

All India Magazine

October 2024



WORSHIP



Flower:
True Worship

Total and constant, without demand or claim.
Spiritual significance and explanation of the flower given by the Mother

Botanical name: Leucas aspera

Tiny white bilabiate flowers, the lower lip larger and the upper lip softly downy, emerging from green calyces tightly arranged in rounded clusters. A common annual herb of fields and waysides in India.

ALL INDIA MAGAZINE

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Phone Nos:(0413) 2336396-97-98

Email: info@aurosociety.org Website: www.aurosociety.org

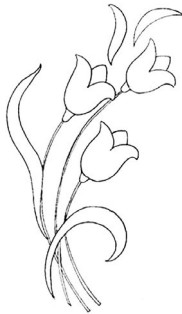
WORSHIP

(PUJA)

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

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Editorial note: *Worship of the Divine or His representative is a natural movement of the human heart. It has a great power in it if done with the right consciousness. This issue is dedicated to exploring the idea of worship.*



As for *milana*, the abiding union is within and that can be there at all times; the outer *milana* or contact is not usually abiding. There are some who often or almost invariably have the contact whenever they worship; the Deity may become living to them in the picture or other image they worship, may move and act through it; others may feel him always present, outwardly, subtly-physically, abiding with them where they live or in the very room; but sometimes this is only for a period. Or they may feel the Presence with them, see it frequently in a body (but not materially except sometimes), *feel* its touch or embrace, converse with it constantly, — that is also one kind of *milana*. The greatest *milana* is one in which one is constantly aware of the Deity constantly abiding in oneself, in everything in the world, holding all the world in him, identical with existence and yet supremely beyond the world — but in the world too one sees, hears, feels nothing but him, so that the very senses bear witness to him alone — and this does *not* exclude such specific personal manifestations as those vouchsafed to Krishnaprem and his guru. The more ways there are of the union, the better.

CWSA 20: 363-64

Sri Aurobindo

Devotion and Bhakti

Turning the Emotions towards the Divine

It is no part of this Yoga to dry up the heart; but the emotions must be turned towards the Divine. There may be short periods in which the heart is quiescent, turned away from the ordinary feelings and waiting for the inflow from above; but such states are not states of dryness but of silence and peace. The heart in this Yoga should in fact be the main centre of concentration until the consciousness rises above.

*

Emotion is a good element in Yoga; but emotional desire becomes easily a cause of perturbation and an obstacle.

*

Turn your emotions towards the Divine, aspire for their purification; they will then become a help on the way and no longer a cause of suffering.

*

Not to kill emotion, but to turn it towards the Divine is the right way of the Yoga.

But it must become pure, founded upon spiritual peace and joy, capable of being transmuted into Ananda. Equality and calm in the mind and vital parts, an intense psychic emotion in the heart can perfectly go together.

*

Awake by your aspiration the psychic fire in the heart that burns steadily towards the Divine — that is the one way to liberate and fulfil the emotional nature.

*

Emotion is necessary in the Yoga and it is only the excessive emotional sensitiveness which makes one enter into despondency over small things that has to be overcome. The very basis of this Yoga is bhakti and if one kills one's emotional being there can be

no bhakti. So there can be no possibility of emotion being excluded from the Yoga.

*

It is only the ordinary vital emotions, which waste the energy and disturb the concentration and peace, that have to be discouraged. Emotion itself is not a bad thing; it is a necessary part of the nature, and psychic emotion is one of the most powerful helps to the sadhana. Psychic emotion, bringing tears of love for the Divine or tears of ananda, ought not to be suppressed: it is only a vital mixture that brings disturbance in the sadhana.

*

Sentimentalism

To indulge in the emotions, love, grief, sorrow, despair, emotional joy etc. for their own sake with a sort of mental-vital over-emphasis on them is what is called sentimentalism. There should be even in deep feeling a calm, a control, a purifying restraint and measure. One should not be at the mercy of one's feelings and sentiments, but master of oneself always.

*

When the consciousness indulges in these things [*joy and sorrow*] and wallows in the excitement of emotional joy or suffering, that is called sentimentalism. There is another kind in which the mind enjoys its perceptions of emotion, love and suffering etc. and plays with them, but that is a less violent and more superficial sentimentalism.

Devotion

Bhakti is not an experience, it is a state of the heart and soul. It is a state which comes when the psychic being is awake and prominent.

*

You are no doubt right about asking for the bhakti, for I suppose it is the master-claim of your nature: for that matter, it is the stron-

gest motive force that sadhana can have and the best means for all else that has to come. It is why I said that it is through the heart that spiritual experience must come to you. The loyalty and the rest that you have for me and the Mother may not, as you say, be part of the bhakti itself, but they could not be there were not the bhakti deep inside. It is its coming out in full force into the surface consciousness that is to be brought about and it seems to me that it is inevitable that it should come as the outer coverings fall off. What is within must surely make its way to the surface.

*

You believe in traditional ideas of Yoga—well, according to traditional ideas also, the one easiest method is that of bhakti, reliance, self-giving, *bhakti*, *nirbhara*, *samarpaṇa*. What still stands in your way — for it was and is growing towards that in you, is an old confusion in mind and vital. The heart says, "I want bhakti", the mind says, "No, no, let us reason", the vital says, "Nonsense, I can't surrender." What you need is to quiet down that confusion created by the mind's past sanskaras and either fix on the one thing or harmonise. Bhakti as the basic force, knowledge, strength and joy in the Divine as the result — that is the harmony proposed in this Yoga. But in either way, if either is done, then peace becomes easily possible.

*

The flow of devotion and love is a thing which the more it repeats or awakens is bound to overflow to all the parts of being and have its effect on them.

If it is the way of *ahaitukī bhakti* that you want to follow, that can be no obstacle; for there can be none better. For in that way everything can be made a means — poetry and music for instance become not merely poetry and music and not merely even an expression of bhakti, but themselves a means of bringing the experience of love and bhakti. Meditation itself becomes not an effort of mental concentration, but a flow of love and adoration

and worship. If simply and sincerely followed, the way of *ahaitukī bhakti* can lead as far as any other.

CWSA 29: 350-55

Bhakti and Love

The nature of bhakti is adoration, worship, self-offering to what is greater than oneself — the nature of love is a feeling or seeking for closeness and union. Self-giving is the character of both; both are necessary in the Yoga and each gets its full force when supported by the other.

*

Love is not a name of the Divine, it is a power of his consciousness and being. Bhakti and love are not quite the same thing, but love is one of the elements of bhakti. There are different kinds of bhakti and that which is of the nature of love is the strongest and is considered the highest, most intense and ecstatic of all. Also in love itself that form of it which is made of self-giving; surrender, absolute adoration, urge towards a selfless union is the true kind of bhakti that is love. "Conquering love" or "Love the victor" means love prevailing over all that stands in the way of its reign, over ignorance, falsehood, selfishness, ego, passion and lust, outward or self-regarding desires and all else till it reigns alone and victorious, bringing down all the other gifts of the Divine Consciousness. It is by force of love and selflessness and self-giving that the sadhak can help Love to conquer.

*

I suppose it [*prema*bhakti] is bhakti with love as its basis; there can be bhakti of worship, submission, reverence, obedience etc. but without love.

*

Selflessness, self-giving, entire faith and confidence, absence of demand and desire, surrender to the Divine Will, love concentrated on the Divine — are some of the main signs [of true love and bhakti].

Emotional Bhakti

It is a misunderstanding to suppose that I am against Bhakti or against emotional Bhakti — which comes to the same thing, since without emotion there can be no Bhakti. It is rather the fact that in my writings on Yoga I have given Bhakti the highest place. All that I have said at any time which could account for this misunderstanding was against an *unpurified* emotionalism which, according to my experience, leads to want of balance, agitated and disharmonious expression or even contrary reactions and, at its extreme, nervous disorder. But the insistence on purification does not mean that I condemn true feeling and emotion any more than the insistence on a purified mind or will means that I condemn thought and will. On the contrary, the deeper the emotion, the more intense the Bhakti, the greater is the force for realisation and transformation. It is oftenest through intensity of emotion that the psychic being awakes and there is an opening of the inner doors to the Divine.

*

If one does not encourage the devotion of the emotional being merely because the lower vital is not yet under control and acts differently, then how is the devotion to grow and how is the lower vital to change? Until the final clarification and harmonising of the nature there are always contradictions in the being, but that is not a reason for in any way suppressing the play of the better movements — on the contrary it is these that should be cultivated and made to increase.

*

The emotional [*devotion*] is more outward than the psychic [*devotion*] — it tends towards outward expression. The psychic is inward and gives the direction to the whole inner and outer life. The emotional can be intense, but is neither so sure in its basis nor powerful enough to change the whole direction of the life.

Vital Bhakti

Vital bhakti is usually full of desires and demands, — it expects a return for what it gives; it loves the Divine more for its own sake than for the sake of the Divine. If it does not get what it wants, it is capable of revolting or turning elsewhere. It is often pursued by jealousy, misunderstanding, unfaithfulness, anger etc., — the usual imperfections of human love, and can turn these against its object of bhakti. On the other hand, if there is vital bhakti governed by the psychic, these defects disappear and the vital gives an ardour and enthusiasm to the love and bhakti which gives it a greater push for effectuation in action and life. The vital should always be the instrument of the soul for self-expression in life and not act on its own account (ego, desire) or on its own separate impulse.

*

The vital bhakti is egoistic, usually full of claims and demands on the Divine and revolting when they are not satisfied. The mental is simply a worship in the thought and idea without love in the heart.

CWSA 29: 356-58

Viraha or Pangs of Separation

Viraha is a transitional experience on the plane of the vital seeking for the Spirit — there is no reason why it should not be possible at a quite early stage. It is the realisations without any uneasiness, realisations in pure Ananda that belong to the more developed sadhana.

*

The pure feeling of *viraha* is psychic — but if rajasic or tamasic movements come in (such as depression, complaint, revolt etc.) then it becomes tamasic or rajasic.

*

Pangs of separation belong to the vital, not to the psychic; the psychic having no pangs need not express them. The psychic is

always turned towards the Divine in faith, joy and confidence—whatever aspiration it has is full of trust and hope.

*

It is a mistake to think that a constant absence of *vyākulatā* is a sign that the aspiration or will for the Divine is not true. It is only in certain exclusive forms of Bhakti Yoga that a constant *vyākulatā* or weeping or *hāhākāra* (the latter is more often vital than psychic) is the rule. Here though the psychic yearning may come sometimes or often in intense waves, what comes as the basis is a quietude of the being and in that quietude a more and more steady perception of the truth and seeking for the Divine and need of the Divine so that all is turned towards that more and more. It is into this that the experience and growing realisation come. Because the opening is growing in you, you are getting this *ābhāsa* of the presence (beyond form) of the Mother. It is as the inner realisation grows that the presence in the physical form takes its full value.

CWSA 29: 359-60

Enmity to the Divine

I have not had time yet to write about the enmity theory. I will do so more fully in two or three days. But I may say at once that the idea does not seem to me at all true that by enmity to the Divine one can reach the Divine and that too more quickly than by bhakti. The idea is contrary to the spiritual truth of things, to reason, to nature and to experience.

As regards your defence of X, they sound like X's own ideas and very queer ideas they are. If they are right, we should have to come to the following conclusions—

1) Sattwa is not the best passage towards realisation, Rajas is the best way to become spiritual. It is the rajasic man with his fierce ego and violent passions who is the true sadhak of the Divine.

2) The Asura is the best bhakta. The Gita is quite wrong in holding up the Deva nature as the condition of realisation and the Asura nature as contrary to it. It is the other way round.

3) Ravana, Hiranyakashipu, Shishupala were the greatest devotees of the Divine because they were capable of hostility to the Divine and so were liberated in a few lives — compared with them the great Rishis and Bhaktas were very poor spiritual vessels. I am aware of the paradox about Ravana in the Purana, but let me point out that these Asuras and Rakshasas did not pretend to be disciples or worshippers of Rama or Krishna or Vishnu or use their position as disciples to get moksha by revolt — they got it by being enemies and getting killed and absorbed into the Godhead.

4) Obedience to the Guru, worship of the Divine are all tommy rot and fit only for sheep, not men. To turn round furiously on the Guru or the Divine, abuse him, express contempt, challenge his sincerity, declare his actions to be wrong, foolish or a trick — to assert oneself as right at every point and his judgment as mistaken, prejudiced, absurd, false, a support of devils etc. etc. is the best way of devotion and the true relation between Guru and Shishya. Disobedience is the highest respect to the Guru, anger and revolt are the noblest worship one can give to the Divine.

5) One who takes the blows of Mahakali with joy as a means of discovering his faults and increasing in light and strength and purity is a sheep and unworthy of discipleship — one who responds to the quietest pressure to change by revolt and persisting in his errors is a strong man and a mighty adhar and a noble disciple on the way to perfection.

I could go on multiplying the consequences, but I have no time. Do you really believe all these things? They are the natural conse-

quences of X's theory or of this theory of revolt as the way to perfection. If you accept the premiss, you have to accept the logical consequences. That is what X did — only he called his errors Truth and the way prescribed by me was falsehood explicable only by the fact that I was a "Master who had forgotten his higher self". And the consequences led to his departure, not willed by us, but by his own choice — and under such circumstances that he has made it a practical impossibility for me to let him come back unless he undergoes a change which the experience of the past does not warrant me in thinking possible.

CWSA 29: 360-61

Sri Aurobindo

If you have faith and confidence, it is not the human form of the guru that you worship, but the Supreme Lord who manifests through him.

Be not troubled and give yourself unreservedly to the Supreme Lord through whatever channel helps you.

With love and blessings.

CWM 14: 60

The Mother

Prayer and Worship

Outer Worship

There is no restriction in this Yoga to inward worship and meditation only. As it is a Yoga for the whole being, not for the inner being only, no such restriction could be intended. Old forms of the different religions may fall away, but absence of all forms is not the rule of the sadhana.

I was thinking [*in writing "Old forms ... may fall away"*] not of Pranam etc. which have a living value, but of old forms which persist although have no longer any value — e.g. Sraddha for the dead. Also here forms which have no relation to this Yoga — for instance Christians who cling to the Christian forms or Mahomedans to the Namaz or Hindus to the Sandhyavandana in the old way soon find them either falling off or else an obstacle to the free development of their sadhana.

What is meant by *bāhyapujā* ? If it is purely external, then of course it is the lowest form; but if done with the true consciousness inside, it can bring the greatest completeness of the adoration by allowing the body and the most external consciousness to share in the spirit and act of worship.

What you say is no doubt true, but it is better not to take away the support that may still be there for the faith of those who need such supports. These visions and images and ceremonies are meant for that. It is a spiritual principle not to take away any faith or support of faith unless the persons who have it are able to replace it by something larger and more complete.

If the *prāpratīṭhā* brings down a powerful Presence [*into an image*], that may remain there long after the one who has brought it has left his body. Usually it is maintained by the bhakti of the officiant and the sincerity of belief and worship of those who come to the temple for adoration. If these fail there is likely to be a withdrawal of the Presence.

The "scientific" explanation [*for the disappearance of food offered to a deity in a temple*] would be that somebody, a servant perhaps, disregarding prohibitions got secretly in and polished off the food of offering when there was nobody to see! That however assumes that occult manifestations are impossible, which is not the case; it is besides only a probable inference or theory. Occultists, or some of them, hold that the food offered to unseen beings is sometimes (but not by any means always) taken in its subtle elements, leaving the outward body of the food as it was. The actual taking of the food, physically, is rare, but instances are believed to have happened where the bhakti was very strong.

CWSA 29: 364-65

External bhakti

There can be no such thing as a mechanical and artificial devotion — there is either devotion or there is not. Devotion may be intense or not intense, complete or incomplete, sometimes manifest and sometimes veiled, but mechanical or artificial devotion is a contradiction in terms.

These [*arguments against external bhakti*] are the exaggerations made by the mind taking one side of Truth and ignoring the other sides. The inner bhakti is the main thing and without it the external becomes a form and mere ritual, but the external has its place and use when it is straightforward and sincere.

*

Bhakti should be for the Divine only — the sadhaks are sadhaks, trying to reach the Divine, but still full of faults and struggles.

*

A "bhakti" which claims everything from the Divine and does not give itself is not real bhakti.

CWSA 29: 355

Prayer

Prayer and aspiration are a part of the spiritual life and do not conflict with surrender, provided one is not disturbed in either way by the fulfilment or unfulfilment of the prayer and keeps one's faith and quietude all the same. In the ordinary life prayer is one of the chief elements of human relation with the Divine and is often but not always answered; when it is not answered the religious man keeps his faith in the Divine and either understands that to answer was not the Divine Will or else he prays more fervently till his prayer is heard — that depends on the man and the circumstances. A sadhak can intercede internally for others in their affairs, provided he remains unattached and equal-minded, but he is not bound to intervene.

*

Of course all prayer is not heard — the world would be a still more disastrous affair than it is, if everybody's prayers were heard, however sincere. Even the Godward prayer is not always heard — at once, even as faith is not always justified at once. Both prayer and faith are powers towards realisation which have been given to man to aid him in his struggle — without them, without aspiration and will and faith (for aspiration is a prayer) it would be difficult for him to get anywhere. But all these things are merely means for setting the Divine Force in action — and it sometimes takes long, very long even, before the forces come into action or at least before they are seen to be in action or bear their result. The ecstasist is not altogether wrong even when he overstates his case. Even the overstatements sometimes help to convince the Cosmic Power, so that it says "Oh well, if it is like that all right —".

*

As for prayer, no hard and fast rule can be laid down. Some prayers are answered, all are not. You may ask, why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they be? It is not a machin-

ery: put a prayer in the slot and get your asking. Besides, considering all the contradictory things mankind is praying for at the same moment, God would be in a rather awkward hole if he had to grant all of them; it wouldn't do.

If one lives in the world one can offer such prayers [*for help in resolving worldly problems*]; but one must not expect that the Divine shall fulfil all those prayers or think that he is bound to do so. When one is a sadhak the prayer should be for the inner things belonging to the sadhana and for outer things only so far as they are necessary for that and for the divine work.

*

What you say about prayer is correct. That [*impersonal prayer*] is the highest kind of prayer, but the other kind also (i.e. the more personal) is permissible and even desirable. All prayer rightly offered brings us closer to the Divine and establishes a right relation with Him.

*

As for the prayers, the fact of praying and the attitude it brings, especially unselfish prayer for others, itself opens you to the higher Power, even if there is no corresponding result in the person prayed for. Nothing can be positively said about that, for the result must necessarily depend on the persons, whether they are open or receptive or something in them can respond to any Force the prayer brings down.

CWSA 29: 365-67

Prayers should be full of confidence

The correspondent had been asked by a fellow-sadhak, "Why do you want to meditate on a photograph of Sri Aurobindo? If you can meditate within, this external form of bhakti is not necessary."—Ed.

*

While looking at a photograph of Sri Aurobindo, the correspon-

dent felt that he was looking at a living being with eyes "as living as real eyes".—Ed.

CWSA 29: 355, 363

"One may not worship only on condition that one changes."—
Many want neither to change nor to worship !

The Mother: Conversation with a Disciple, Jan 14, 1970

Worship of the Universal

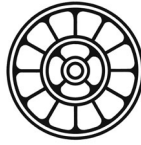
Human conceptions of the Divine divide themselves first into the worship of the formed and the aspiration towards the formless, secondly, into the adoration of the Qualified and the urge of the rarest spirits towards the Unqualified, the Absolute. For all these stages the Tantric worship and discipline provides. How can the Formless invest Himself with form, asks the religious rationalist. The universe is there to reply. Hinduism worships Narayana in the stone, the tree, the animal, the human being. That which the intellectual and spiritual pride or severity of other religions scorns, it makes its pride and turns into its own form of logical severity. Stocks and stones, the quadruped and the human being, all these are equals in God, our brothers in the Divine, forms that the Omnipresent has not disdained to assume. But beyond the material forms there are others that are ideal and symbolic, but not less, if anything more real, more full of divine power than any actual physical manifestation. These are the mental images in which we worship God. The Hindu believes that to whatever form he brings his devotion, the love of God is bound to assume and vivify it, and we cannot say that the belief is irrational. For if there is a Consciousness in the universe and transcending it which answers to the yearning of all these creatures and perhaps Itself yearns towards them with the love of the Father, the Mother, the Friend, the Lover, and a love surpassing all these, then it is idle to suppose that It would assume or create for its own pleasure and

glory the forms of the universe, but would disdain as an offence to Its dignity or purity those which the love of the worshipper offers to It and which after all Itself has formed in his heart or his imagination. To these mental forms mental worship may be offered, and this is the higher way; or we may give the material foundation, the *pratiṣṭhā*, of a statue or pictured image to form a physical nodus for a physical act of worship.

In the formless also we worship God, in His qualities, in His Love, Power, Bliss, Wisdom, in the great cosmic Principles by which He manifests Himself to the eye of knowledge. We worship Him as the Impersonality manifested in these things or the Personality containing them. And we rise at the apex of the pinnacle into that which is not only formless, *arūpa*, but *nirguṇa*, qualityless, the indefinable, *anirdeśyam*, of the Gita. In our human ignorance, with our mental passion for degrees and distinctions, for superiorities and exclusions, we thus grade these things and say that this is superior, that is for ignorant and inferior souls. Do we know? The Theist looks down with reprobation on the form-adoring man-worshipping idolater and polytheist; the Adwaitin looks down with a calm and tolerant indulgence on the ignorance of the quality-adoring personality-bemused Theist. But it seems to us that God scorns nothing, that the Soul of all things may take as much delight in the prayer of a little child or the offering of a flower or a leaf before a pictured image as in the philosopher's leap from the summit of thought into the indefinable and unknowable and that he does best who can rise and widen into the shoreless realisation and yet keep the heart of the little child and the capacity of the seer of forms.

CWSA 1: 572-73

Sri Aurobindo



Once one has taken the path of Sri Aurobindo's yoga, should not one stop worshipping all other gods and goddesses?

One who truly follows the path given by Sri Aurobindo, as soon as he begins to have the experience of this path, will find it impossible to confine his consciousness to the worship of any god or goddess or even of all of them together.

CWM 10: 254

Mother,

I have been asked whether Sri Aurobindo's followers can or cannot worship Rama, Krishna and the other gods, whether they should perform religious ceremonies or stop them. I replied that we do not have any set rules that each one has to follow. Each one should do what he feels from within. I said that if one is sincere and wants to be a servant of the Lord, he can become one even without knowing the name of Mother and Sri Aurobindo, that Mother will respond to him in the form of Radha or the Virgin Mary or Hanuman. It all depends on sincerity and faith. We neither ask someone to perform the ceremony nor stop it. What do you say?

Quite right.

CWM 17: 234

The Mother

The Divine upon earth

People are so unwilling to recognise anything that expresses the Divine that they are ever on the alert to find fault, discover apparent defects and so reduce what is high to their own level. They are simply furious at being surpassed and when they do succeed in finding superficial "shortcomings" they are greatly pleased. But they forget that if they confront even the Divine, when its presence is on the earth, with their crude physical mind they are bound to meet only what is crude. They cannot hope to see what they are themselves incapable of seeing or unwilling to see. They are sure to misjudge the Divine if they consider the surface-aspect of its actions, for they will never understand that what seems similar to human activity is yet altogether dissimilar and proceeds from a source which is non-human.

The Divine, manifesting itself for the work on earth, appears to act as men do but really does not. It is not possible to evaluate it by such standards of the obvious and the apparent. But men are utterly in love with their own inferiority and cannot bear to submit to or admit a higher reality. This desire to find fault, this malicious passion to criticise and doubt what something in oneself tells one is a higher reality is the very stamp of humanity — marks out the merely human. Wherever, on the other hand, there is a spontaneous admiration for the true, the beautiful, the noble, there is something divine expressed. You should know for certain that it is the psychic being, the soul in you with which your physical consciousness comes in contact when your heart leaps out to worship and admire what you feel to be of a divine origin.

The moment you are in front of what you feel to be such, you should be moved to tears of joy. It is the mean creature who stops to reflect: "Yes, it is something great but it would be worth admiring if it fell to my lot, if I were the happy possessor of this quality, the instrument of this superior manifestation." Why should you bother about your ego when the main concern is that the Divine

should reveal itself wherever it wants and in whatever manner it chooses? You should feel fulfilled when it is thus expressed, you should be able to burst the narrow bonds of your miserable personality, and soar up in unselfish joy. This joy is the true sign that your soul has awakened and has sensed the truth. It is only then that you can open to the influence of the descending truth and be shaped by it. I remember occasions when I used to be moved to tears on seeing even children, even babies do something that was most divinely beautiful and simple. Feel that joy and you will be able to profit by the Divine's presence in your midst.

CWM 3: 158-59

Idols and worship

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.

But people in Europe do not have this inner sense, not at all. For them everything is like a surface — not even that, just a thin outer film with nothing behind — so they cannot feel it. And yet it is a fact that the presence is there; it is an absolutely real fact, I guarantee it.

CWM 10: 95

Idols and forms of gods and goddesses

But these idols aren't merely human creations — they are self-existent, aren't they?

Oh, I've had some very interesting revelations on this point, on the way people think and feel about it. I remember someone once made a little statue of Sri Aurobindo; he gave it a potbelly and... anyway, to me it was ridiculous. So I said, 'How could you make such a thing?!' He explained that even if it's a caricature for the ordinary eye, since it's an image of the one you consider God, or a god, or an Avatar, since it's the image of the one you worship, even if only a guru, it contains the spirit and the force of his presence, and this is what you worship, even in a crude form, even if the form is a caricature to the physical eye.

Someone made a large painting of Sri Aurobindo and myself, and they brought it here to show me. I said, 'Oh, it's dreadful!' It was... to the physical eye it was really dreadful. 'It's dreadful,' I said, 'we can't keep it.' Then immediately someone asked me for it, saying, 'I'm going to put it up in my house and do my puja before it.' Ah!... I couldn't help saying, 'But how could you put up a thing like that!' (It wasn't so much ugly as frightfully banal.) 'How can you do puja before something so commonplace and empty!' This person replied, 'Oh, to me it's not empty! It contains all the presence and all the force, and I shall worship it as that: the Presence and the Force.'

All this is based on the old idea that whatever the image — which we disdainfully call an 'idol' — whatever the external form of the deity may be, the presence of the thing represented is always there. And there is always someone — whether priest or initiate, sadhu or sannyasi — someone who has the power and (usually this is the priest's work) who draws the Force and the Presence down into it. And it's true, it's quite real — the Force and the Presence are there; and this (not the form in wood or stone or metal) is what is

worshipped: this Presence.

Europeans don't have the inner sense at all. To them, everything is like this (*gesture*), a surface — not even that, a film on the surface. And they can't feel anything behind. But it's an absolutely real fact that the Presence is there — I guarantee it. People have given me statuettes of various gods, little things in metal, wood or ivory; and as soon as I take one in my hand, the god is there. I have a Ganesh (I have been given several) and if I take it in my hand and look at it for a moment, he's there. I have a little one by my bedside where I work, eat, and meditate. And then there is a Narayana which comes from the Himalayas, from Badrinath. I use them both as paperweights for my handkerchiefs! (My handkerchiefs are kept on a little table next to my bed, and I keep Ganapati and Narayana on top of them.) And no one touches them but me — I pick them up, take a fresh handkerchief, and put them back again. Once I blended some nail polish myself, and before applying it, I put some on Ganapati's forehead and stomach and fingertips! We are on the best of terms, very friendly. So to me, you see, all this is very true.

Only....

Narayana came first. I put him there and told him to stay and be happy. A while later, I was given a very nice Ganapati; so I asked Narayana — I didn't ask his permission, I told him, 'Don't be angry, you know, but I'm going to give you a companion; I like you both very much, there's no preference; the other is much better looking, but you, you are Narayana!' I flattered him, I told him pleasant things, and he was perfectly happy.

It has always been like that for me — always. And I have never, never had the religious sense at all — you know, what people call this kind of... what they have in religions, especially in Europe. I see only the English word for it: awe, like a kind of terror. This always made me laugh! But I have always felt what's behind, the presences behind.

The Mother: Conversation with a Disciple, April 29, 1961

The three parts of worship

"It may be said that a complete act of divine love and worship has in it three parts that are the expressions of a single whole,— a practical worship of the Divine in the act, a symbol of worship in the form of the act expressing some vision and seeking or some relation with the Divine, an inner adoration and longing for oneness or feeling of oneness in the heart and soul and spirit."

Sri Aurobindo, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, SABCL, Vol. 20, pp. 152-53

I have not understood the first two parts very well.

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

Images of gods and goddesses

I have seen some of these forms in the vital and mental worlds, which were truly human creation. There is a force from beyond which manifests. But in these triple worlds of falsehood, truly man has created God in his own image — more or less — and there are beings which manifest in forms which are the result of the formative thought of man. And here, you see, it is truly frightful! I have seen some of these formations... (*silence*) and all this is so obscure, so incomprehensible, inexpressive...

Some of the gods are more ill-treated than others. For example, that poor Mahakali, you know, what things are done to her!... It is so *frightful*, it is unimaginable! But this form lives only in a very low world... yes, in the lowest vital; and what it possesses of the original being is something... a reflection so remote from the origin that it is unrecognisable. However, usually, it is this that is attracted by human consciousness. And when an idol is made, you see, and the priest brings down a form — when the ceremony takes place in a regular manner, he puts himself in an inner state of invocation and tries to bring down a form or an emanation of the godhead into the idol in order to give it a power — if the priest is truly a man with a power of invocation, he can succeed. But usually — there are exceptions to everything — but usually these people have been educated in the common ideas according to tradition. And so, when they think of the godhead whom they are invoking, they think of all the attributes and appearances that have been given to it, and the invocation is usually addressed to entities of the vital world or at best to those of the mental world, but not to the Being itself. And it is these small entities which manifest in one idol or another. All these idols in small temples or even in families — some people have their little shrines, you know, in their homes and keep an image of the godhead they worship — these entities manifest in them; sometimes the consequences are rather unfortunate, for these forms are precisely so remote

from the original godhead that... they are awkward formations. Some of those Kalis they worship in certain families are veritable monsters!

CWM 6: 275-76

Religious monuments

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 boo 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!"

I am sorry, but that's how it is. I tell you I have deliberately tried this experiment a little everywhere. Maybe I found some very tiny places, like a tiny village church at times, where there was a very quiet little spot for meditation, very still, very silent, where there was some aspiration; but this was so rare! I have seen the beautiful churches of Italy, magnificent places; they were full of these vital beings and full of terror. I remember painting in a basilica of Venice, and while I was working, in the confessional a priest was hearing the confession of a poor woman. Well, it was truly a frightful sight! I don't know what the priest was like, what his character was, he could not be seen — you know, don't you, that they are not seen. They are shut up in a box and receive the confession through a grille. There was such a dark and sucking power over him, and that poor woman was in such a state of fearful terror that it was truly painful to see it. And all these people believe this is something holy! But it is a web of the hostile vital forces which use all this to feed upon. Besides, in the invisible world hardly any beings love to be worshipped, except those of the vital. These, as I said, are quite pleased by it. And then, it gives them importance. They are puffed up with pride and feel very happy, and when they can get a herd of people to worship them they are quite satisfied.

CWM 6: 194-95

Worship and real gods

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 pujas. 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. 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: 195-97

The Mother

What should be the attitude of the sadhak of Sri Aurobindo's yoga towards the various forms of God worshipped by different religions in the past and the present? If he continues to worship them, will it create an obstacle to his progress and prevent his realisation of his aim?

A benevolent goodwill towards all worshippers.

An enlightened indifference towards all religions.

As for the relation with the beings of the Overmind, if this relation exists already, each case must have its own solution.

CWM 12: 308

The Mother

Spiritual value of worship

Sweet Mother, does the worship offered to the goddess Durga and to Kali have any spiritual value?

That depends on who offers the worship.

It is not that which is of importance for the spiritual value. For the integrality and the complete truth of the Yoga it is important not to limit one's aspiration to one form or another. But from the spiritual point of view, whatever the object of worship, if the movement is perfectly sincere, if the self-giving is integral and absolute, the spiritual result can be the same; for, whatever object you take, through it — sometimes in spite of it, despite it — you always reach the supreme Reality, in the measure and proportion of the sincerity of your consecration.

That is why it is always said that, no matter what aspect of the Divine you adore or even what guide you choose, if you are perfect in your self-giving and absolutely sincere, you are *sure* to attain the spiritual goal.

But the result is no longer the same when you want to realise the integral yoga. Then you must not limit yourself in any way, even in the path of your consecration.... Only, these are two very different things.

Spiritual realisation — as it was formerly understood, as it is still commonly understood — is union with the Supreme in some way or other, either within you or through some form or other; it is the fusion of your being with the Supreme, with the Absolute, almost the disappearance of your individuality in this fusion. And that depends absolutely on the sincerity and the integrality of your self-giving, rather than on the choice you make of that to which you want to give yourself. For... the very sincerity of your aspiration will make you cross all limitations and find the Supreme, for you carry Him within yourself.

Whether you seek Him outside, whether you seek Him within,

whether you seek Him in a form or without form, if your aspiration is sincere enough and your resolution sincere enough, you are sure to reach the goal.

But if you want to make the complementary movement of which Sri Aurobindo speaks, that is to say, to return to the outer consciousness and world after having realised this union in yourself, and transform this outer consciousness and world, then in this case you cannot limit yourself in any way, for otherwise you will not be able to accomplish your work.

Essentially, you must be able to find this oneness with the Divine in all forms, all aspects, in every way that has been used to reach Him. And you must go beyond that and find a new way.

So, the first point to clear up in your thought — and it is a point of capital importance: you must not confuse the integral yoga with other spiritual realisations, which may be very high but cover a very limited field, for theirs is a movement only in depth.

You may pierce a hole, you see, with your aspiration and make a movement in depth through anything at all. All depends on the intensity and sincerity of your aspiration — on the sincerity, that is to say, on how far your self-giving is complete, integral, absolute. But it does not depend on the form you have chosen: necessarily, you will have to pass through in order to find what is behind.

But if you want to transform your nature and your being, and if you want to participate in the creation of a new world, then this aspiration, this sharp and linear point is no longer enough. One must include everything and contain everything in one's consciousness.

Naturally, that is much more difficult.

CWM 8: 243-45

Religious value of worship

Mother, what is this "divine element in human nature" which always demands symbols for the completeness of its spiritual satisfaction?

It is precisely that part of the being which is not satisfied with abstractions and with escaping from life and evading it and leaving it as it is. It is that part of the being which wants to be integral, wants to be integrally transformed or at any rate to participate integrally in the inner adoration.

In every normal being there is the necessity, the need — an absolute need to translate into a physical form what he feels and wants internally. 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: 245-47

The Mother

"In any cult the symbol, the significant rite or expressive figure is not only a moving and enriching aesthetic element, but a physical means by which the human being begins to make outwardly definite the emotion and aspiration of his heart, to confirm it and to dynamise it. For if without a spiritual aspiration worship is meaningless and vain, yet the aspiration also without the act and the form is a disembodied and, for life, an incompletely effective power. It is unhappily the fate of all forms in human life to become crystallised, purely formal and therefore effete, and although form and cult preserve always their power for the man who can still enter into their meaning, the majority come to use the ceremony as a mechanical rite and the symbol as a"

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and therefore effete, and although form and cult preserve always their power for the man who can still enter into their meaning, the majority come to use the ceremony as a mechanical rite and the symbol as a lifeless sign and because that kills the soul of religion, cult and form have in the end to be changed or thrown aside altogether. There are those even to whom all cult and form are for this reason suspect and offensive; but few can dispense with the support of outward symbols and even a certain divine element in human nature demands them always for the completeness of its spiritual satisfaction. Always the symbol is legitimate in so far as it is true, sincere, beautiful and delightful, and even one may say that a spiritual consciousness without any aesthetic or emotional content is not entirely or at any rate not integrally spiritual. In the spiritual life the basis of the act is a spiritual consciousness perennial and renovating, moved to express itself always in new forms or able to renew the truth of a form always by the flow of the spirit, and to so express itself and make every action a living symbol of some truth of the soul is the very nature of its creative vision and impulse. It is so that the spiritual seeker must deal with life and transmute its form and glorify it in its essence."

CWSA 23: 163-64

Sri Aurobindo

The beings of the subtle world of the life-force, with which our vital is connected, live and flourish on the worship of their devotees, and that is why they are always inspiring new cults and religions so that their feasts of worship and adulation may never come to an end.

CWM 3: 137

The Mother



For worship lifts the worshipper's bowed strength
Close to the god's pride and bliss his soul adores.

Savitri:125

Sri Aurobindo

Surrender

The Mother's Photograph

When I get sleepy during meditation, I often just sit in a quietly concentrated wakefulness and look at the Mother's photo or your photo. Can I get the same amount of benefit simply by looking at Mother's photo or yours with all the concentration I can command?

Yes, very many do.

Sometimes in that state I pray; sometimes the inside is void — no thoughts or words at all, so I simply gaze. Am I pursuing the right line?

Yes.

CWSA 32: 597

When the meditation is done with the photo, it is better done with open eyes.

CWSA 29: 313

Feeling the Mother's Presence through a Photograph

When I sit in meditation before the Mother's photographs or the painting of her feet, I get more Force than when I sit at a distance — on my easy chair, for example. I have noticed that this happens invariably and I suppose it is not subjective merely. But I want to know the real truth from you.

No, it is not subjective merely. By your meditating near them, you have been able to enter through them into communion with the Mother and something of her presence and power is there.

*

Your experience about the photograph was a very fine and true

experience. The Mother's presence can be felt through the photograph by one who regards it with devotion towards her. It was her true presence that was there, her subtle physical presence and all you felt was true. It shows that your physical mind is opening to the true consciousness. It is quite sure that this will grow and the remnants of the old movements are bound to disappear.

CWSA 32: 183-84

You spoke of my friend X as receiving the Mother's Force.

"*In contact with*" the Divine Force which is the force of the Mother — that was what I wrote, I believe.

But which Mother?

How many Mothers are there?

Ours or some universal Mother as people say?

Who is this some universal Mother? How many of these some universal Mothers are there?

I ask because I do not understand how, without invoking the Mother, he gets her Force.

Have you not put him by the photograph and his letter in connection with us? Has he not turned in this direction? Has he not met Y and been impressed by him — a third channel of contact? That is quite sufficient to help him to a contact if he has the faith and the Yogic stress in him.

CWSA 32: 238-39

Sri Aurobindo

Surrender to the Divine and surrender to the Guru are said to be two different things. Is it really so?

No. In surrendering to the Guru, it is to the Divine in him that one surrenders — if it were only to a human entity it would be ineffective. But it is the consciousness of the Divine Presence that makes the Guru a real Guru, so that even if the disciple surrenders to him thinking of the human being to whom he surrenders, that Presence would still make it effective.

Does surrender to the formless Divine leave the being subject to the gunas and ego to a certain extent?

Yes — because only the static part would be free in formlessness, the active Nature would be still in the play of the gunas. Many think they are free from the ego because they get the sense of the formless Existence, they do not see that the egoistic element remains in their action just as before.

Is not surrender to the Divine in form — as the Guru — higher than the surrender to the formless Divine?

It is more dynamic.

What makes the surrender to the Guru so grand and glorious as to be called the surrender beyond all surrenders?

Because through it you surrender not only to the impersonal but to the personal, not only to the Divine in yourself but to the Divine outside you; you get a chance for the surpassing of ego not only by retreat into the Self where ego does not exist, but in the personal nature where it is the ruler. It is the sign of the will to complete surrender to the total Divine, *samagraḥ māṁ, mānuṣāṅtanam āṠritam*. Of course it must be a genuine spiritual surrender for all this to be true.

If absolute surrender to the Guru leaves one helpless like a puppet

in the hands of forces — what good is it? I think what is harmful is to surrender only to the Divine in the Guru and not to the Divine in one's Self. It is this one-sided surrender which is harmful.

What is harmful is to surrender to something in yourself which flatters your ego and which you call the Divine. It is that which makes you a puppet in the hands of Forces.

CWSA 35: 396-97

There is not much spiritual meaning in keeping open to the Mother if you withhold your surrender. Self-giving or surrender is demanded of those who practise this Yoga, because without such a progressive surrender of the being it is quite impossible to get anywhere near the goal.

*

To seek after the Impersonal is the way of those who want to withdraw from life, but usually they try by their own effort, and not by an opening of themselves to a superior Power or by the way of surrender; for the Impersonal is not something that guides or helps, but something to be attained and it leaves each man to attain it according to the way and capacity of his nature. On the other hand by an opening and surrender to the Mother one can realise the Impersonal and every other aspect of Truth also.

CWSA 32: 141

Sri Aurobindo

Even the gods have to make their surrender to the Supreme if the Divine creation is to be realised upon earth.

CWM 15: 13

The Mother



Sweet Mother, Last August Y met me and asked whether it is permissible for disciples of Sri Aurobindo and Mother to do worship of other gods and goddesses at their Centres. He said that a lot of confusion has been caused by those who have been writing and preaching that the Supramental Yoga can be done and its goal reached through the deities to whom people are accustomed. The old Puranas, the Tulsi Ramayana, etc. are being expounded with a view to promote the ideal of Sri Aurobindo and Mother. Their view is that Sri Krishna, Rama, Sita — all can give the truth of the Supramental.

Those who still believe in gods can certainly continue to worship them if they feel like it — but they must know that this creed and this worship has nothing to do with the teaching of Sri Aurobindo and no connection whatever with the Supramental Realisation.

CWM 17: 387-88

The Mother



The only necessity in this sadhana is to open yourself to the Divine Force; if one is open the necessary understanding or knowledge will come of itself through spiritual experience.

Sri Aurobindo



*Our Gratitude and consecration to the
Mother and Sri Aurobindo*

Sri Aurobindo Society, Nairobi Centre, Kenya

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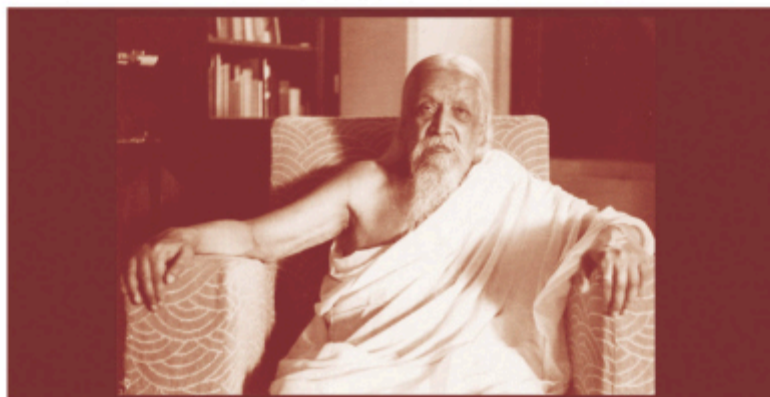
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