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Significance of Death



Flower: Immortality

*Forms are in perpetual transformation;
identify yourself with the Immortal Consciousness
and you will become it.*

(Spiritual significance and explanation of the flower given by the Mother)

Botanical name:
Gomphrena globosa

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SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH

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Even if Science — physical Science or occult Science — were to discover the necessary conditions or means for an indefinite survival of the body, still, if the body could not adapt itself so as to become a fit instrument of expression for the inner growth, the soul would find some way to abandon it and pass on to a new incarnation. The material or physical causes of death are not its sole or its true cause; its true inmost reason is the spiritual necessity for the evolution of a new being.

CWSA 22: 854

Sri Aurobindo

Significance of Death

Death as a fact has been attached to all life upon earth; but man understands it in a different sense from the meaning Nature originally put into it. In man and in the animals that are nearest to his level, the necessity of death has taken a special form and significance to their consciousness; but the subconscious knowledge in this lower Nature which supports it is a feeling of the necessity of renewal and change and transformation.

It was the conditions of matter upon earth that made death indispensable. The whole sense of the evolution of matter has been a growth from a first state of unconsciousness to an increasing consciousness. And in this process of growth dissolution of forms became an inevitable necessity, as things actually took place. For a fixed form was needed in order that the organised individual consciousness might have a stable support. And yet it is the fixity of the form that made death inevitable. Matter had to assume forms; individualisation and the concrete embodiment of life-forces or consciousness-forces were impossible without it and without these there would have been lacking the first conditions of organised existence on the plane of matter. But a definite and concrete formation contracts the tendency to become at once rigid and hard and petrified. The individual form persisted as a too binding mould; it cannot follow the movements of the forces; it cannot change in harmony with the progressive change in the universal dynamism; it cannot meet continually Nature's demand or keep pace with her; it gets out of the current. At a certain point of this growing disparity and disharmony between the form and the force that presses upon it, a complete dissolution of the form is unavoidable. A new form must be created; a new harmony and parity made possible. This is the true significance of death and this is its use in Nature. But if the form can become more quick and pliant and the cells of the body can be awakened to change with

the changing consciousness, there would be no need of a drastic dissolution, death would be no longer inevitable.

*

The mental and the vital beings of man follow as best they can the movement of the universal forces, and the stream of the world's inner transformation and evolution carries them a certain way; but the body bound to the law of the most material nature, moves very slowly. After some years, seventy or eighty, a hundred or two hundred, — and that is perhaps the maximum, — the dislocation is so serious that the outer being falls to pieces. The divergence between the demand and the answer, the increasing inability and irresponsiveness of the body, brings about the phenomenon of death. ...

If the whole being could simultaneously advance in its progressive transformation, keeping pace with the inner march of the universe, there would be no illness, there would be no death. But it would have to be literally the whole being integrally from the highest planes, where it is more plastic and yields in the required measure to transforming forces, down to the most material, which is by nature rigid, stationary, refractory to any rapid remoulding change.

CWM 3: 36-37, 87-90

The Mother

*This then is the necessity and justification of
Death, not as a denial of Life,
but as a process of Life...*

CWSA 21: 206

Sri Aurobindo

Oppositions — A Stimulus to Progress

Thoughts and Aphorisms: Sri Aurobindo

88 – This world was built by Death that he might live. Wilt thou abolish death? Then life too will perish. Thou canst not abolish death, but thou mayst transform it into a greater living.

89 – This world was built by Cruelty that she might love. Wilt thou abolish cruelty? Then love too will perish. Thou canst not abolish cruelty, but thou mayst transfigure it into its opposite, into a fierce Love and Delightfulness.

90 – This world was built by Ignorance and Error that they might know. Wilt thou abolish ignorance and error? Then knowledge too will perish. Thou canst not abolish ignorance and error, but thou mayst transmute them into the utter and effulgent exceeding of reason.

91 – If Life alone were and not death, there could be no immortality; if love were alone and not cruelty, joy would be only a tepid and ephemeral rapture; if reason were alone and not ignorance, our highest attainment would not exceed a limited rationality and worldly wisdom.

92 – Death transformed becomes Life that is Immortality; Cruelty transfigured becomes Love that is intolerable ecstasy; Ignorance transmuted becomes Light that leaps beyond wisdom and knowledge.

The Mother's Comments:

It is the same idea, that is, opposition and contraries are a stimulus to progress. Because to say that without cruelty Love would

be tepid... The principle of Love as it exists beyond the Manifested and the Non-Manifested has nothing to do with either tepidness or cruelty. Only, Sri Aurobindo's idea would seem to be that opposites are the quickest and most effective means of shaping Matter so that it can intensify its manifestation.

As an experience, this is absolutely certain, in the sense that, first of all, when one comes into contact with eternal Love, the supreme Love, one immediately has — how to put it? — a perception, a sensation — it is not an understanding, it is something very concrete: even the most illumined material consciousness, however much it has been moulded and prepared, is incapable of manifesting That. The first thing one feels is this kind of incapacity. Then comes an experience: something which manifests a form of — one cannot call it exactly “cruelty”, because it is not cruelty as we know it — but within the totality of circumstances, a vibration appears and, with a certain intensity, refuses love as it is manifested here. It is precisely this: something in the material world which refuses the manifestation of love as it exists at present. I am not speaking of the ordinary world, I am speaking of the present consciousness at its highest. It is an experience, I am speaking of something that has happened. So the part of the consciousness which has been struck by this opposition makes a direct appeal to the origin of Love, *with an intensity which it would not have without the experience of this refusal*. Limits are broken and a flood pours down which *could not* have manifested before; and something is expressed which was not expressed before.

When one sees this, there is obviously a similar experience from the point of view of what we call life and death. It is this kind of constant “brooding” or presence of Death and the possibility of death, as it is said in *Savitri*: we have a constant companion throughout the journey from cradle to grave; we are constantly accompanied by this threat or presence of Death. Well, along with this, in the cells, there is a call for a Power of Eternity, with an in-

tensity which would not be there except for this constant threat. Then one understands, one begins to feel quite concretely that all these things are only ways of intensifying the manifestation, of making it progress, of making it more perfect. And if the means are crude, it is because the manifestation itself is very crude. And as it becomes more perfect and fit to manifest that which is *eternally progressive*, the very crude means will give way to subtler ones and the world will progress without any need for such brutal oppositions. This is simply because the world is still in its infancy and human consciousness is still entirely in its infancy.

This is a very concrete experience.

It follows that when the earth no longer needs to die in order to progress, there will be no more death. When the earth no longer needs to suffer in order to progress, there will be no more suffering. And when the earth no longer needs to hate in order to love, there will be no more hatred.

This is the quickest and most effective means to bring creation out of its inertia and lead it towards its fulfilment.

... Perhaps it will go quickly.... But the question comes to this — an aspiration that is sufficient, intense and effective enough, to attract That which can transform complication into Simplicity, cruelty into Love, and so on.

CWM 10: 166-68

The Mother

Q: Should one respect the body of a dead person? If so, how?

One should respect everything, living and dead, and know that everything lives in the Divine Consciousness.

The respect should be felt in the heart and the inner attitude.

CWM 15: 121

The Mother

If There Were No Siege of Death

“Death is the question Nature puts continually to Life and her reminder to it that it has not yet found itself. If there were no siege of death, the creature would be bound forever in the form of an imperfect living. Pursued by death he awakes to the idea of perfect life and seeks out its means and its possibility.”

Thoughts and Glimpses, SABCL, Vol. 16, p. 386

This is a question which every person whose consciousness is awakened a little has asked himself at least once in his life. There is in the depths of the being such a need to perpetuate, to prolong, to develop life, that the moment one has a first contact with death, which, although it may be quite an accidental contact, is yet inevitable, there is a sort of recoil in the being.

In persons who are sensitive, it produces horror; in others, indignation. There is a tendency to ask oneself: “What is this monstrous farce in which one takes part without wanting to, without understanding it? Why are we born, if it is only to die? Why all this effort for development, progress, the flowering of the faculties, if it is to come to a diminution ending in decline and disintegration?...” Some feel a revolt in them, others less strong feel despair and always this question arises: “If there is a conscious Will behind all that, this Will seems to be monstrous.”

But here Sri Aurobindo tells us that this was an indispensable means of awakening in the consciousness of matter the need for perfection, the necessity of progress, that without this catastrophe, all beings would have been satisfied with the condition they were in — perhaps.... This is not certain.

But then, we have to take things as they are and tell ourselves that we must find the way out of it all.

The fact is that everything is in a state of perpetual progressive development, that is, the whole creation, the whole universe

is advancing towards a perfection which seems to recede as one goes forward towards it, for what seemed a perfection at a certain moment is no longer perfect after a time. The most subtle states of being in the consciousness follow this progression even as it is going on, and the higher up the scale one goes, the more closely does the rhythm of the advance resemble the rhythm of the universal development, and approach the rhythm of the divine development; but the material world is rigid by nature, transformation is slow, very slow, there, almost imperceptible for the measurement of time as human consciousness perceives it... and so there is a constant disequilibrium between the inner and outer movement, and this lack of balance, this incapacity of the outer forms to follow the movement of the inner progress brings about the necessity of decomposition and the change of forms. But if, into this matter, one could infuse enough consciousness to obtain the same rhythm, if matter could become plastic enough to follow the inner progression, this rupture of balance would not occur, and death would no longer be necessary.

So, according to what Sri Aurobindo tells us, Nature has found this rather radical means to awaken in the material consciousness the necessary aspiration and plasticity.

It is obvious that the most dominant characteristic of matter is inertia, and that, if there were not this violence, perhaps the individual consciousness would be so inert that rather than change it would accept to live in a perpetual imperfection.... That is possible. Anyway, this is how things are made, and for us who know a little more, there is only one thing that remains to be done, it is to change all this, as far as we have the means, by calling the Force, the Consciousness, the new Power which is capable of infusing into material substance the vibration which can transform it, make it plastic, supple, progressive.

Obviously the greatest obstacle is the attachment to things as they are; but even Nature as a whole finds that those who have

the deeper knowledge want to go too fast: she likes her meanings, she likes her successive attempts, her failures, her fresh beginnings, her new inventions; she likes the fantasy of the path, the unexpectedness of the experience; one could almost say that for her the longer it takes, the more enjoyable it is.

But even of the best games one tires. There comes a time when one needs to change them and one could dream of a game in which it would no longer be necessary to destroy in order to progress, where the zeal for progress would be enough to find new means, new expressions, where the *élan* would be ardent enough to overcome inertia, lassitude, lack of understanding, fatigue, indifference.

Why does this body, as soon as some progress has been made, feel the need to sit down? It is tired. **It says, "Oh! you must wait. I must be given time to rest." This is what leads it to death.** If it felt within itself that ardour to do always better, become more transparent, more beautiful, more luminous, eternally young, one could escape from this macabre joke of Nature.

For her this is of no importance. She sees the whole, she sees the totality; she sees that nothing is lost, that it is only recombining quantities, numberless minute elements, without any importance, which are put back into a pot and mixed well — and something new comes out of it. But that game is not amusing for everybody. And if in one's consciousness one could be as vast as she, more powerful than she, why shouldn't one do the same thing in a better way?

This is the problem which confronts us now. With the addition, the new help of this Force which has descended, which is manifesting, working, why shouldn't one take in hand this tremendous game and make it more beautiful, more harmonious, more true?

It only needs brains powerful enough to receive this Force and formulate the possible course of action. There must be conscious

beings powerful enough to convince Nature that there are other methods than hers.... This looks like madness, but all new things have always seemed like madness before they became realities.

The hour has come for this madness to be realised. And since we are all here for reasons that are perhaps unknown to most of you, but are still very conscious reasons, we may set ourselves to fulfil that madness — at least it will be worth while living it.

CWM 9: 33-36

The Mother

374. What is this thing thou callest death? Can God die? O thou who fearest death, it is Life that has come to thee sporting with a death-head and wearing a mask of terror.

375. There is a means to attain physical immortality and death is by our choice, not by Nature's compulsion. But who would care to wear one coat for a hundred years or be confined in one narrow & changeless lodging unto a long eternity?

CWSA 12: 473

Sri Aurobindo

What is Death — Physically

Q: What is death, from the physical point of view?

Death is the phenomenon of decentralisation and dispersion of the cells which make up the physical body.

The consciousness is, by its very nature, immortal, and in order to manifest in the physical world, it assumes more or less lasting material forms.

The material substance is in course of transformation in order to become a multiform and increasingly perfect and lasting mode of expression for this consciousness.

Q: Does the decentralisation occur all at once or by degrees?

Everything does not disperse all at once; it takes a long time.

The central will of the physical being abdicates its will to hold all the cells together. That is the first phenomenon. It accepts dissolution for one reason or another. One of the strongest reasons is the sense of an irreparable disharmony; the other is a kind of disgust with continuing the effort of coordination and harmonisation. In fact, there are innumerable reasons, but unless there is a violent accident, it is above all this will to maintain cohesion which abdicates for one reason or another, or without reason. It is this which inevitably precedes death.

Q: In the expression “dispersion of the cells”, doesn’t the word “dispersion” have a special meaning? If so, what is it?

I used the word dispersion of the cells in its most concrete sense. When the concentration which forms the body comes to an end and the body dissolves, all the cells that have been especially developed and have become conscious of the divine Presence within them, are scattered and enter other combinations in which they awaken, by contagion, the consciousness of the Presence that each

one has had. And in this way, by this phenomenon of concentration, development and dispersion, all matter evolves and learns by contagion, develops by contagion, has the experience by contagion.

Naturally, the cell dissolves with the body. It is the consciousness of the cells that enters other combinations.

Q: What causes the physical being's disgust with continuing the effort of coordination and harmonisation?

Usually, this disgust occurs when there is, in one part of the being (an important part, either vital or mental), an absolute refusal to progress. And so, physically, this is manifested as a refusal to strive against the deterioration which comes with time.

Q: Where is the connection between the central will of the physical being and the cells established? And how?

The cells have an inner composition or structure which corresponds to the structure of the universe. So the link is established between identical external and internal states.... It is not "external", but it is external for the individual. That is, the cell, in its internal composition, receives the vibration of the corresponding state in the composition of the whole. Each cell is composed of different radiances, with a wholly luminous centre, and the connection is established between light and light. That is, the will, the central light, acts on the cell by touching the corresponding lights, by an inner contact of the being. Each cell is a world in miniature corresponding to the whole.

Q: How does the will, the central light, which is not material, act on the gross matter of the cell?

It is just like asking, "How does the will act on matter?" All life is like that. ... the whole existence is the result of the action of the

will, that without will, matter would be inert and immobile and that it is precisely the fact that the vibration of will acts on matter that makes life possible. Otherwise there would be no life.

Q: Is the will for progress enough to prevent the deterioration that comes with time? How can the physical being prevent this deterioration?

That is precisely what the transformation of the body is: the physical cells not only become conscious, but receptive to the true Consciousness-Force; that is, they allow the working of this higher Consciousness. That is the work of transformation.

Q: How does one become conscious of the physical being?

Mankind, nearly all of mankind, is conscious only of the physical being. With education, the number of men who are conscious of their vital and mind is increasing. As for the human beings who are conscious of their psychic being, they are relatively few. If you mean, “How does one awaken the consciousness of the physical being?”, that is precisely the aim of physical education. It is physical education that teaches the cells to be conscious. But for the development of the brain, it is study, observation, intelligent education, above all observation and reasoning. And naturally, for the whole education of the consciousness from the point of view of character, it is yoga.

CWM 10-27-30, 83-84

The Mother

Q: After death, once separated from his physical being, from his vital and mental beings, how is the soul conscious of being, of existing?

The soul is a spark of the Supreme Divine; I do not see how the Lord has need of a body in order to be conscious of his being.

CWM 11: 61

The Mother



*He is Eternity lured from hour to hour,
He is infinity in a little space:
He is immortality in the arms of death.*

(Savitri 4th ed., p. 516)

Moment of Death

Right attitude towards death

Whatever the circumstance, if your mind is accustomed to look at it as something favourable, it will no longer be unpleasant for you. This is quite well known; as long as the mind refuses to accept a thing, struggles against it, tries to obstruct it, there are torments, difficulties, storms, inner struggles and all suffering. But the minute the mind says, "Good, this is what has to come, it is thus that it must happen", whatever happens, you are content. There are people who have acquired such control of their mind over their body that they feel nothing; I told you this the other day about certain mystics: if they think the suffering inflicted upon them is going to help them cross the stages in a moment and give them a sort of stepping-stone to attain the Realisation, the goal they have put before them, union with the Divine, they no longer feel the suffering at all. Their body is as it were galvanised by the mental conception. This has happened very often, it is a very common experience among those who truly have enthusiasm. And after all, if one must for some reason or other leave one's body and take a new one, is it not better to make of one's death something magnificent, joyful, enthusiastic, than to make it a disgusting defeat? Those who cling on, who try by every possible means to delay the end even by a minute or two, who give you an example of frightful anguish, show that they are not conscious of their soul....

CWM 4: 354

Death is only a means

After all, it is perhaps a means, isn't it? One can change this accident into a means; if one is conscious one can make a beautiful thing of it, a very beautiful thing, as of everything. And note, those who do not fear it, who are not anxious, who can die without any sordidness are those who never think about it, who are

not haunted all the time by this “horror” facing them which they must escape and which they try to push as far away from them as they can. These, when the occasion comes, can lift their head, smile and say, “Here I am.”

It is they who have the will to make the best possible use of their life, it is they who say, “I shall remain here as long as it is necessary, to the last second, and I shall not lose one moment to realise my goal”; these, when the necessity comes, put up the best show. Why? — It is very simple, because they live in their ideal, the truth of their ideal; because that is the real thing for them, the very reason of their being, and in all things they can see this ideal, this reason of existence, and never do they come down into the sordidness of material life.

So, the conclusion:

One must never wish for death.

One must never will to die.

One must never be afraid to die.

And in all circumstances one must will to exceed oneself.

CWM 4: 354

Fear of death

When one has to die one dies, and when one has not to die, one does not die. Even when you are in mortal danger, if it is not your hour to die, you will not die, and even if you are out of all danger, just a scratch on your foot will be enough to make you die, for there are people who have died of a pin-scratch on the foot — because the time had come. Therefore, fear has no sense. What you can do is to rise to a state of consciousness where you can say, “It is like that, we accept the fact because it seems to be recognised as an inevitable fact. But I do not need to worry, for it will come only when it must come. So I don’t need to feel afraid: when it is not to come, it will not come to me, but when it must come to me, it will come. And as it will come to me inevitably, it

is better I do not fear the thing; on the contrary, one must accept what is perfectly natural.” This is a well-known remedy, that is to say, very much in use.

There is another, a little more difficult, but better, I believe. It lies in telling oneself: “This body is not I”, and in trying to find in oneself the part which is truly one’s self, until one has found one’s psychic being. And when one has found one’s psychic being — immediately, you understand — one has the sense of immortality. And one knows that what goes out or what comes in is just a matter of convenience: “I am not going to weep over a pair of shoes I put aside when it is full of holes! When my pair of shoes is worn out I cast it aside, and I do not weep.” Well, the psychic being has taken this body because it needed to use it for its work, but when the time comes to leave the body, that is to say, when one must leave it because it is no longer of any use for some reason or other, one leaves the body and has no fear. It is quite a natural gesture — and it is done without the least regret, that’s all.

And the moment you are in your psychic being, you have that feeling, spontaneously, effortlessly. You soar above the physical life and have the sense of immortality. As for me, I consider this the best remedy. ...

Now, a third thing also one must know, but for this one has to be a mighty yogi. For this means knowing that death is not an inevitable thing, it is an accident which has been occurring till now (which seems in any case to have always occurred till now), and that we have put it into our head and our will to conquer this accident and overcome it. But it is so terrible, so formidable a battle against all the laws of Nature, against all collective suggestions, all earthly habits, that unless, as I have said, you are a first-rate warrior whom nothing frightens, it is better not to begin the battle. You must be an absolutely intrepid hero, for at every step, at every second you have to fight a battle against all established things. So it is not a very easy thing.

CWM 5: 315-16

One dies only if one consents to die

You have said: "One can neither hasten nor delay its hour." But death comes if one stops progressing. So, if one progresses, one can put off the hour. Or does this mean that from one's birth the day and the moment of death are predestined?

No. This is altogether something else and on another plane. I have written elsewhere that one dies only when one consents to die — which seems to contradict what I have said here. But this is the truth. I have told you this once already, I believe; in any case, I have written it somewhere. There are two points of view. Here I have taken quite an ordinary, material point of view, that of the physical consciousness. But I have explained somewhere that there are, as it were, different "layers of determinisms" in our being. The physical existence has a determinism; the vital existence has a determinism; the mental existence has a determinism; the higher mental, the psychic have a determinism. And then the higher existences have determinisms — the supramental existence has a determinism. And the determinism of everyone comes from the combination of all these determinisms (I am sure I have written this somewhere). If, for instance, at a given moment, when the entire physical determinism must necessarily bring death, you suddenly enter into contact with an extremely high determinism, like the supramental one, for example, and you succeed in joining the two, you change your physical determinism completely at that moment: death which had been determined by the physical determinism is abolished, and the conditions change and are pushed back. ...

If you do not make a higher determinism intervene, truly you can change nothing. That is the only way of changing your physical determinism. If you remain in your physical consciousness and want to change your determinism, you cannot...

CWM 6: 47-49

Consciously organizing the different parts around the soul

Sometimes when people are dying, they know that they are about to die. Why don't they tell the spirit to go away?

Ah! well, that depends upon the people. Two things are necessary. First of all, nothing in your being, no part of your being should want to die. That does not happen often. You have always a defeatist in you somewhere: something that is tired, something that is disgusted, something that has had enough of it, something that is lazy, something that does not want to struggle and says: "Well! Ah! Let it be finished, so much the better." That is sufficient, you are dead.

But it is a fact: if nothing, absolutely nothing in you consents to die, you will not die. For someone to die, there is always a second, perhaps the hundredth part of a second when he gives his consent. If there is not this second of consent, he does not die.

I knew people who should have really died according to all physical and vital laws; and they refused. They said: "No, I will not die", and they lived. There are others who do not need at all to die, but they are of that kind and say: "Ah! Well! Yes, so much the better, it will be finished", and it is finished. Even that much, even nothing more than that: you need not have a persistent wish, you have only to say: "Well, yes, I have had enough!" and it is finished. So it is truly like that. As you say, you may have death standing by your bedside and tell him: "I do not want you, go away", and it will be obliged to go away. But usually one gives way, for one must struggle, one must be strong, one must be very courageous and enduring, must have a great faith in the importance of life; like someone, for example, who feels very strongly that he has still something to do and he must absolutely do it. But who is sure he has not within him the least bit of a defeatist, somewhere, who just yields and says: "It is all right"?... It is here, the necessity of unifying oneself.

Whatever the way we follow, the subject we study, we always arrive at the same result. The most important thing for an individual is to unify himself around his divine centre; in that way he becomes a true individual, master of himself and his destiny. Otherwise, he is a plaything of forces that toss him about like a piece of cork on a river. He goes where he does not want to go, he is made to do things he does not want to do, and finally he falls into a hole without having the strength to hold on. But if you are consciously organised, unified around the divine centre, ruled and directed by it, you are master of your destiny. That is worth the trouble of attempting....

CWM 5: 137-38

A dark and dangerous exit

Why does one suffer when one commits suicide?

Why does one commit suicide? Because one is a coward.... When one is cowardly one always suffers.

In the next life one suffers again?

The psychic being comes with a definite purpose to go through a set of experiences and to learn and make progress. Then if you leave before its work is finished it will have to come back to do it again under much more difficult conditions. So all that you have avoided in one life you will find again in another, and more difficult. And even without leaving in this way, if you have difficulties to overcome in life, you have what we usually call a test to pass, you see; well, if you don't pass it or turn your back upon it, if you go away instead of passing it, you will have to pass it another time and it will be much more difficult than before.

Now people, you know, are extremely ignorant and they think that it is like this: there is life, and then death; life is a bunch of troubles, and then death is an eternal peace. But it is not at all

like that. And usually when one goes out of life in an altogether arbitrary way and in an ignorant and obscure passion, one goes straight into a vital world made of all these passions and all this ignorance. So the troubles one wanted to avoid one finds again without even having the protection which the body gives, for — if you have ever had a nightmare, that is, a rash excursion in the vital world, well, your remedy is to wake yourself up, that is to say, to rush back immediately into your body. But when you have destroyed your body you no longer have a body to protect you. So you find yourself in a perpetual nightmare, which is not very pleasant. For, to avoid the nightmare you must be in a psychic consciousness, and when you are in a psychic consciousness you may be quite sure that things won't trouble you. It is indeed the movement of an ignorant darkness and, as I said, a great cowardice in front of the sustained effort to be made.

CWM 7: 23-24

The Mother

Constant Remembrance and the Moment of Departure

What the thought, the inner regard, the faith, *OraddhD*, settles itself upon with a complete and definite insistence, into that our inner being tends to change. This tendency becomes a decisive force when we go to those higher spiritual and self-evolved experiences which are less dependent on external things than is our ordinary psychology, enslaved as that is to outward Nature. There we can see ourselves steadily becoming that on which we keep our minds fixed and to which we constantly aspire. Therefore there any lapse of the thought, any infidelity of the memory means always a retardation of the change or some fall in its process and a going back towards what we were before, — at least so long as we have not substantially and irrevocably fixed our new becoming. When we have done that, when we have made it normal to our experience, the memory of it remains self-existent because that now is the natural form of our consciousness. In the critical mo-

ment of passing from the mortal plane of living, the importance of our then state of consciousness becomes evident. But it is not a deathbed remembrance at variance with or insufficiently prepared by the whole tenor of our life and our past subjectivity that can have this saving power. The thought of the Gita here is not on a par with the indulgences and facilities of popular religion; it has nothing in common with the crude fancies that make the absolution and last unction of the priest, an edifying “Christian” death after an unedifying profane life or the precaution or accident of a death in sacred Benares or holy Ganges a sufficient machinery of salvation. The divine subjective becoming on which the mind has to be fixed firmly in the moment of the physical death, *yaW smaran bhDvaW tyajati ante kalevaram*, must have been one into which the soul was at each moment growing inwardly during the physical life, *sadDtad-bhDva-bhDvitaU*. “Therefore,” says the divine Teacher, “at all times remember me and fight; for if thy mind and thy understanding are always fixed on and given up to Me, *mayi arpita-mano-buddhiU*, to Me thou shalt surely come. For it is by thinking always of him with a consciousness united with him in an undeviating Yoga of constant practice that one comes to the divine and supreme Purusha.”

CWSA 19: 295-296

Sri Aurobindo

Q: The time and the way of death, are these not always chosen by the soul? In the great destructions of mankind by bombing, flood, earthquake, have all the souls chosen to die together at that moment?

The immense majority of men have a collective destiny. For them the question does not arise at all. One who has an individualised psychic being can survive even in the midst of collective catastrophes, if that is his soul’s choice.

CWM 11: 61

The Mother

Old Age and Death

Q: If a person feels that his work is over in this life and that he has nothing more to offer, wouldn't it be better for him to die and be born again instead of dragging out an aimless existence?

This is what the unsatisfied ego asks itself when it finds that things are not going as it desires.

But someone who belongs to the Divine and wants to live in the truth knows that the Divine will keep him on earth as long as He perceives his usefulness on earth and will make him leave the earth when he has nothing more to do there. So the question cannot arise, and he will live quietly in the certitude of the Divine's supreme wisdom.

Q: You wrote yesterday: "But someone who belongs to the Divine...." Doesn't everyone, whoever he is, belong to the Divine?

When I say, "someone who belongs to the Divine", I mean a being who has abolished the ego within himself, who is constantly conscious of the Divine, who no longer has any personal will, who acts only under the divine impulsion and who has no other aim than to do what the Divine wants him to do.

I do not think there are many people in this state. And certainly these people will never worry whether their life is useful or not, since they exist only for and by the Divine and no longer have any personal life.

*

So long as we are in a body, whatever its age and difficulties, it is certain that we have something to do or learn in it, and this conviction gives the necessary strength to face all vicissitudes. ...

One must not be in a hurry and hasten the departure, even if it is for the eternal repose or the beatitude of nothingness. As long

as we are in a body, undoubtedly we have yet something to do or learn therein.

*

Expect nothing from death. Life is your salvation.

It is in life that you must transform yourself. It is upon earth that you progress and it is upon earth that you realise. It is in the body that you win the Victory.

*

This suggestion of death comes from the “ego” when it feels that soon it will have to abdicate. Keep quiet and fearless. Everything will be all right.

*

You speak of absolute renunciation, but to give up the body is *not* the absolute renunciation. The true and total renunciation is to give up the ego which is a much more arduous endeavour. If you have not renounced your ego, to give up the body will not bring freedom to you.

*

Death is not at all what you believe it to be. You expect from death the neutral quietness of an unconscious rest. But to obtain that rest you must prepare for it.

When you die you lose only your body and at the same time the possibilities of relation with and action on the material world. But all that belongs to the vital world does not disappear with the material substance; all your desires, attachments, cravings persist with the sense of frustration and disappointment, and all that prevents you from finding the expected peace. To enjoy a peaceful and eventless death you must prepare for it. And the only effective preparation is the abolition of desires.

So long as we have a body we have to act, to work, to do something: but if we do it simply because it has to be done, with-

out seeking for the result or wanting it to be like this or like that, we get progressively detached and thus prepare ourselves for a restful death.

*

If you wish to escape from death, you must not bind yourself to anything perishable.

One can conquer that alone which one fears not, and he who fears death has already been vanquished by death.

*

Q: Because my nature is weak, it becomes difficult to renounce ordinary things. But it is sure that I want only You; if You are not there — death and nothing else.

There is no question of dying. Leaving your body is not a solution; you remain with your desires and it is worse. It is much more reasonable and true to let your desires die, understanding how useless and stupid they are.

Since you want the Divine Life so much, you need not be afraid of failure, for a sincere and sustained aspiration is always fulfilled.

Make a firm resolution to overcome your weaknesses and you will see that it is not so difficult as it seems. My force is with you to overcome the obstacles, and also my blessings.

CWM 15: 127-28

The Mother

Q: Sweet Mother, how should the news of death be received, especially when it is someone close to us?

Say to the Supreme Lord: “Let Thy Will be done”, and remain as peaceful as possible.

If the departed one is a person one loves, one should concentrate one’s love on him in peace and calm, for that is what can most help the one who has departed.

CWM 16: 418

The Mother

Suicide

Know for certain that to commit suicide is the most foolish action that a man can do; because the end of the body does not mean the end of the consciousness and what was troubling you while you were alive continues to trouble you when you are dead, without the possibility of diverting your mind which you can get when you are alive.

*

Q: I feel that I am your blank child born with blank fortune; such a child has no mission to fulfil in life. Isn't it better to go away from the world?

It is *in this world* that you have to change and that the change is possible. If you run away from this world, you will have to come again probably in worse conditions and you will have to do everything all over again.

It is much better not to be a coward, to face now the situation and to make the necessary effort to conquer. The help is always with you; you must learn to avail yourself of it.

*

Q: Why does one suffer when one commits suicide?

Why does one commit suicide? Because one is a coward... When one is cowardly one always suffers.

Q: In the next life one suffers again?

The psychic being comes with a definite purpose to go through a set of experiences and to learn and make progress. Then if you leave before its work is finished it will have to come back to do it again under much more difficult conditions. So all that you have avoided in one life you will find again in another, and more difficult. And even without leaving in this way, if you have difficulties to overcome in life, you have what we usually call a test to pass,

you see; well, if you don't pass it or turn your back upon it, if you go away instead of passing it, you will have to pass it another time and it will be much more difficult than before.

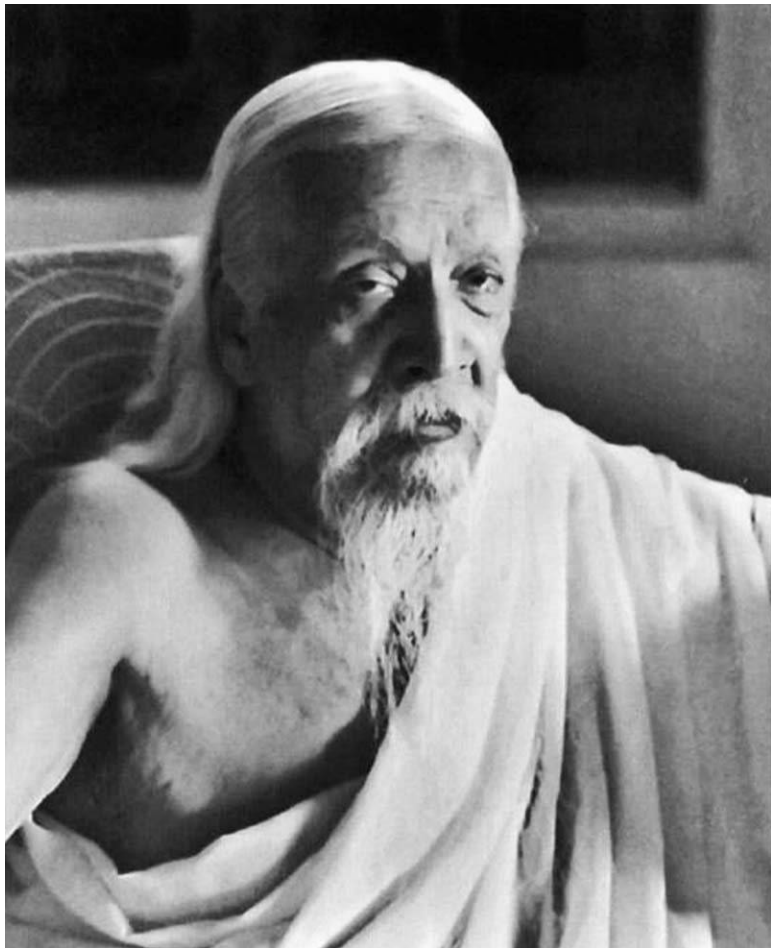
Now people, you know, are extremely ignorant and they think that it is like this: there is life, and then death; life is a bunch of troubles, and then death is an eternal peace. But it is not at all like that. And usually when one goes out of life in an altogether arbitrary way and in an ignorant and obscure passion, one goes straight into a vital world made of all these passions and all this ignorance. So the troubles one wanted to avoid one finds again without even having the protection which the body gives, for — if you have ever had a nightmare, that is, a rash excursion in the vital world, well, your remedy is to wake yourself up, that is to say, to rush back immediately into your body. But when you have destroyed your body you no longer have a body to protect you. So you find yourself in a perpetual nightmare, which is not very pleasant. For, to avoid the nightmare you must be in a psychic consciousness, and when you are in a psychic consciousness you may be quite sure that things won't trouble you. It is indeed the movement of an ignorant darkness and, as I said, a great cowardice in front of the sustained effort to be made.

*

Beginning with the idiot who kills himself to “put an end” to his life (this of course is, of all the idiocies, the most idiotic; it makes one's case still worse), starting from there right up to Nirvana (where one imagines one is able to escape), all that, all that is worth *nothing*. They are all at different levels, but all are worth *nothing*.

CWM 15: 128, 127; 7: 23-24; 11: 179

The Mother



*They who have looked on me,
shall grieve no more.*

(Savitri, p. 684)

Is the Moment of Death Predestined

*Q: You have said: “One can neither hasten nor delay its hour.” *... Does this mean that from one’s birth the day and the moment of death are predestined?*

No. This is altogether something else and on another plane. I have written elsewhere that one dies only when one consents to die — which seems to contradict what I have said here. But this is the truth. I have told you this once already, I believe; in any case, I have written it somewhere. There are two points of view. Here I have taken quite an ordinary, material point of view, that of the physical consciousness. But I have explained somewhere that there are, as it were, different “layers of determinisms” in our being. The physical existence has a determinism; the vital existence has a determinism; the mental existence has a determinism; the higher mental, the psychic have a determinism. And then the higher existences have determinisms — the supramental existence has a determinism. And the determinism of everyone comes from the combination of all these determinisms. If, for instance, at a given moment, when the entire physical determinism must necessarily bring death, you suddenly enter into contact with an extremely high determinism, like the supramental one, for example, and you succeed in joining the two, you change your physical determinism completely at that moment: death which had been determined by the physical determinism is abolished, and the conditions change and are pushed back.

I do not speak of this in that article.* I have taken a purely material point of view. I have given the example of people (and people who lived almost exclusively in their material consciousness, their physical consciousness, you understand, mental, vital and material), and who eagerly wanted to die from the time they were fifty — they lived to be eighty-seven! I have had an instance of that. I had another example the very opposite of this, of someone who

ardently wanted to live very long, who felt that he had many very important things to do and that he must not die, and he took all kinds of precautions against that — and yet he died. There may be cases which seem contradictory, but that is only an appearance. There are explanations for all these things, they obey different laws. Here I have taken the purely material point of view.

If you do not make a higher determinism intervene, truly you can change nothing. That is the only way of changing your physical determinism. If you remain in your physical consciousness and want to change your determinism, you cannot... During the First War I knew a boy who had been told he would die of a gunshot (you know in war one dies easily), and he had even been given an approximate date. And that caused him such agony that he had succeeded in getting a long leave. He came to Paris on leave. He was an officer and had his pistol in his pocket. He jumped from a tram and fell down, the pistol went off and he was killed on the spot. He could not escape.

I could narrate any number of such examples to you. But this belongs to a single plane, the material plane — the purely material physical, mental and vital plane. It is only a higher knowledge and a contact with the higher planes and the descent of these higher planes into the physical plane, which can change circumstances. So too, if one succeeded in bringing down the supramental plane permanently into the physical life, physical life would be transformed, that is, it would change totally. But only on this condition.

CWM 6: 47-49

The Mother

What should we do to make the soul happy, so that it reincarnates in good conditions, for example in a spiritual environment?

Have no sorrow and remain very peaceful and quiet, while keeping an affectionate remembrance of the one who has departed.

CWM 15: 121

The Mother

What Happens After Death

Someone has asked me a question about death: what happens after death and how one takes a new body.

Needless to say, it is a subject which could fill volumes, no two cases are alike: practically *everything* is possible in the life after death as everything is possible on earth when one is in a physical body, and all statements when generalised become dogmatic. But still one may look at the problem in some detail, and sometimes one makes interesting discoveries. ...

... in a more general way, I have often told you that, with regard to the external envelope of the being, everything depends on its attitude at the moment of death, and that attitude necessarily depends on its inner development and its unification.

CWM 8: 335-36

Q: “Domain of death” means what?

Every religion has spoken about it differently. The Greeks had their “Elysium”, one crossed over in a “boat”. There are all the paradises, all the hells.

Generally, “domain of death” is the name given to a certain region of the most material vital into which one is projected at the moment one leaves one’s body. The part — how to put it? — of one’s life that’s usually the most conscious is projected there at the moment of death. Well, that region, that material vital world is very dark, it is full of adverse formations having desires at their centre or even adverse wills, and these are very, very elemental entities which have a very fragmentary life and are like vampires, in the sense that they feed on all that is thrown out from human beings. And so, at that moment, from the shock of death — for very few die without a shock, go out consciously, in full knowledge of the thing, there are not many such — usually it is an accident: a last accident; well, at that shock of death, those entities rush in

upon this, upon this vitality that goes out, and feed upon it. So long as a person is alive, they cannot touch him. For, you have all had the experience of a nightmare in which, when the situation becomes really very dangerous, suddenly you wake up — you come back into your body, for the body is your protection. In the physical they can do nothing to you but when you are completely outside the physical (and even this link I spoke about serves as a protection to a certain extent when you go out), but if the links are broken and you are entirely without a body, well, unless you take advantage of special circumstances... as for instance when a person is much loved by others who are yet alive; if at that moment these people who love him concentrate their thought and love on the departed one, he finds a refuge therein, and this protects him completely against those entities; but one who passes away without anyone's having a special attachment for him, either because he is surrounded by people he has harmed and who do not love him or by people who are in a terribly unconscious state — he is like a prey delivered to these forces. And that indeed is an experience that's difficult to bear. They cannot touch anything else except what belongs to their own domain, that is, the most material vital — the higher vital escapes them altogether, they can do nothing there. And so, this material vital goes out but the other remains; and this higher vital is attacked by other dangers, simply that. And if it also disappears, the mind remains. But behind all this is the psychic being which nothing can touch, which is above all possible attacks, and it indeed is free to go where it wants. Usually — unless it has a special opportunity and has reached a state of complete development — it goes to rest in the psychic worlds. There it enters into a kind of beatific contemplation in which it remains, and this is an assimilation of all its experiences, and when it has finished assimilating them and resting, well, it starts preparing to come down again for a new life. That being nothing can touch. But so very few are conscious of their psychic that one can hardly

say that it is such and such a person whom one has known, for people as we know them are made of what? — of all their physical experiences, all their vital reactions, all their mental formations — that is, the body, the character, the thought — and with these we have a human being! Well, all that cannot persist after death unless it is organised and centralised around the psychic being and to the extent it is perfectly unified with the psychic. Otherwise all this mixture is dissolved and the psychic being alone remains, at times just as a flame, at times as a completely conscious being.

This of course is the general law. Now there are bridges, as it were, “protected passages” which have been built in the vital world in order to cross over all these dangers. There are atmospheres which receive people leaving their body, give them shelter, give them protection. There are all kinds of other conditions; what I have told you just now is the normal state of those who die, of ordinary human beings, but as soon as we come to a little higher type of humanity, all these conditions change. The general law remains unless there is a special higher development within the being. There are people with so total a cohesion in their being that they no longer depend upon the body — not at all — whether it be there or not there.

But all this development does not come about just like that, simply by thinking about it from time to time, desiring it still less often and forgetting it most of the time — no, it is not like that that it can happen. These are disciplines, I may say, at least as arduous as the strictest spiritual disciplines.... Essentially it is for this that we are on the earth. Truly speaking, human beings were made for this purpose, to do that work, and it is perhaps because they refuse to do it that there is so much chaos in the world. If they did it truly, things would go much better.

CWM 6: 54-57

The Mother

How to Conquer the Fear of Death

Generally speaking, perhaps the greatest obstacle in the way of man's progress is fear, a fear that is many sided, multiform, self-contradictory, illogical, unreasoning and often unreasonable. Of all fears the most subtle and the most tenacious is the fear of death. It is deeply rooted in the subconscious and it is not easy to dislodge. It is obviously made up of several interwoven elements: the spirit of conservatism and the concern for self-preservation so as to ensure the continuity of consciousness, the recoil before the unknown, the uneasiness caused by the unexpected and the unforeseeable, and perhaps, behind all that, hidden in the depths of the cells, the instinct that death is not inevitable and that, if certain conditions are fulfilled, it can be conquered; although, as a matter of fact, fear in itself is one of the greatest obstacles to that conquest. For one cannot conquer what one fears, and one who fears death has already been conquered by it.

How can one overcome this fear? Several methods can be used for this purpose. But first of all, a few fundamental notions are needed to help us in our endeavour. The first and most important point is to know that life is one and immortal. Only the forms are countless, fleeting and brittle. This knowledge must be securely and permanently established in the mind and one must identify one's consciousness as far as possible with the eternal life that is independent of every form, but which manifests in all forms. This gives the indispensable psychological basis with which to confront the problem, for the problem remains. Even if the inner being is enlightened enough to be above all fear, the fear still remains hidden in the cells of the body, obscure, spontaneous, beyond the reach of reason, usually almost unconscious. It is in these obscure depths that one must find it out, seize hold of it and cast upon it the light of knowledge and certitude.

Thus life does not die, but the form is dissolved, and it is this dis-

solution that the physical consciousness dreads. And yet the form is constantly changing and in essence there is nothing to prevent this change from being progressive. Only this progressive change could make death no longer inevitable, but it is very difficult to achieve and demands conditions that very few people are able to fulfil. Thus the method to be followed in order to overcome the fear of death will differ according to the nature of the case and the state of the consciousness. These methods can be classified into four principal kinds, although each one includes a large number of varieties; in fact, each individual must develop his own system. The first method appeals to the reason. One can say that in the present state of the world, death is inevitable; a body that has taken birth will necessarily die one day or another, and in almost every case death comes when it must: one can neither hasten nor delay its hour. Someone who craves for it may have to wait very long to obtain it and someone who dreads it may suddenly be struck down in spite of all the precautions he has taken. The hour of death seems therefore to be inexorably fixed, except for a very few individuals who possess powers that the human race in general does not command. Reason teaches us that it is absurd to fear something that one cannot avoid. The only thing to do is to accept the idea of death and quietly do the best one can from day to day, from hour to hour, without worrying about what is going to happen. This process is very effective when it is used by intellectuals who are accustomed to act according to the laws of reason; but it would be less successful for emotional people who live in their feelings and let themselves be ruled by them. No doubt, these people should have recourse to the second method, the method of inner seeking. Beyond all the emotions, in the silent and tranquil depths of our being, there is a light shining constantly, the light of the psychic consciousness. Go in search of this light, concentrate on it; it is within you. With a persevering will you are sure to find it and as soon as you enter into it, you awake to the sense of immortality. You have always lived, you will always live;

you become wholly independent of your body; your conscious existence does not depend on it; and this body is only one of the transient forms through which you have manifested. Death is no longer an extinction, it is only a transition. All fear instantly vanishes and you walk through life with the calm certitude of a free man.

The third method is for those who have faith in a God, their God, and who have given themselves to him. They belong to him integrally; all the events of their lives are an expression of the divine will and they accept them not merely with calm submission but with gratitude, for they are convinced that whatever happens to them is always for their own good. They have a mystic trust in their God and in their personal relationship with him. They have made an absolute surrender of their will to his and feel his unvarying love and protection, wholly independent of the accidents of life and death. They have the constant experience of lying at the feet of their Beloved in an absolute self-surrender or of being cradled in his arms and enjoying a perfect security. There is no longer any room in their consciousness for fear, anxiety or torment; all that has been replaced by a calm and delightful bliss. But not everyone has the good fortune of being a mystic.

Finally there are those who are born warriors. They cannot accept life as it is and they feel pulsating within them their right to immortality, an integral and earthly immortality. They possess a kind of intuitive knowledge that death is nothing but a bad habit; they seem to be born with the resolution to conquer it. But this conquest entails a desperate combat against an army of fierce and subtle assailants, a combat that has to be fought constantly, almost at every minute. Only one who has an indomitable spirit should attempt it. The battle has many fronts; it is waged on several planes that intermingle and complement each other. ... There is yet another way to conquer the fear of death, but it is within the reach of so few that it is mentioned here only as a matter of information. It is to enter into the domain of death deliberately and consciously while one

is still alive, and then to return from this region and re-enter the physical body, resuming the course of material existence with full knowledge. But for that one must be an initiate. CWM 12: 82-87

... if one must for some reason or other leave one's body and take a new one, is it not better to make of one's death something magnificent, joyful, enthusiastic, than to make it a disgusting defeat? Those who cling on, who try by every possible means to delay the end even by a minute or two, who give you an example of frightful anguish, show that they are not conscious of their soul.... After all, it is perhaps a means, isn't it? One can change this accident into a means; if one is conscious one can make a beautiful thing of it, a very beautiful thing, as of everything. And note, those who do not fear it, who are not anxious, who can die without any sordidness are those who never think about it, who are not haunted all the time by this "horror" facing them which they must escape and which they try to push as far away from them as they can. These, when the occasion comes, can lift their head, smile and say, "Here I am."

It is they who have the will to make the best possible use of their life, it is they who say, "I shall remain here as long as it is necessary, to the last second, and I shall not lose one moment to realise my goal"; these, when the necessity comes, put up the best show. Why? — It is very simple, because they live in their ideal, the truth of their ideal; because that is the real thing for them, the very reason of their being, and in all things they can see this ideal, this reason of existence, and never do they come down into the sordidness of material life.

So, the conclusion:

One must never wish for death.

One must never will to die.

One must never be afraid to die.

And in all circumstances one must will to exceed oneself.

CWM 12: 82-874: 355

The Mother

The Living and the Dead

The attitude of the living towards the dead is one of the most loathsome expressions of mankind's selfish ignorance.

It's either a complete I-couldn't-care-less attitude, or else, "Ohh, anything to get rid of that!" I have some children here (they're no longer children), who live here with their fathers and mothers (who aren't very old), and some of those children told me "dreams" in which they saw their fathers or mothers dead and coming to them... and they sent them back violently, saying, "You're dead, you've got no right to come and bother us"!

You're dead, you've got no right to come and bother us. There you are. That's... few will be frank enough to say so, but it's very widespread.

Many things must change before a little bit of truth can manifest — that's all I can say.

*

That's what I said to T. (I don't think she understood), I told her that there isn't so much difference between what men call "life" and what they call "death"; the difference is very small, and grows still smaller when you go into the problem in depth and in all the details. One always make a clean cut between the two — it's quite stupid: some living are already half dead, and many dead are very alive.

*

Human beings have made an appalling tragedy out of death. And I saw, with all these recent experiences, I saw how many, many poor human beings have been destroyed by the very people they loved the most! Under the pretext that they were dead.

People give them a very bad time.

Destroyed?

Yes, burned. Or shut up in a box without air and light — while fully conscious. And just because they can no longer express them-

selves, people say they are “dead.” They don’t waste any time declaring them dead! But they are conscious. They are conscious. Imagine someone who can no longer speak or move — according to human laws, he is “dead.” He is dead but he is conscious. He is conscious, so he sees the people around him: some of them are weeping, some of them are... if he’s a bit clairvoyant, he also sees that some of them are rejoicing. And then he sees himself put into a box, sees the lid nailed down, shutting him in: “Ah, now it’s all over, they’re going to cover me with earth!” Or he’s taken over there [to the cremation ground], and then it’s fire in the mouth — fully conscious.

I have lived this in recent days. I have seen it. Last night or the night before, I spent at least two hours in a world — the subtle physical world — where the living mingle with the dead with no sense of difference, it makes absolutely no difference there. For instance, when Mridu was in her body I used to see her at night maybe once a year (maybe not even that much). For years she was utterly nonexistent in my consciousness... but since she left her body, I see her almost every night! There she is, just as she was, you know (rotund gesture), but no longer troubled, that’s all. No longer troubled. And there were both living and... what we call the “living” and the “dead”— they were both there together, eating together, moving around together, having fun together; and all in a lovely, tranquil light — pleasant, very pleasant. “There!” I thought, “and humans have drawn a sharp line, saying, ‘Now he’s dead!’” Dead! And what really takes the cake is the way they treat the body like an unconscious object, and it’s still conscious!

It’s treated like an object: “Now then! Let’s get rid of this just as quickly as we can: it’s a nuisance and it gets in the way.” And even those who feel the most sorrow don’t want to see it; it’s too painful for them.

The Mother, Conversation with a Disciple, October 12, 1962



*In order to be able to
conquer death and win immortality,
one must neither fear death nor desire it.*

CWM 15: 120

The Mother



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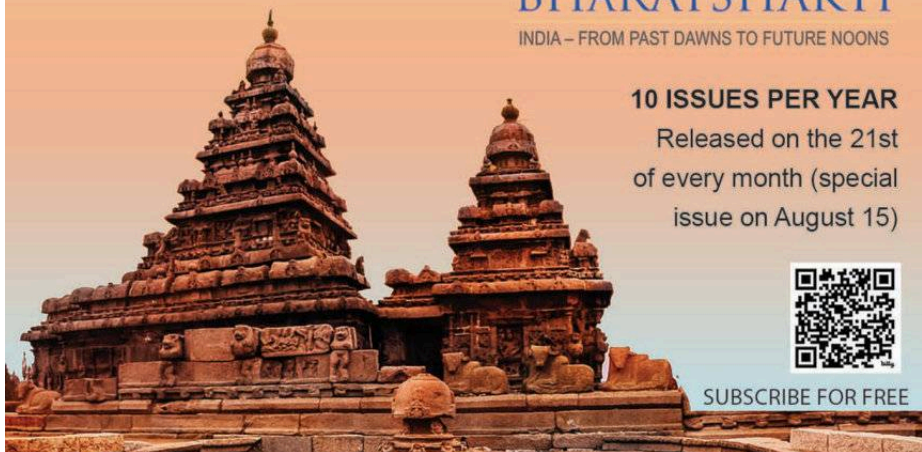
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