but we have no capacity to enter into communion with God."

Then I said, "But it was just because of that I didn't go, for it doesn't interest me."

CWM 8:147-49

## Socio-political Ideologies and Godless religions

We call "religion" any concept of the world or the universe which is presented as the exclusive Truth in which one must have absolute faith, generally because this Truth is declared to be the result of a revelation.

Most of the religions affirm the existence of a God and the rules to follow to obey Him, but there are some Godless religions, such as the socio-political organisations which, in the name of an Ideal or the State, claim the same right to be obeyed.

Man's right is to pursue the Truth freely and to approach it freely in his own way. But each one ought to know that his discovery is good for him alone and is not to be imposed upon others.

CWM 15: 30

**The Mother**

*Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and height of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer; Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduism has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other; but intellectual dogma and cult-egoism stand in the way.*

CWSA 13: 211

*Sri Aurobindo*



## The pot and the nectar

The quarrels of religious sects are like the disputing of pots, which shall be alone allowed to hold the immortalising nectar. Let them dispute, but the thing for us is to get at the nectar in whatever pot and attain immortality.

— Sri Aurobindo

The immortalising nectar is the supreme Truth, the supreme Knowledge, the Union with the Supreme which gives the consciousness of immortality.

Each religious sect has its own way of approaching the Divine and this is why Sri Aurobindo compares them to different pots. But he says: No matter which path you follow, the goal alone is important, and the goal is the same whatever the path you follow. The nectar is the same in whichever pot it is contained.

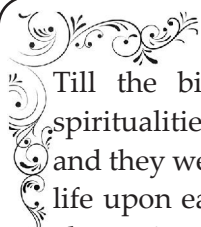
Some say that the flavour of the pot, the path you follow changes the taste of the nectar, that is to say, affects your union with the Divine. Sri Aurobindo answers: The approach may be different, each one chooses the one he prefers or which most suits his taste, but the nectar itself, the union with the Divine, always keeps its power of immortality.

CWM 10: 83

The Mother







Till the birth of Sri Aurobindo, religions and spiritualities were always centered on past figures, and they were showing as "the goal" the negation of life upon earth. So, you had a choice between two alternatives: either

— a life *in* this world with its round of petty pleasures and pains, joys and sufferings, threatened by hell if you were not behaving properly; or

— an escape *into* another world, heaven, nirvana, moksha.

Between these two there is nothing much to choose, they are equally bad.

Sri Aurobindo has told us that this was a fundamental mistake which accounts for the weakness and degradation of India. Buddhism, Jainism, Illusionism were sufficient to sap all energy out of the country.

True, India is the only place in the world which is still aware that something else than matter exists. The other countries have quite forgotten it: Europe, America and elsewhere.... That is why she still has a message to preserve and deliver to the world. But at present she is splashing and floundering in the muddle.

Sri Aurobindo has shown that the truth does not lie in running away from earthly life but *in* remaining in it, to *transform it, divinise it*, so that the Divine can manifest **HERE**, in this **PHYSICAL WORLD**.

CWM 12: 210-11

**The Mother**



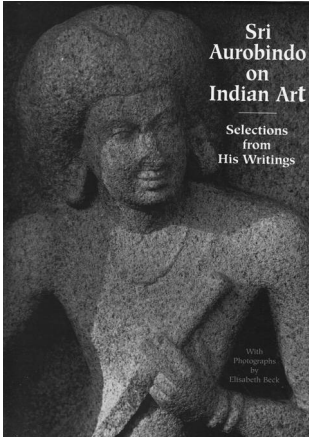


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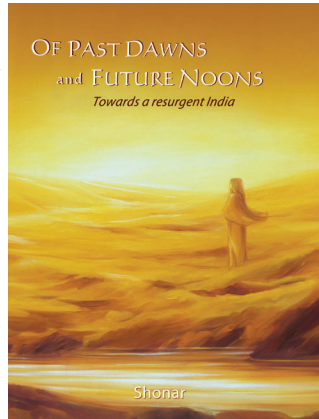
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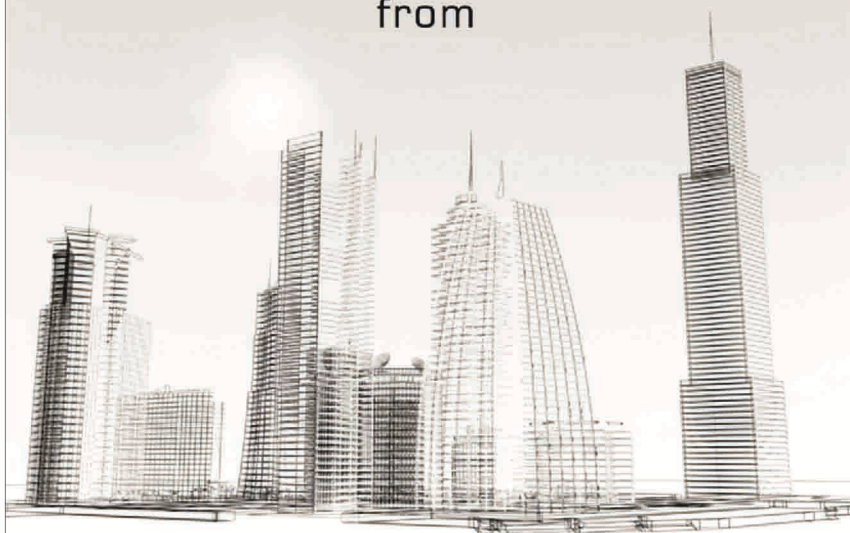
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