PATIENT AT THE CROSSROADS



Dr. Alok Pandey



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Introduction

Medicine has been described as priesthood. In ancient times, it was priests who practised the art of healing. Though it would be reasonable to presume that mankind always had some kind of medical practice since its earliest dawns, the two earliest-known ancient systems of medicine are the Indian followed by the Greek. Atharvaveda, the first Indian text on medicine, deals with an occult understanding of diseases and accordingly prescribes certain methods to ward them off. It also contains its own pharmacopeia—a list of herbs used for treating ailments. In the Vedic age, this knowledge was derived by intuition. It is said that the seers came together to contemplate upon the diminishing lifespan of humanity. In response to their prayers, the truths of health and prolongation of life was revealed to them by Indra, the lord of luminous worlds. In ancient treatises, we also have the accounts of Danvantari, the physician of the gods, and the Aswin Kumars, the swiftfooted, fair twins who ride upon the horse associated with bringing health, promoting longevity and curing diseases. One of the efforts of the Vedic seers was to discover the secret nectar of immortality with the help of certain esoteric practices and the intercession of the gods who represented to them certain powers and aspects of the Divine Reality that stands behind the cosmos and its complex processes. Though much of this ancient knowledge is now lost, at least in its proper application, something of this has come down as folklore and tradition. However its more modern and scientific version has come down as Ayurveda, literally meaning 'the science of life'. It is recognised as the first scientific system of medicine. Its two famous texts, one by Charaka and the other by Susruta belong to the post-Vedic period around 600 BC. According to the compendium of Charaka, health and disease are not predetermined and life may be prolonged by

human effort. The compendium of Susruta defines the purpose of medicine to cure the diseases of the sick, protect the healthy, and to prolong life. Both these ancient compendia include details of the examination, diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis of numerous ailments. The *Susruta Samhita* is notable for describing procedures on various forms of surgery, including rhinoplasty or nose repair, the repair of torn ear lobes, cataract surgery, and several other excisions and other surgical procedures. Most remarkable is Sushruta's penchant for scientific classification: His medical treatise consists of 184 chapters, in which 1,120 conditions are listed, including injuries and illnesses relating to ageing and mental illness. The *Sushruta Samhita* describes 125 surgical instruments, 300 surgical procedures and classifies human surgery in 8 categories.

The Ayurvedic classics mention eight branches of medicine: kayacikitsa (internal medicine), salyacikitsa (surgery including anatomy), salakyacikitsa (eye, ear, nose, and throat diseases), kaumarabhtya (pediatrics), bhutavidya (spirit medicine), agada tantra (toxicology), rasayana (science of rejuvenation), and vajikaraa (aphrodisiacs, mainly for men). Apart from learning these, the student of Ayurveda was expected to know 10 arts that were indispensable in the preparation and application of his medicines: distillation, operative skills, cooking, horticulture, metallurgy, sugar manufacture, pharmacy, analysis and separation of minerals, compounding of metals, and preparation of alkalis. The teaching of various subjects was done during the instruction of relevant clinical subjects. For example, teaching of anatomy was a part of the teaching of surgery, embryology was a part of training in paediatrics and obstetrics, and the knowledge of physiology and pathology was interwoven in the teaching of all the clinical disciplines. The normal length of the student's training appears to have been seven years. But the physician was expected to continue to learn.

In ancient Greece, temples dedicated to the healer-god, Asclepius, functioned as centres of medical advice, prognosis, and healing. At these shrines, patients would enter a dream-like state of induced sleep known as 'enkoimesis', not unlike anaesthesia, in which they either received guidance from the deity in a dream or were cured by surgery. These temples provided carefully controlled spaces conducive to healing and fulfilled several of the requirements of institutions created for healing. In the Asclepieion of

Epidaurus, three large marble boards dated 350 BC preserve the names, case histories, complaints, and cures of about 70 patients who came to the temple with a problem and shed it there. Some of the surgical cures listed, such as the opening of an abdominal abscess or the removal of traumatic foreign material, are realistic enough to have taken place, but with the patient in a state of enkoimesis, induced with the help of soporific substances such as opium. A towering figure in the history of medicine was the physician Hippocrates of Kos (ca. 460 BC—ca. 370 BC), considered the 'father of modern medicine'. The *Hippocratic Corpus* is a collection of around 70 early medical works from ancient Greece, strongly associated with Hippocrates and his students. Most famously, Hippocrates invented the 'Hippocratic Oath' for physicians, which is still relevant and in use today.

As the intuitive ages began to recede and mankind entered into a darker age, much of this deeper knowledge was eclipsed or else degraded into superstitions and belief systems. The tide of time turned a new leaf and the lamps of reductionist analysis began to look at man with the keen but soulless eyes of the prevalent materialist doctrine. A mechanical model of man began to replace the living temple of God and medicine soon became a science like physics and chemistry and the physician a student of the human machine and its laws of operations. The 1953 discovery of the structure of DNA by James D. Watson and Francis Crick would open the door to molecular biology and modern genetics. During the late 19th century and the first part of the 20th century, several physicians, such as Nobel Prize winner Alexis Carrel, supported eugenics, a theory first formulated in 1865 by Francis Galton. Eugenics was discredited as a science after the Nazis' experiments in World War II became known; however, compulsory sterilisation programmes continued to be used in modern countries (including the US, Sweden, and Peru) until much later.

Thus was born what we regard today as 'modern medicine', an offspring of the twilight age. It developed, nursed by the analytical reason of man, till almost late 20th century. It is only in the later part that yet another leaf seems to be turning in the history of human time. It is because of an increasing dissatisfaction with the existing models and the stark commercial attitudes that are its natural accompaniments that some individuals have once again begun to search for the deeper causes of health and illness and seek a more

enduring relief from the malady called man. Still it is an age of transition and we see two parallel movements coming together, seeking reconciliation and synthesis. The old intuitive gleam seems to be returning again as mankind is rekindling its interest in the lost secrets of ancient civilisations, the Vedas and the occult, and spiritual side of life. Meanwhile modern medicine continues to be hailed in many quarters as the one and only authentic and scientific system capable of relieving human suffering; all the rest being dubbed as 'faith-cures'! Quite naturally, we are in the phase of a cusp. It is like the proverbial darkness before the dawn, and in the field of medicine it has taken the ugly turn of commercialism, where patient is a client and health care is a product that the physician sells to bring profits to the big corporate house called the 'hospital'. This may not be true of all places of healing, yet it would be a truism to say that the 'art and science' of medicine is turning to be the 'commerce' of medicine and the priests of the temple of the gods (the human body's ancient view) are graduating into licensed owners and sellers of tools and gadgets to fix the problem of the human machine.

The rise of 20th century consumerism turned the tide of science from a search into the Nature of things to its practical use and selling ability in the global market. As a consequence, there has been a proliferation of gadgetry and equipment, each vying to entice and allure, impress and woo the mind of the user. All has been sullied by its profaning touch. Everything has become marketable, from the self-proclaimed 'gurus' with their magic 'techniques' to simple requirements of everyday life, such as water that once used to be free. Everything now comes with a price tag: the 'swamis' and their discourses, the fitness lifestyle courses, and even the quality of air we breathe.

The field of medicine too has not remained untouched by this consumerism. We see a sudden proliferation of drugs, hospitals and equipment, each proclaiming an edge over the other, each claiming to be the 'right choice'. The modern allopathic doctor has lost his charm of the 1960s, when he was still a friend and member of the family. More frequently, he is now an agent for selling a product and his name and expertise is but a means to earn revenue for the hospital to which he is attached. Though some doctors have remained immune either due to heredity or due to their constitution, yet this disease has no doubt infected a large section of the

medical fraternity. We see a proliferation of New Age tools and gadgets and alternative healing techniques and technicians who have set up shops to entice the 'disgruntled' patient, to provide panaceas in an age of stress and tension, or sometimes even cheaper solutions (not always though) to earn some quick money and make a runaway success. As in all things, there is a great mix of good intentions and bad results or sometimes the reverse as well.

Leaving aside the physician factor, which plays an important part in the recovery process, the average patient today suffers from an additional problem of information overload. Gone are the days when we had one or two physicians, few diseases and fewer medicines. The lack of information was compensated by a faith, which enhanced all the 'knowledge' of drugs and diseases put together. But now that we have lost the innocence that ignorance gives and have yet to discover the true power that authentic knowledge provides, we move in a twilit limbo where it is difficult to discern between what is good and what is not, who is genuine and who is a fake. Or perhaps the two are invariably mixed. Not knowing what is truly good and not having enough faith, the patient finds himself at a crossroads with several signs pointing in different directions. How is he supposed to resolve the dilemma or make sense of the mass of information that often reaches unfiltered into his ear from uninformed sources, including what passes as 'scientific evidence'?

This book is an attempt to provide brief workable guidelines which may be practically useful for resolving some of the dilemmas that are of a more general nature.

Naturally, each individual and each case is different, and no two situations are comparable. So the guidelines too are of a general nature and based upon a deeper understanding and a growing experience of the issues involved. These guidelines are sometimes presented as axiomatic truths. Some are indeed self-evident fundamental facts of life, tested and re-tested by time and have an empirical validity; others have been established by detailed studies, while still others are intuitive gleams from masters who have penetrated beyond appearances and passed beyond thought.

This book and all that has gone into its birth, most of all the painstaking labour of the editor, Shonar; the many hands, heads, and hearts through which it has come into being; and above all the patient patients who have

taught so much to every physician, are all offered at Their feet to whom it really belongs and who have inspired and made this possible.

To Them it is offered with gratitude, love, and a prayer that may all be free from disease, may all be happy and at peace, may all be free from suffering and grief, may all awaken to the Beauty of the Future and, throwing the bonds of Ignorance and leaving behind the horrors of the past as a nightmare, emerge into the greater and more luminous dawn that has begun to show up upon the eastern skies.



PART I



PRELIMINARY PHILOSOPHIC CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT IS ILLNESS?

Of all creatures, it is human beings who perhaps suffer the state of illness most. This is only natural given the extreme complexity of the human organism. Besides, unlike animals, human beings live in a fast-changing environment, much of course of their own making. Above all, human beings are not rigidly fixed to a type. They are, so to say, yet to find the right law or the law of their nature. All this makes health in human beings a precarious balance and disease an easy passage. Yet, at the same time, it also gives to a human being the possibility of a greater adaptive equilibrium, a chance of developing plasticity, to bring out a greater power from within than what animal nature can provide. Nevertheless the question remains: What is disease? Is it just a combination of certain symptoms that threatens the human organism and jeopardises its survival? Or is it just an abnormal figure, a statistical anomaly? These are simply outward results, often end results of a complex chain that links man—the microcosm—to the universe—the macrocosm. Seen against this vaster landscape, we may even wonder if what we call disease is but a passage that the Universal Nature uses for its own incalculable purpose. Or to put it more directly, could a given disease be simply an evolutionary challenge that is meant to ultimately stimulate growth, or at least to goad us? This is not to say that this is the best way to grow; but certainly it does influence our way of approaching the phenomenon of illness. If disease is an evolutionary challenge, then the ways and means to approach and overcome an illness would be different. For instance, we may like to learn how to augment our natural defences rather than, as we now do, simply attack and violently suppress an illness.

There are many instances where a patient goes to a doctor for surgery or even a routine medical check-up and is found to have some disorder which had so far gone undetected. If we carry this a little further, we shall find that even if our present apparatus does not detect an abnormality, we may still be harbouring an abnormality within. Modern studies in cancer, for instance, do suggest that all of us, whether we have the disease or not, do have certain cells that may well resemble cancerous cells circulating in our body. This does not mean that we are bound to have a cancer. We may never outwardly suffer from cancer. But the possibility is there within. Equally, not every abnormal state will necessarily lead to disease. In other words, disease can be seen as a continuum of possibilities of which only a few will actually manifest as frank illness. And it is here that the catch lies. With modern tools of investigation the concept of illness has touched a new level. We no more speak of symptoms when we speak of illness. Many life-threatening diseases, such as high blood pressure (hypertension), are silent and throw up no symptoms. This enlarged concept, while useful in one way, that is, detecting and treating an illness early, creates problems in some other ways. We enter here a field of probability and statistics. A person having high blood pressure may never actually suffer anything as a result of this increase and it may even be that this high reading is his normal. All this raises dilemmas of 'to treat or not to treat' or how much to treat and how far to go. Preventive detection has pushed the boundaries of disease one step further but it has also brought us one step closer to fear!

This takes us to the other important issue: What is really meant by abnormal? Many patients are quite confused when they are asymptomatic and the physician declares with an air of prophesy that he has detected a disease in the patient's system. Diseases, at least some of them, are fairly silent and we become aware of them only when they take a sudden toll upon us or create a detectable event. So how do we know that it is an abnormality?

The fact of the matter is that our concept of disease is still largely statistical. If something has been observed to be threatening to our life, either in the short or the long run, then we call it an illness. Also if something is found deviating from what is generally observed in the majority, we again term it as an illness. Of course modern medicine has also found how these levels or altered chemistry affect our functions and eventually create the possibility of disease.

It is now a fact that many diseases, before they originate in the body, start in the way our minds react to things, in our habits, and the lifestyles that we adopt. Certain attitudes have almost a predictive value, so also certain lifestyles. Thus, it is known that a certain type of personality, rightly

called the Type A personality is linked often to cardiac events (heart attacks). Persons of this type are overambitious, driven by a hypercritical attitude towards themselves and towards others. They are sticklers for rules and often thereby put not only themselves but others in great stress. Sooner or later this takes a toll, surely on themselves, but also on others. Of course there are no studies done to see if working with such persons increases the risk of heart attacks in others but it would be interesting!

All the same, if we could see, as surely we shall someday, we may find that some persons carry disease in their very atmosphere or the environmental consciousness that surrounds human beings. Most people do feel this subtle atmosphere, but in an age of science and rationality, we either do not acknowledge it or think it to be an illusion of our mind. But just as we have the gross physical senses that register certain things, so also we have in us dormant, for the most part now, subtle senses corresponding to the gross ones through which we can have more data and even indications of things that are often latent. For instance, one can often detect in the atmosphere of some (not all) sick persons some kind of a strong smell. Others feel something like a diminution of the 'glow'. They often use terms like 'pulled down', pale etc. Still others can feel an atmosphere of gloom hanging around a person that presages a disease. In other words, the concept of disease itself will evolve and change as our human capacity to observe and understand evolves. Perhaps, to an evolved consciousness it may not be a disease at all but a complex play of forces through which an evolutionary process is being worked out. This thought too is slowly entering the mind of modern medicine. For instance, in the emerging field of psychoneuroimmunology, the information content of the disease is valued more for its ability to help us in the evolutionary transformation than for labelling and cure. Labelling of course is only a question of semantics and often not very helpful for no two diseases are alike as no two persons are alike, even though certain generalisations exist. Besides labelling often fixes the disease in the mind and thereby blocks the mental processes that may be helpful in recovery, especially when grim and strict prognostications are given by 'knowledgeable' doctors. An instance comes to mind of a case of carcinoma stomach [stomach carcinoma?], where the surgeon could not excise the tumour and simply opened and closed the abdomen. The patient was told nothing. Her family was however explained

that it is a matter of a few more months, and yet she continues to live even after ten years. Nowhere does one see the ill-effects of a scientific dogma as in the field of modern medicine where doctors have become almost cult figures, whose word is taken as the scroll of destiny!

So we come back to where we started. Disease is not just an absence of physical or even mental signs and symptoms but a state of disorder and disharmony, a state of imbalance, if we like, that can manifest at any of the levels of our being-physical, psychological, social. The seeds circulate within our system and its possibility lies always embedded in our obscure depths, in certain subconscious habits and tendencies, in our hopes and fears, in our greed and desires, even in our atavistic responses to environmental challenges. It is, to put it in another way, a state of disorganisation and disintegration that threatens the individual unit of life from the All-Life that is around it. By All-Life is meant the various forms of life to which each individual unit of life must adapt. If one successfully adapts, and so long as one does so, we say the person is healthy. When one does not and succumbs to the pressure or the challenge, then we say it is a frank illness. A dynamic and constant adjustment and adaptation is the big challenge of life where each unit claims its space and freedom to be, and towards this must necessarily face the equally valid challenge from other forces and units of life that also want their space and freedom to expand and to be. In short, disease is a state where the forces and conditions of harmony and order are threatened and the forces of disorder and disintegration have an upper hand in the organism. And this process takes place all the time and at several levels of our complex being, not all of which can be studied or seen, let alone understood.

WHAT IS HEALTH?

Health is even more difficult to define. Just as illness has many dimensions, so too health can be seen and even assessed across many dimensions, each necessary for the completeness of the other. If disease is essentially about the disturbance of equilibrium, then health can be defined as a state of equilibrium. But this equilibrium by its very nature cannot be static. The human body is constantly in a state of flux both within and without. It has to constantly adapt to challenges from outside, challenges that are not just physical but, in a human being at least, also psychological. Besides like any other body, the human body too must have its own rhythm, which is primarily an extension of the animal rhythms. The difference, however, is that an animal seldom disrupts his rhythm and therefore there is little need for an internal adaptation. But with human beings the natural instinct is replaced by a conscious or rather half-conscious volition. We do not eat simply because we are hungry, we do not sleep simply because we are sleepy or tired; we do not even mate simply because it is the season and the moment for mating. Other factors have been added apart from instinct, such as pleasure, social pressure, job requirements, monetary considerations, other overriding interests and so on and so forth. The internal rhythms have therefore been completely disrupted and this has surely taken a heavy toll upon the body. Given this constant state of flux, it is difficult to define a perfect state of health for a human being. The complexity becomes even more complex when we understand that the human body (and the mind as well) is endowed with a lot of reserve. A seemingly healthy body may be just on the edge of a serious disruptive event simply because it has reached its end reserves. And this can deceive even an expert eye.

An example to illustrate this is of a 75-year-old man who consulted a well-known cardiologist. Looking at his test results, the cardiologist declared that his heart is as young as a teenager's. The man was dead within a week due to a massive heart attack! It is because of such cases that the concept of stress

tests evolved. The reverse is perhaps even truer. Grim pronouncements and prognostications of imminent death may never come true. The author personally knows of an instance where a lady underwent depression because her physician pronounced that she had another six months to live. Well, she lived on for at least 15 years before dying of something quite unrelated. (As an aside her physician died before her!)

Thus, we have not only a physical but also a psychological and emotional component of health, a social health, and of course as is being recognised now, a spiritual aspect of health as well. It is quite possible and indeed it is being increasingly seen that one dimension can influence and override the other altogether. A smoker may never die of the ill-effects of smoking and a person doing all the right things may die young. The reason is not just genetic predisposition but something deeper, thereby making any simplistic assessment of health in a human being futile. Besides, unlike the animal, a human being is not made of one type, and each individual has his or her own unique rhythm making the task even more complicated. Nevertheless, following the cues so far, we can say that health is a state of balance and harmony within and without. It is a state wherein the forces of integration and harmony are in the ascendant and it is reflected not only in our physical functioning but even more so in the way we think and feel and react and respond to our environment, in our lifestyle and attitudes, to say the least.

The human body has to adjust to a host of challenges within and without. To begin with each organ of the body responds to certain movements of thought and emotions, desires and impulses. And since each is interlinked with the other and the energy feeders are the same, an overuse of one organ would necessarily be at the expense of the others. Similarly the underuse of an organ system may lead to its progressive atrophy which will, in its turn, disturb the balance of the rest since there is a complex interdependence of each system on the other. However much we may specialise, the human body is one and a disturbance in one part sooner or later, in however minute or big way, begins to reflect upon the other systems. In childhood or youth, it is possible to recover this lost harmony and balance relatively easily since in general the forces of growth and harmony are more active. But with growing age, for a variety of reasons, this general balance is changed in

favour of the forces of disintegration and a relatively small disharmony can swiftly snowball into a rapidly downhill course for the body.

Not only within, the human being has to also face the challenge of harmonising with its complex environment. Like the animal, it has to face the challenges of its physical environment which it tries to do, both by internal resources and by external manipulation. This in turn adds to the challenge in the long run, for with each technological substitution there is a corresponding biological amputation of some capacity that Nature has provided. Secondly, and unlike the animal and plants, the human being has to adapt not only to his own fairly complex internal processes but also the complex psychological and social stresses and environing forces that arise from his interaction with other fellow human beings. Whether we consciously register it or not, whether our present scientific equipments record it or not, the human body does receive and retain in its obscure memory the imprints and impacts it receives not only from its physical but also its psychological environment. That is why, certain memories can trigger a whole set of chain reactions.

An additional stress for adaptation arises from the environing life around us. From the microorganism to the macro-animals, from the impact of radiation to the daily pollutants, the human organism has to accommodate and compete with a variety of separate units. So long as the body is able to adapt successfully things work out well and we can reasonably say that we are in a state of health. This is a dynamic process and it changes from moment to moment. Thus, a state of health may be defined as a state of dynamic equilibrium both within and without, internally between one organ and another, externally between the organism and other organisms.

WHAT IS CURE?

Generally, the patient understands cure as a relief of symptoms. That is his end point, the target he is aiming at. But just as we have seen that disease may be present in a subtle state, so also one can say with reasonable accuracy that cure is not just relief of symptoms but also the return of the lost balance and harmony.

It may be necessary here to qualify that this return of harmony can itself be of two types. One, where the harmony is created by a temporary force of material or vital nature introduced into the system which for a moment counterbalances the effects of the disharmony from having its more visible and external reactions upon the mind or the body. Thus, for instance we can control the blood sugar through the use of drugs. As long as the drug is there and active in the system, the milieu interior is maintained, but the moment the drug is withdrawn everything returns and often with a virulence. This too has its usage. It can provide temporary relief. It can ward off a possible emergency and give the much-needed time for working out further things.

Above all, it can buy time and keep the patient going till Nature and its healing processes take over and the need of external support can be withdrawn. At other times, the absence of symptoms may erase the memory and give the patient a sense of cure. This itself may trigger the healing process. It may become a material medium to induce faith or a medium for the deeper and subtler forces and energies of healing to act. But this of course is more characteristically the domain of Homeopathy and Ayurveda.

True healing must go deeper. Not only must it control the symptoms or the visible and recordable manifestation of the illness but, more importantly, bring back the lost harmony in the subtler and deeper levels of our being. That is why often enough when a disease is controlled in one organ system and one type of symptoms are managed, the disharmony returns and the systems affected and the symptoms manifested are different. Sometimes the differences are so striking that most physicians take it to be a different disease. But actually it is the same inner disharmony that is resurfacing in another way. It is here that the healing systems that deal with the energy-body, such as Homeopathy, have a certain advantage. If they hit right, they can really act deeper and create a more lasting cure. Healing systems that deal with the energy-body try to do that but the problem is that the human body extends itself not at one or two but a number of levels and there is hardly any system that can reach that far. Material means can at best go as deep as the point where the vital energy converts itself into the material and no further. Even its manipulation of mental processes is done by working upon the most material parts, the last link in a long chain of cause and effect.

The most radical cure however would be if the disease disappears not only at the level of symptoms or the body, but at the deepest level possible. Clearing seeds of illness at the subconscious levels where the roots of illness lurk and return like weeds again and again, such a radical healing should be able to remove all possibility of an illness from the system. But this cure cannot be affected by medicines alone without the aid of a spiritual force that can go deep and conquer the subconscious nature in man.



WHAT IS TREATMENT?

Treatment is any means and method that can be used to bring relief from the symptoms or cure a disease. A suitable dictum is 'To sometimes cure, to often relieve, to always comfort'. All therapeutic systems recognise that it may not be always possible to cure an illness but quite a few illnesses can be contained. A therapeutic programme is nothing more than a line of advance or a system that Nature itself follows to facilitate the recovery process. In fact Nature follows not one or two but a number of lines simultaneously. Besides Nature has in its secret depths an instinctive sense of the totality and takes the best course possible, considering the individual unit of life and all that surrounds it. But human knowledge is limited and therefore we can at the most capture one or two lines of advance that Nature follows. Besides, our treatment is exclusively focused upon the individual unit and its recovery process. All this makes any given system of therapeutics at best a temporary practical device. Nature may accept or refuse. This is the secret that we have yet to learn, that finally, it is something within us, within the body itself that decides to get cured and is cured.

This 'will to cure' stands behind all systems as a common factor and is being increasingly recognised as a single most important factor in bringing about the recovery. If something within us has decided not to come out of the illness or even wants it to linger for various reasons (such as getting the much-needed attention or simply a love for drama and even tragedy that is there in man's nature), then whatever we may do and whatever system of therapeutics we may use we end up failing to get to the last recovery point. A given system, therefore, can only set in motion certain processes that tend towards restoring the balance but if the will to recover is not there, the imbalance shows off again—one way or the other, in one system or another—till the body finally succumbs to the onslaught.

Seen in this way, some of the alternate systems that act more holistically upon the mind as well as the body, taking into consideration the person's

constitution, are better than the conventional Allopathic approach. Two such systems are Homeopathy and Ayurveda. Both these systems have a detailed consideration of the constitution before prescribing the drug. Besides, in its original purity, the Ayurveda physician was taught to understand and recognise the signs indicating whether the overall will to recover are present or not. Each system has its own understanding of man, the cosmos, disease and the larger goal, and the method of working.



WHO IS A PHYSICIAN?

In times as these, the word 'physician' has become synonymous with a person holding a medical degree in Allopathic medicine. A layman would naturally trust him as the State has certified him. Very few patients really know what kind of training is involved in the making of a doctor. There is also a wide range of differences between one medical doctor and another, be they from the same college. The percentage of marks also do not matter the practice of medicine requires many skills such as good observation, memory, ability to make sense of the information given, that is, information processing, judgement, sincerity that keeps one updated about the latest developments in the field and, most importantly, an empathy with the patient. Besides, medicine is a science as well as an art. It also requires an intuitive sense, something that all good doctors have. But in the age of rapid commercialisation all these things are fast dwindling in doctors, leading to a growing dissatisfaction. There are other factors as well such as the commercialisation of the medical profession where getting a medical degree involves lakhs of rupees, and many students join it only or mainly because it will give much better returns later along with the social status. There is also the problem of rapid industrialisation and the fast pace of life leading to a swift increase in diseases, the concentration of doctors and patients around the urban areas so that on an average the physician gets much less time per patient despite the swell in doctors, hospitals and medicines available today. It is as if patients were exponentially increasing with an increase in hospitals and doctors! One reason attributed to this is an increasing health awareness but another reason could be a loss of natural faith in the body's own capacity to heal so that now patients visit doctors for the smallest of problems, fearing some serious consequences of ignoring it. In short, there is a changing pattern of diseases and the challenge this change imposes is perhaps not being met by doctors, who more often than not, are overworked.



WHAT COULD BE THE SOLUTION?

First of all, especially in a country like India, we must encourage alternate systems whose healers were once deliberately marginalised by the British mainly for political purposes. It is time that we recovered our lost confidence and started a systematic exploration of some of the ancient systems and their merits and strengths. This would reduce the burden on the exchequer and also take healing to the villages where although we still have the traditions alive, it is much like a sick unit fast disappearing due to lack of State support. Perhaps it is worth studying whether the plants found in the native areas are gifts of Nature to tackle most problems found in that region. The only catch, of course, is the flip side of globalisation, what with fast food and the changing rhythms and exposure to new toxins, neither our habits nor our habitats remain natural anymore.

Still, it is interesting to note how the ancient systems viewed this once noble profession. In Ayurveda, for instance, a physician had to be a 'dwij' or twice born. That is to say he had to be born in the spirit as much as in matter. This term was used in those times for persons who were initiated into the secrets of spiritual mysteries. In fact, even in ancient Egypt and Europe, it is the priests who became the physicians while the barbers went on to take care of surgery. In India, whether physician or surgeon (and many elaborate techniques and even instruments of surgery are described in detail), one had to be a person well versed and learned, both in his branch of study and in his understanding of the spiritual side of life. The physical, the psychological, the occult and the spiritual were all considered before deciding the type of medication to be used and the prognosis.

Just as a human being is not merely a body or a mind, the physician too must be able to understand and help the patient on all the levels of his being, that is, be sensitive and knowledgeable not only about the physical but also the psychological and spiritual side of his patient. All this is unfortunately still very far from the realm of actuality at the present moment. But perhaps

some reflection of it can be seen in the concept of the family physician. It is a meaningful concept and can be replicated in some way. It always helps if a patient can have one particular physician as the common nodal point through which he can be routed to others if necessary. And besides, the physician gets to know the unique situation, the general physical and psychological conditions, and above all the inner resources that help in the recovery process.

An ideal physician is still a far cry. But if one has to envisage such a person, he should have, apart from the theoretical and practical knowledge of his subject, a wide and generous heart, a cheerful and kind predisposition, a positive outlook and indefatigable energy and most of all faith—faith in himself, faith in the healing process, faith in the possibility of cure, and, most of all, faith in the Grace. In other words, a physician is more than just someone with technical knowledge. The big bane of present times has been this divorce of everything from the deeper purpose of life and the subtler forces that move us.



WHO IS A PATIENT?

There is a tendency to view a patient as someone who is suffering from an illness. However, we often forget that this 'someone' is a living and thinking creature. Physicians are too often used to looking at a patient as if he were a physical object. The reasons are many. First of all, medical training right from the moment of entry begins to condition the student to look at a human being as just another machine. Anatomical studies on cadavers, study of separate parts taken out from a dead body (there is no other way of course), infuse this sense. Young interns begin to discuss their patients as if they were cases for study. I remember how, when I was admitted with a pain in the abdomen, the young interns started discussing among themselves all the possibilities right in front of me. While discussing them, they would even make a joke or two and pass casual remarks about cutting the abdomen as if it were a cake. It was horrifying to say the least. And one gets used to hearing songs and jokes in the operation theatres, presumably to ward off the tension. Finally, seeing 'dead bodies' and walking away the very next moment after 'doing one's bit' only reinforces the desensitisation process. Perhaps it is necessary at some stage for a physician to be relatively insensitive to the patient's pain or else he would never be able to work upon him. But this practical desensitisation often enough turns into an all-pervading insensitivity with its attendant consequences.

But perhaps there is a better way, a higher way if one may say so. It is possible to take a spiritual stand, to regard a human being as a developing soul, growing in spiritual experience through both pain and joy, through suffering and through happiness. While working upon the body, even when one has to isolate it from the rest, one must always remember this truth in the background, that one is not dealing with just some chemicals and a conglomeration of cells. This way, one would perhaps avoid a lot of unnecessary reactions that arise within the patient due to unwitting remarks of their physicians or other health-care personnel. One must be especially

cautious about prognostications about illness and the course the disease may take. Medical treatment is a peculiar thing where the physician may end up reinforcing a scientific superstition by repeating it to a patient over and over again! Each such remark, whether scientifically proven or not, carries a potent force to set into motion mechanisms in the patient that begin to work in the direction of the fear being generated. The mind of man is a powerful equipment for good or for worse, as more and more physicians are recognising lately. It is a great art to know how much to say and how to say it. Especially when it comes to speaking about a statistical truth, we must be careful that we are not turning it into a gospel truth in the patient's mind. Later it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy and only reproduces itself in further statistical studies till new findings and some breakthrough emerges and suddenly the fresh statistics begin to flourish. Very few physicians realise (some do and exploit it rather) that their patients often treat them as demigods, placing their entire trust in the hands of the physician. The word of their physician, even sometimes a casual phrase gets translated in the patient's mind as a truth that cannot be challenged. Sometimes it takes years to undo that, and sometimes it becomes again a self-fulfilling prophesy. I remember an instance of a patient who had suffered from breast carcinoma. Many years before being actually diagnosed with it she was told casually by a doctor that she may have breast cancer. Subsequent examination did not reveal anything but the remark stuck in her mind and she often brooded over it. Almost after a decade, she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Whether the doctor was an intuitive one or whether her words proved fatal and started in her patient's mind a psycho-biological loop feeding the possibility is hard to say. But surely such instances are not uncommon and it will be good to remember that what a doctor says is not necessarily what is understood by the patient. Each mind processes any given information in its own way, adding to that its own bit of fear and hope, expectations and anxiety, thus altering the whole meaning. Many patients do not countercheck whether what they have understood is correct or not; they are often afraid that they may get to hear the worst and that imagined scenario, exaggerated by the physician's silence, plays upon their minds. Equally, many physicians either do not care to explain or are more interested in making money out of their patient's misery rather than have genuine concerns about their client's illness or their well-being.



WHAT CAUSES ILLNESS?

Illness is primarily an inner disequilibrium, that is, the normally smooth functioning of the body is disturbed. At first one organ system is affected but later due to the interconnectedness of the organs, the other physiological systems may get affected—first those intimately linked to the primary organ, later those that are more distant. Normally this smooth functioning of the body is maintained through an extremely complex process, or rather processes, where both internal and external inputs are taken into consideration. The body adjusts rapidly to these changes and challenges from within and without by shifting its processes fast enough through elaborate feedback loops that link up each and every process ultimately to the brain tissues. Normally this shifting is automatic and does not require any conscious intervention.

Quite naturally there are limits to these adjustments. These limits are twofold. First, there are limits of each species within which it adjusts naturally, spontaneously, automatically. But in addition, there are limits of individual human beings. These individual limits are determined by a complex interaction of genetics, heredity and environmental learning. To take a very simple example, those who have lived and grown up in extreme climatic conditions can adjust to climatic conditions much better than those who have been brought up in moderate climates. It is known for instance that those with a fairer skin versus those with a darker skin (Negroid races) have a higher probability of developing skin cancers, especially when they are exposed to the tropical sun. There may be many more such adaptive strategies of Nature than we are presently aware of. Certain natural foods and also food habits of natives residing in a certain place for generations are perfectly safe for them while the same foods or food habits may be found harmful to others and in other environments. In our over-enthusiasm for genes and heredity we often undermine Nature's deep wisdom that underlies all adaptive learning. But equally one can train oneself to adapt better and

better. All conscious learning and training and education are about this bringing out of the latent possibilities of the body and mind. A manoeuvre that would normally break the bone or dislocate the joint of an ordinary untrained human being can not only be endured, but also done with an expression of pleasure by the gymnast. Effort that would be impossible for an average human heart is merely a warm up for an athlete before the final run! At another level, one where the body is not trained consciously but adapts naturally, we have the example of village folk who have lived in less than hygienic conditions but have a remarkable immunity whereas those who have had a sheltered life lose that natural immunity and fall sick at the slightest sip of the same water or food! Such examples are many and in every field of human activity and in every organ system, not only those which we call as voluntary but also involuntary and autonomic. That is why it is not quite correct to compare the body with a machine. Or let us say, it is a remarkably conscious machine that has enormous capacity to adapt and survive even under extreme conditions. It is just that we hardly reflect upon this, rather, we neglect it. Besides, thanks to our mind-centred education and our general conditioning by prevalent ideas and physical comforts, we have lost this capacity and now refuse to believe in it. Medical consumerism and the fast pace of life has only made it worse. We prefer bypass surgery over the natural bypass that can take place through a change of lifestyle. We prefer a stressful life plus the pill rather than a life of ease and peace, since this stress is translated in our consciousness with money and later it becomes a habitual attitude and a way of life.

In other words, an illness is essentially a failure of this adaptive process and naturally it varies from individual to individual. By practice we can increase our adaptability to an enormous degree, maybe become resistant if not immune to many an illness. This adaptation requires a threefold effort: a certain training to the body, a certain healthy lifestyle and a certain set of mental attitudes. Nevertheless, an absolute immunity and a perfect resistance to all illnesses would be impossible and not even desirable for Nature's work which is essentially to maintain a certain balance between the different types of life forms it has evolved and sustains. Man may be the highest of her creations so far, but it is not certain that he is also her favourite. Therefore, whatever we may do, one day the body will fall, if not

through disease then through ageing or 'accidents'. Death somehow finds a door to enter through, even if it be the smallest one. At least that has been the story of life upon earth so far.

Whatever the cause or the source of an illness, once it enters and settles within the body or affects any organ system then it becomes more difficult to stop it. The groove of Nature (i.e. the fixed habit of response that has been learnt and around which Nature seems to move rigidly) responds mechanically and the door to illness opens again and again. The age-old wisdom—that prevention is better than cure—is so very true. Of course the body tries to expel the illness and here again some have a better chance than others. Naturally those who have a good heredity and training, who have worked upon their bodies or have a naturally robust life force and a healthy lifestyle or a positive mental attitude fare better than others. Still, an imprint once made has a tendency to invite the problem again except in certain instances. If nothing else, there is the memory that the body holds which can throw up a relapse, especially in chronic illnesses. However, with age, there is a general decline in the body's natural immunity and the capacity to fight an illness. The life force is no longer strong, and if we find it difficult to change our lifestyle after a certain age, it is even more difficult to change our mental attitudes. Because of sheer force of habit (a method Nature provides to ensure stability of its creations), we become increasingly rigid and fixed in our responses. This rigidity is seen not only in the body but also in the mind, till death comes as a release and liberates us from the fixed mould now grown too constricted for its evolutionary purposes. For, all evolution implies plasticity and that decreases markedly and often exponentially with advancing age. Then once disequilibrium sets in, it begins to involve the other organs until it is no longer possible to reverse the process.

Illness therefore is information and a pointer that something is not quite right in the individual unit of life in this complex chain of creation where each is linked to the other and to every other object in this universe, from the bacteria around the nose to the cosmic radiations that visit this earth from time to time. In this long and complex chain, the human being finds himself at one end, an extremely complex creation carrying within his cells all the imprints of the earlier forms that have preceded him—their experiences, their struggles and hopes, their fears and desires are all inherited by him.

But over and above, within him is also the impulse to consciously evolve and complete Nature's half-finished task of a perfect type. All this struggle and pull from both the ends, this inheritance of the past and this pressure from the future to evolve, this invasion of forces that struggle and compete for survival, this precariously held balance of an extremely complex functioning, this habit and conditioning of responses leading to a progressive lack of plasticity, this maladaptive lifestyle, this growing restlessness and dissatisfaction with almost everything, this imbalance of life that encourages extremes and not a holistic integral development, this bombardment of forces from near and afar, all this translates itself into one single language—the language of illness.



WHAT CAUSES CURE?

If illness is about disequilibrium, then healing is about re-establishing the equilibrium. Naturally it involves all the factors that have been shifted in the process. That is why it is much easier to heal any illness when it has just started. With passage of time it becomes more and more difficult. Each part that is linked in the chain with the patient helps or hinders the healing process. It involves the physician, the medical attendants, the caregivers, the place where the patient is located, the environment, the psychological and spiritual atmosphere, the mode of therapy itself and finally the patient. In fact it is the patient whose will and faith are of utmost importance. They are the crucial factors without which healing may be impossible. This will is not always a conscious will. Very often it is simply a confidence that all will be well and one will be cured. If the will and faith are there, then everything helps. If these are missing, then everything becomes difficult. Most patients do not realise this. They are filled with doubts about the illness, doubts about the system of therapy, doubts about the physician, doubts about the medicines. Unfortunately, the caregivers only make things worse. Overeager to pass off their ignorance as knowledge, they often speak with an authority that has no basis in real facts or even common sense. Often they have heard stray reports here and there or have certain opinions gathered from newspapers or preformed mindsets that they pass off as authentic truths. We do not know how much of an effect our thoughts and hopes and fears, whether spoken or even unspoken, have upon our environment, especially upon those who trust us.

Nevertheless it is quite common that when an illness enters the system, it triggers not only a disharmony specific to the system but also a more general disharmony that involves weak and vulnerable areas. Of course each and every symptom is not necessarily part of the illness; it may be an attempt of Nature to cure. Each illness also has its psychological correlates that often go unnoticed. And very often it is from here that the healing starts. The will

decides that all is going to be well—first the mental will and then the will of the body. Next the process of healing starts, with a general sense of wellbeing, gradually ending with the system clearing up slowly and completely. Again some symptoms that prolong may not be related to the disease but may be part of the cure. In fact quite a few symptoms, including diarrhoea, cough and fever, are the body's attempts to throw out the pathogen and beat the illness. That sometimes the symptoms themselves become a cause for distress and occasionally of danger is another matter. Nevertheless, they are neither to be dreaded nor feared. It is not symptoms that spell disaster, fear does. In fact some of the worst diseases strike us unaware. But some patients do feel a distinct but inexplicable 'unease' before falling ill. That is a more reliable index than manifest symptoms. This unease is felt when the illness is still in its subtler stages and is difficult to detect. Sometimes the body throws it off and all is well. At other times one can work upon it by subtler means at that early stage and prevent a manifest and detectable malady.

In fact it is much easier to cure an illness when it has not yet completely manifested in the body. Once it settles down, then it usually runs its course determined by the general collective conditioning of the human system. For in the final analysis it all comes down to constitution, habit and conditioning. If the constitution is strong and there is in the body and mind a sufficient degree of plasticity, an absence of fear and the presence of trust, then healing goes much faster. But one can also learn to give another response and the body can be trained in a way as to not only endure but to obey the will to heal and get well. This too is a matter of conditioning and training. The will, like everything else, can be trained especially in childhood. If a child is taught that illness is a challenge that we must defeat and can defeat with the help of Grace and not a thing to be dreaded or pampered, then it makes it much easier when we grow up. Given time and encouragement and some material support most illnesses will and do heal. An inner peace and trust make this process easier.

CAN THE VARIOUS SYSTEMS OF THERAPY BE COMBINED?

This is a question that differs not only from system to system but also from therapist to therapist. In general, however, it is not a very good thing to combine systems for three reasons. Firstly, combining systems also means combining physicians. This does not often work to the patient's advantage. Too many doctors spoil the case! They may differ in their understanding and in their pronouncements of the prognosis. All this may well leave the patient confused and unsure about himself and the illness. It will also affect the patient's faith in the physician as he will not know whom to trust and whom not to. Secondly, certain systems rely upon the symptoms to administer the medicines. Some other systems such as Allopathy believe in controlling the symptoms. This often leads to a masking and may not give the true picture needed for assessment. Thirdly, systems like Homeopathy work by first bringing out the malady from its roots, leading often to a temporary exacerbation. Allopathy works rather to contain the disease at the physical level. It may also thereby push it further into the subconscious level, thereby working in contradiction to the Homeopath. Besides, most patients do not have the time and patience for a radical cure. They prefer the quicker method even if it is incomplete. Like everything else, our science and technology reflect the nature of the age we live in. In this fast pace of life where material reality is considered the sole reality, everything is judged by the outer effects and where time is money, most patients get restless if an illness seems to prolong.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Well, the simple answer is to go to a physician in whom you can place your trust and take the medicine in which you have faith. In any case, no system is perfect and there is no panacea for human maladies. So ultimately, the highest wisdom is to do what you can and leave the rest in the hands of a greater Power.



Is There More to Healing than Physicians and Medicines?

Yes of course! One can and indeed must assist the healing process. One of the banes of modern technology is an excessive dependence upon external aid. We are made to feel helpless before an immense technological structure that has assumed such gigantic proportions that we feel crushed and appalled at the same time under its weight. What was originally meant to serve us turns out to be an encumbrance.

We can assist the healing process by adopting certain attitudes, a positive outlook and faith, a will to be well, a certain detachment of the mind that refuses to get depressed by the illness even if it is painful or prolonged. Apart from these, there are other self-help methods that employ the power of the human mind to influence the body. Among these powers, the foremost is imagination. We know, for instance, how our imagination can actually affect our bodies when we watch a television drama and our heartbeat goes up at a certain scene or we begin to sweat, our pupils get dilated, etc. It is now a well-recognised fact that our thoughts, feelings, etc., have a great influence upon our bodies. So if we can use these means given to us for restoring our health instead of encouraging the illness it will be a great help. Some of these means are auto-suggestion, hypnosis, guided imagery, all of which employ imagination to some extent.

Human beings can also seek help from beyond the frontiers of the mind. This is possible because, unlike other species, human beings can move beyond the arc of possibilities and the limited frames fixed by Nature for each species within which it must move. Through a process of methodical development, human beings can awaken within them many other potential sources and means of knowledge and power; if they cross the borders of canbe and cannot-be and invoke a greater force, it can help and heal, succour and strengthen, restore and rejuvenate our body, mind and tired spirits. This greater 'knowledge' and 'power', 'wisdom' and 'force' are given the name of God or the various gods and goddesses that are its energies, aspects and

powers. We can invoke this greater Consciousness into our bodies and mind and thereby achieve results that sometimes appear miraculous but are not so much a miracle as they are the natural consequence of the working of a far-greater Light and Force and its limitless potential.

According to those who have entered into It and experienced It, this Consciousness is potentially omnipotent and omniscient because the whole universe is Its emanation and objectivisation [objective?] and It has also entered each and every process. All is Its play and is secretly supported from behind and within by this greater Consciousness. It is quite natural and even logical that with the help of this Power nothing is impossible. However, from this we must not nurture crude and often vulgar ideas of Its omnipotence. Firstly, since the whole universe is supported by It, this greater Consciousness does not act arbitrarily like a capricious human being ordering his subjects to do this or that but adjusts the whole to bring about a certain result. The whole universe is interlinked and the lower we are in the chain of our inner evolution, the more dependent we are on the many forces that cling to us and tie us down to our present human condition. These forces have also emanated from the same One Infinite Consciousness and have a cosmic purpose in existence. To ignore that purpose will be to create another kind of disorder, sometimes at a much larger scale. This greater Consciousness does not ignore the conditions of the play but works through it in such a way as to bring about the desired result without creating dramatic shifts in the totality which would only create a fresh confusion. That Consciousness does not show Itself and has no need for it since to Its self-awareness all is Itself. Instead, very often It works through several small steps in the chain, shifting now one thing here and now something there, things and incidents that may well seem as if natural, or else a chance coincidence. Later sometimes we may recall how one small step or alteration in the scheme of things turned out to be the crucial event or the moment that became a catalyst for a whole series of shifts and the ultimate result. This is the psychological equivalent of the chaos theory where a seemingly small and passing incident, apparently a chance, worked in ways that were inexplicable. An instance (out of many) comes to mind. A 75-year old man was experiencing chest pain. Not knowing what to do he thought it to be due to gas (a common error). As he was rolling in pain someone entered

his room quite unexpectedly and alerted the doctor and what followed next was a series of events as if working out to facilitate the episode in a certain direction. Now, one may ask why this benevolent Force can't simply make the pain vanish suddenly, as by a miracle, and not make the patient go through a lengthy process involving many steps and persons. To understand this mystery we have to understand the mystery of creation itself and the plan on which it is built.

Unlike our linear thinking that sees cause and effect in a simple oneto-one relationship, the Divine vision is a global vision. It sees not only the individual life as it extends forwards and backwards but also the many links in the steps. The individual life is linked through unseen bonds to the All-Life and one cannot disturb one element of the chain without disturbing the rest. To paraphrase a great scientist who when asked how he hit his head on the branch of a tree, remarked thoughtfully: 'The whole universe conspired towards this.' Besides, the All-knowing Consciousness has always a master plan and Its steps are only to hasten things towards that larger goal, to bring it nearer. Sometimes it is necessary for all of us (including the treating physicians and caregivers and those who are linked to us through bonds of sentimental attachment and of course ourselves) to go through the pain and the struggle as this may be best under the circumstances and will help all to progress faster. After all, whatever we may say, an illness affects only the body, the outer form, but the soul within is not afflicted? and grows as much through the so-called painful experiences as through the pleasant ones. In fact, very often a seemingly painful event has much more power to change our life and its orientation than a pleasant one that keeps us only glued to the surface of life and its small comforts and petty demands. Pleasure is deceptive and often it is detrimental to inner growth. When things are going fine we remain often in a state of excitement or inert complacence, whereas pain shakes us up—we are compelled to think and raise questions and confront ourselves and seek to outgrow our limitations. Yet when we call for help, even when it lets us go through the pain and the struggle sometimes, we can experience a secret unseen Hand supporting us inwardly through the painful passage.



WHAT THEN IS HEREDITY?

Heredity involves three things. First, there is the physical heredity that is passed on through the seed of the parent. It endows us with certain vulnerabilities as well as certain strengths. It lays the foundation of our physical body, the hardware, so to speak. Then, there is the psychological heredity which is more like a learning or a transmission of certain parental and other influences from the psychological environment and the sociocultural milieu. It is like the software that has programmed us. But apart from these, there is a third factor, not yet recognised by mainstream science but is known by spiritual teachers as the 'law of karma'. This is the inheritance of our past bonds—the skinware. That is to say, we start from the curve where we left the thread of our previous life. While the first is easier to study, the second is too complex to study or understand in all its aspects that relate to each other. The last is of course still the privilege of the few who have risen to great inner heights and plumbed their own depths.

In the hierarchical order, the first or the physical heredity still exercises a strong hold upon the person since it is the basis of our physical existence that develops out of the seed. This process of reproducing faithfully the design encrypted within the seed has been going on for millions of years since life first entered the womb of matter. That is why it has such a strong hold on the physical constitution. But overriding it is the psychological inheritance, again for better or for worse. This is not only in degrees of tolerance, especially of pain, but also in matters of endurance and even attitudes that are healthy or unhealthy, habits that help or hinder the health, beliefs that are helpful or harmful, that condition of our mind to react and respond in one way or the other. Needless to say, a good psychological constitution can override a bad physical heredity and the reverse may also be true. The mind and its attitudes have a great effect upon the body and, like many other things, these attitudes are often unconsciously picked up from the environment and accepted unquestioningly when one is yet a child. Later, it may take decades

to surmount one such attitude and sometimes one is never quite able to overcome it.

But finally, and overriding all this, is the experience that the soul has chosen to undergo based upon its past learning curve. Not only that, the soul is creating fresh karmas and thereby bringing into play new forces and dimensions of consciousness whose importance is immense since it is this alone that can be really controlled in a certain measure at least. One can do little about one's physical heredity or the passive learning and other forms of childhood influences. One can also do little about one's past. But one can always do something about the present. In fact changing one's present is the best way of changing one's future and the results and consequences arising out of the past.

But one can work upon the present in two ways. One method is to change outwardly, that is to say our lifestyle, habits, etc. The other and more enduring way is to change inwardly, that is to say one's attitudes, to cultivate in oneself certain higher elements of Nature that can call the play of a higher consciousness through faith, aspiration, surrender, peace, purification of nature from certain animal propensities or lower basal elements such as greed, anger, etc. It is best to combine the two—inner and outer—for ideal results.

Is Illness a Punishment, the Result of Bad Karma?

The theory of karma is often invoked like a trump card to explain the moral nature of the universe. Moral or amoral, the main business of the universe seems to be change and an evolutionary progress rather than justice. What then is this much talked about karma? It is a machinery for evolutionary growth through constant learning and integrating what we have thus learnt into the very inmost fabric of our being. Any energy let forth into this world is a 'karma'. This involves not only our outwardly demonstrable actions but also our inner thoughts and feelings and will. Each is an energy set into motion at its appropriate plane and goes out to produce a certain result depending upon its strength, intensity, persistence, formation, power, and the inherent motive that is propelling it from behind and in a certain direction. These energies, once released, go out into the world towards their goals, touch whatever it can and through each other the entire universe. Yet, in the end, they have the tendency to return towards their parent source. We are thus like dynamos, all the time receiving and transmitting, attracting and repelling by a law of affinity. What we have released comes back to us grown manifold, distorted and twisted or blunted and changed or perhaps even cancelled and annulled. While normally this energy moves along its own plane, creating results through the simple law of cause and effect, sometimes its course can be completely modified by the intervention of a higher determinism. In other words, the Higher Law only works to protect us against the effects of karma and not to punish us. But usually we are not open to this Higher Law and therefore have to pass through the normal and natural consequence appropriate to that plane where the energy is released into motion or wherever it is interlinked to a nearby plane. Thus, for example, a bad thought can produce ill-effects not only upon our own bodies but also upon other bodies. The same is true of a positive thought and a positive feeling. It does not matter whether the thought or the feeling is conscious or unconscious, but being conscious of it, especially when it is emotionally charged, does lend a greater power to the formation

and doing it with the sense of being the doer additionally attaches the tag of responsibility and keeps one tied to consequences.

Practically, it means that one can create formations consciously to help the healing process. Much of guided imagery is about that—a conscious use of thought and will and imagination to produce a certain result. And if one can free oneself from the sense of being the doer, then one avoids many unpleasant consequences, but that of course is much more difficult and requires a sincere Yoga that not all can or are even willing to undertake. Finally, by invoking a Force from the Beyond, one can completely modify the karmic consequence and if it is, by some rare fortune, the intervention of the Supreme Grace, it has the power even to completely annul the karma. But again this is neither easy nor common. What is much more common is the natural change in the karmic consequences when the individual has realised what he had to learn from it and has therefore changed his inner poise or the station of consciousness. Thus, learning and evolving, he sets in motion a new force (new to him) that nevertheless has the effect of cancelling some of the energies that he has released in the past or at least modifying its effects. To take a very commonplace example, smoking is a karma that brings us closer to diseases and death. But if one stops smoking, then with the passage of time some or many of the ill-effects and possible consequences begin to recede and become less and less probable! Much of lifestyle change is about that. But what applies at the most outer and physical level applies as much to the inner fields. That is why all spiritual disciplines insist that we must have our hearts and minds full of goodwill and positive thoughts and feelings for others, we must consciously cultivate it. In the end this benefits not only others but even our own self! A change of action, a change of lifestyle, a change of attitudes and orientation, a change of the very goal and station of our inner self are some of the ways and means to thwart the ill-effects of previous adverse karmas, and the reverse is also as much true. All the same, karma is not some primitive law of reward and punishment, though sometimes it may seem to take this extreme form when a strong karma creates an equally severe repercussion. But this repercussion, whether from the environment or the cosmic forces (often one using the other), is upon the inner being and not so much in terms of what happens outside. The inner being learns in the process and grows one way or the other.



TO TREAT OR NOT TO TREAT?

This also brings in another dimension to the treatment issue, at least when we look at things from the spiritual perspective. It is the dilemma of 'to treat or not to treat', and if so, how much and how far and by what methods. These dilemmas are not only spiritual but also involve ethical, existential, psychological, and even scientific considerations. Frankly this is a question to which there can be no definite answer in our present level of ignorance, much like we have no definite answer to questions relating to organ transplant and euthanasia. Perhaps they are best left alone and for each person to decide for himself. But a few broad hints may be discussed.

One thing we all can easily agree with is that there is no fundamental objection to treatment per se. An illness is an error of response or an inability of the organism to respond to the challenge and therefore one must correct it just as one sets out to correct any aberration. But it is equally true that we must look at the larger picture as much as the smaller or more apparent one. There are many factors involved in this seemingly simple decision. There is the patient to consider, the age of the client, whether he can endure the treatment process, whether the benefits of the treatment are going to be very short lived, whether it is adding to the quality of life in any way, given the age, and whether the risk is worth taking. All these dilemmas come in when the treatment involved is especially going to be a rather violent one and also expensive. Certain surgeries, life-support systems, chemotherapy for malignancy, fall into this category. Its milder versions apply to patients needing treatment for chronic illnesses with a known progressive downhill course, such as end-stage chronic renal failure. Perhaps, we can be sure of one thing, that there is no harm in using gentler remedies for almost anything and on any patient, even on the death bed. The problem comes when one has to make a choice about taking strong remedies that either stun the system or shake it up too violently. Several issues are to be considered here. First of all, these remedies may forcefully suppress the illness and when it erupts

again or resurfaces it may be far worse, especially if there have not been any accompanying changes in the attitudes and lifestyle. Such patients are often known to escape the treatment after a while and require more and more powerful remedies. This happens for the following reasons:

- The malady is only contained, not cured. The root cause, of which one is mostly unaware, is still there lying in the shadows.
- An illness is an information as much about the patient as about the organ and its pathology. Most physicians concentrate upon the latter and neglect the former. The result is that while one is working upon the organ, the patient factors (lifestyle, diet, exercise, and attitudes) and the environment factors (the physical, psychological, and social milieu) remain as they are. Therefore, the illness returns to the vulnerable organ.
- Even from the karmic and energy point of view, the karma, under normal ordinary circumstances (not taking into account the extraordinary factor of Grace that alone can completely annul the law or even the bringing into operation a higher determinism to mitigate the effects) must be worked out. If we stop its working on one spot, it will emerge at another spot. The pent-up energies must find expression and create other routes for it. That is why death finds its way even if all medical doors through known diseases are shut and tightly bolted! It will still enter, through the roof, the cellar or the attic or even the floor and the basement of our physical structure that houses life and mind and a conscious soul in it.
- Strong violent remedies have another problem. They stun the body and often the force of life and the mind itself along with it. They help us temporarily but by putting us in a helpless condition. The long-term results of all this may well be that the body's own healing capacities go to sleep and the mind itself, shocked by the suddenness of the change, loses faith in its own capacity to heal.

Indeed we can see this already happening. The number of diseases and the number of sick persons are increasing with the number of hospitals and drugs flooding the cities and the markets. One can almost say without much exaggeration that a physician often puts the fear (unwittingly at times) into the patient's head and the body, and then treats it through a long and

complicated process! One has to only look at the average number of times a patient has to visit a hospital or a clinic where he often goes for one problem and comes out with three others. Of course not all physicians are the same. There are some excellent and experienced clinicians who instil faith instead of fear, whose words not only comfort but also reassure, giving the patient new hope and courage, even exacting his active participation as the largest stakeholder to his own life and in which he has the maximum say. This, however, is rare. More often than not, the patient is made to feel as if he is some kind of a helpless victim tied to the stake of life as a sacrificial object. Medical science comes there to give him relief but cannot free him from the knots and bonds of fear and anxiety that often tie him in a way worse than the illness.



IS IT GOOD TO TAKE ADVICE FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES?

In this age of information overload, it is only natural that when struck with an illness, one runs outside to gather as much information about it as one can. Unfortunately, usually this works only to the patient's disadvantage. Much of the information is only hearsay and not authentic. Even when it is well-meaning and from reliable sources, it can mislead us since no two patients are alike and, therefore, in a way, no two illnesses are alike. One may add that very often even two specialist doctors do not always agree with each other! Besides it is very difficult to opine upon a patient simply by casually hearing about the symptoms and supplying some superficial information. An experienced and intuitive physician may be able to provide some useful hints but usually it is rare to find such a physician, even in this age of teleconferencing! No doubt sometimes an odd thing here and there helps; usually it is not this or that thing taken or done but the body's own resources that have healed it in its natural course. Whatever was being given at that time gets the acclaim! But in either case, whether the claim is genuine or simply a matter of faith, the body still begins to rely upon something external to itself. As long as one knows that the value of all such advice is very relative and the real healing is always in the end self-healing, it is okay. There is yet another problem. It is the unnecessary fear that is introduced by unsolicited advice. The damaging effect of such advice is seldom understood by the person who gives it, often in good faith. But the words spoken, the suggestions given, the feelings generated, the vibrations communicated, all continue to reverberate in the mind of the patient and later in the subconscious parts much after the adviser himself may have forgotten it. Of course if the suggestions are good and positive they work to the benefit of the patient. But more often than not, an illness is generally associated with fear of various kinds and that makes things only worse. Perhaps more persons die of fear than the actual illness. But we seldom recognise it and there are no instruments to measure the damage done by fear, often triggered by

unasked advice. The best advice one can give is to remain cheerful in spite of the illness, to keep trust even if the doctors have declared the case as hopeless (since doctors are not God and medical science is not an absolute knowledge), to observe moderation and to take rest. Diverting the mind to something positive and beautiful or light and joyous is a more concrete help that a person can provide someone, a help more beneficial than one that harps upon the illness or gives it more attention than it deserves. The safe rule for the patient is not to discuss the illness with too many persons who will add nothing but misery, even when they sympathise. Only they must know about it who are directly involved with the care and to whom the patient's well-being or illness makes a concrete or emotional difference. And there too one must exercise utmost caution before speaking about one's maladies. None can help, except the Divine Grace, sometimes aided by our faith in the physician, the medicine and in the eventual recovery.



WHAT IS THE LARGER PICTURE BEHIND ILLNESS?

The larger picture simply put is that we are neither alone nor the ultimate creation. There is a visible and also an invisible thread that links each seemingly separate aspect of creation and holds it together in a chain of oneness. The visible aspects are the various links in the chain of life and the interdependence of each thing upon everything else, from the food we eat, to the climatic changes we witness, the social demands and pressures leading to changing pattern of life to the constant stress and pressures generated by the human being towards its own kind. But behind these more visible links, there are other subtler links, interconnected with the thread of consciousness and woven into the very fabric of life. There are many layers of our being and of the world existence as we are only just beginning to discover. There are worlds within worlds, to use an Upanishadic phrase, that press upon our life through unseen doors and influence us without our knowledge. We are driven to act and think and feel and do, often what our innate sense of truth deeply abhors. We are like prisoners who have come to love our prison, either because we see nothing outside of it and wish to make the most we can, or else because any striving to be free only increases the restlessness and frustration, a battle of battles fought within and interminably so. Most human beings therefore reconcile and settle to a third position, a seemingly neutral one, at least one that would avoid conflicts or reduce them to a minimum and only in the sphere of their personal survival and enjoyment! And yet the irony is that this too does not satisfy human beings and there is within us a relentless urge to have more, to want more, even to seek more, to grow more, in short to progress more and more beyond what one is and has to what one believes to be possible.

This constant pressure upon man to exceed himself, to augment his capacities and to actualise his potentials, leads to a constant evolutionary pressure. On one side, this urge is the birthplace of new things and new possibilities. On the other side, it generates a stress born out of a constant

friction within, a dissatisfaction with what one is. When something new is born through this creative urge which is at its core an evolutionary urge, then we feel the joy and the release, at least a temporary respite, till the next evolutionary wave comes and sweeps us off our feet and shifts our focus to still higher and deeper unborn things. But when this evolutionary process is blocked, the energy of life turns back upon itself and begins to destroy the form that has become useless for its high purpose. This pressure of conscious evolution is a relatively new emergence and has been born only with man. Animals don't feel it to that extent beyond their mere physical survival, and that too is usually taken care of by Nature. This is so because in animal forms the quantum and the quality of consciousness is rather small and that too is largely identified with the form. But with the advent of the mind and more so with the appearance of an individual soul in man the possibilities have become limitless. As an ancient Upanishad puts it, thus that the Supreme Creatrix Consciousness asked the gods (powers and aspects of the One Divine) as to which form they would like to inhabit; they (the gods) rejected all the forms one by one, till they were shown the human form. Once the human form was presented to them, they jumped into it as here alone they felt was the possibility of expressing their force and energies in a material sheath. Since then the material world inhabited by men has become a field of internal and external conflicts between the gods that labour unseen in man to uplift his soul towards greater and diviner possibilities and the powers and forces of darkness, ignorance and unconsciousness that governed the animal kingdom so far.

In other words, man experiences a double conflict, one within and the other without. The outer pressure is from the environment, the other species, the constant bombardment of earth with toxins and chemicals, the many pollutants, the changing pattern of lives, etc. The inner pressure is from a conflict between his animal parts and their needs and wants and the innate urge in man towards a more sublimesoar, daring to scale a greater height of his self-being, a deeper and subtler, a nobler and vaster way of thinking, feeling and living. Of course, matters become worse because the animal parts in man no more carry the spontaneous and natural simplicity of the animal life that has been lost with the advent of the mind. If anything, it is replaced by a kind of perversity, a crookedness that links itself to the

animal impulses and distorts even simple things like food and sleep and the movements of fear and rage that are so much part of the animal world and its survival. In human beings, all these movements get linked to thought and intelligence, and get further distorted by the ego sense that insists upon its own satisfaction to the exclusion of every other unit of life. The distortions that mental power has added to the animal life and its few and simple wants need not be elaborated more. We know it as a species and are constantly facing the threat of extermination, not so much from other species or even the environmental challenges, as much from ourselves. But what we do not yet recognise, and which is the key to solving the human problem, is that even in the worst of human beings, there is something inborn which can be best described as a spiritual urge. We have within us a need to reflect and, if nothing else, a need to justify ourselves by some means or the other. However crude and hypocritical this justification may be, it shows the birth of a new tendency. Action on impulse is not enough—it must be right and rationally justified as well. But if we go to the depth of this need, we shall see behind this veil of reason and the need for justification, a vaguely felt Light that now shines as idealistic tendency, a need for perfection, a conscious seeking after Love, Knowledge, Power, Bliss and all the rest. True, we have to cross many deceptive shadows and shades of self-deception, be disillusioned many a time and through many a life before we turn towards the real source of this Light that is within us. But many layers cover this and many veils stand between this inmost entity in man and the surface man as we know and understand ourselves to be.

Eventually this deeper Light is born to grow and win like all new modes of consciousness that have so far appeared upon earth. But this victory is not without a battle and it has its complexities and struggles and frustrations and losses. It was not within a few centuries that the mind began to rule the earth since its advent within the animal world. It has taken millenniums to arrive where man stands today and his mastery, or more accurately the mastery of a mentalised consciousness, is still far from complete. There is within man the striving for and the birth of a greater spiritual consciousness. Just as we see glimpses of the mind within the animal kingdom, at least in higher animals as a promise of the future, so too we see in man the glimpses of a spiritual consciousness, half-veiled, vaguely felt in most. This spiritual

impetus has been quickened in the last century and there are many signs to testify that. One obvious sign is the awakening of the spiritual need in many persons and the growing interest in spiritual things rather suddenly and unexpectedly. There are other signs as well. Nevertheless it is enough to generate an inner pressure and to make the struggle and the conflict much more acute and severe. It is this struggle and conflict of forces that translates itself as an illness, at least in the body and the surface layers of our being. Man, by this view, is a transitional being and illness is paradoxically one of the means, a disastrous means no doubt, that Nature has chosen. Not caring for establishing a harmony, or even perhaps the survival of the race, Nature seems to be pressing relentlessly towards creating this new type. And for this it seems to be using all means to hasten the advent of something 'other' and different than man, a being who will be as much other than him as today man is from the animal. This is the larger picture and the backdrop of the growing number of illnesses despite an advancing knowledge.



PART II



PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Different systems speak of different causes of illness. Which one is true?

Different systems do not necessarily speak of different causes, but they do speak from different levels. Or they may speak of the same thing but use a different language. What we need to understand is that each system probes and understands man and his maladies at different levels of existence. They do not contradict, but often complement each other. It is like one person describing the tree as just its roots, another as its trunk and one more as its branches and leaves. Each is right but their perception is incomplete. As human beings, we are aware of primarily the physical level and the meaning and interpretation of words in their modern sense. Therefore, we have a natural tendency to see everything and interpret every word in our own sense. This is perhaps what leads to so much confusion.

So, for example, when the Ayurvedic physician speaks of three types of dosas (humours), he is not speaking about the physical level but of the subtler elements, forces and energies that feed the physical. Thus, when he speaks of *vata dosa* (wind and all that partakes of the air element in the body), it does not mean that there is too much gas in the stomach going to the brain, but simply that the flow of the life-energy (the great expander of all things) has become uneven, blocked and is flowing into small and narrow channels, thereby not available for better purposes. Again, pitta (fire and all that partakes of this element of heat within the body) is not just acidity and biliary vomiting, but the element that provides heat and light to the body, metabolism for instance. Or else the kapha (phlegm or mucoid) is the fluid element in the body. Again, to take another instance, the Homeopath speaks of miasm¹ as a deep rooted source of the illness, possibly referring to some psycho-physical or perhaps physico-vital plane where the malady hides itself even when it is apparently thrown out of the body only to return later. This hiding place for an illness may well correspond to the Yogic understanding of the karmic seeds that are like energy knots buried in some subconscious part, throwing up shoots with a vehement persistence even when there is

no apparent cause! So also, the Acupuncturist speaks of the 'energy body' as does the Pranic healer. Thus, the practitioners look at the cause on different levels. Something of this kind is already emerging in modern medicine as well. The role of the mind and emotions, our inner psychological state, is being increasingly recognised in health and illness. But the problem is that most illnesses are not unidimensional but have multifactorial causes, each operating in its own way and adding or negating the effect of others. Each system therefore has its own contribution to make, its own strengths and weaknesses, its own field and mechanism of action. Thus, the quarrel among the systems is unnecessary and in fact illegitimate.

In other words, we can recognise illness at different levels of our complex nature. The physical—where we usually become conscious of the symptoms—is the last step in a descending chain of cause and effect, the origin of which may well lie hidden in depths behind depths that are not always easily accessible to our human vision and experience. In fact, in the body itself we now describe several layers at which an illness may originate, from genes to the gross outer structure and the external environment we live in. If we take the totality of a human being and the many dimensions he lives in, we may well be in for a much bigger surprise.



2. How should one choose practically between the different systems?

A few simple guidelines may help:

(a) Faith: Choose the system in which you naturally have faith and to which your body most responds or is accustomed to from childhood. There is no point adopting a method simply because it is fashionable or is being well advertised and marketed. Such propaganda might help initially by creating a powerful collective atmosphere that is full of anticipatory suggestions and hope. But these things usually do not last long (though they may appear long compared to the average human lifespan). Systems such as Ayurveda, Homoeopathy, Allopathy, Mind-Body medicine are more steady and established. Some others (such as Reiki and Acupressure) have just been born or reborn and not yet developed in experience and expertise. The results, therefore, are also not likely to be steady, and the patient must know that he is willingly submitting himself to an experimental method. Many Allopathic drugs and procedures themselves move in and out of fashion. Here, there is also a case for indigenous methods. Systems of healing that originate in a certain geographical region, and even perhaps the culinary practices, work more efficiently with the local people. It is as if Nature has evolved it in this way. This collective wisdom has its own logic and merits. It has served for a long time and people have invested faith in it. It is a tragic irony that modern medicine has gone around with an almost evangelical fervour to establish itself as the primary (read: only) true medical system and thereby destroyed and uprooted the indigenous methods and given instead an expensive and uncertain faith in the name of scientific dogma. Yet the irony of it all is that now it is well established that any medicine, modern or ancient, works through at least two mechanisms, one of which is faith. The contribution of this faith factor is not just some minor or incidental thing. The placebo effect is strong enough to register itself as a formidable force, requiring strict models of testing a drug! Who knows one day we may discover that not only drugs but even surgical procedures, like injectables, may well be helping largely due to the faith factor!

(b) Time and Patience: Most illnesses (nearly 90%) are self-healing by nature and the system of therapy used really does not matter. Among these are the most common fevers, sore throat, diarrhoeas, etc. Still others can be corrected by lifestyle adjustments, such as diabetes. Out of the other 10%, about 8–9 out of 10 again are largely contained rather than cured. Thus, for example, one does not speak of cure of hypertension but only its control. It is only the 1% where the choice of system makes a sizeable difference. Most healing is at its foundation self-healing or natural healing. Of course the dynamics of illnesses have changed over the last few decades.

On the one hand, we have strong remedies that provide quick relief, thus tempting the patient to take them, even if it means losing his natural health and making his body increasingly dependent upon drugs. On the other hand, there is this frightening list of diseases increasing every year with a host of supposed complications expected if left untreated. The result has been a loss of natural faith in our own healing processes.

(c) Simple Solutions: As a safe rule, if an illness has not taken deep root in the body (that is to say, there is no distinct organ pathology of an anatomical nature) and is neither acute nor too distressing, then it is best to try out simple alternative methods along with some lifestyle changes and general positive measures, such as a greater balance of work and rest, healthy diet, etc. This trial should be done only if one can place one's trust fully in the recovery and not with a constant lingering doubt. One method needs to be abandoned in favour of another only if one has persisted for a reasonable length of time (say 6 months on an average) for chronic problems. The decision to change should not be arbitrary and fanciful, jumping from one doctor to another or one system to another. It should be a well-informed decision made with awareness and in consultation with the physician. Doctor 'shopping' is never a good practice. Faith in the physician is an integral part of therapeutics. To change system, method or physician often confuses the body which takes time to adapt. That is why it is good to have one nodal physician to whom one can refer for advice and who can, if need be, refer your case further. The concept of a family physician is fast returning now, though in a new way more suited to the times. The other advantage of a family physician is that he knows the unique constitution, the specific allergies and responsiveness to certain therapies, etc. His role in the

social rehabilitation of a patient with chronic debilitating illness is of course well known and crucial.

(d) Common Sense and Attitude: If the illness has the nature of an emergency and is accompanied by anatomical changes in an organ, as for instance in a cardiac emergency or a stroke, then it is best to consult an Allopath who is trained and expert at primarily dealing with diseases that have infiltrated deep into the physical body. Again, if there is no help possible in Allopathy (an intractable malignancy for instance), then it is better to try out a gentler palliative in the alternative systems rather than undergo violent life-prolonging procedures or use strong remedies as palliatives. Indeed it is sometimes better to accept the inevitable gracefully and with a calm heart and luminous trust that whatever happens will be for the ultimate good. This natural trust in destiny should not be confused with a resigned fatalism of the hopeless and the helpless. Rather it is a trust that implies faith in Something or Someone that far exceeds our limited human understanding and its capacities, a Wisdom, if we like, that knows its goal and its steps, however strange or capricious they may seem to our limited and short-sighted vision. It is known that having such a trust is itself therapeutic and facilitates the healing process. And if one has to leave the body, then this state of trust creates the best possible condition for the release. Either way it is the best possible attitude to take, rather than pump tons of chemicals into the system which may sometimes well be like flogging a tired horse. In fact, most sensible physicians do not like to interfere too much, chemically or surgically, with a patient who is past his nineties. Of course age may not be the only criterion; more important is the vitality and general state of health. Intervention through strong remedies when a patient has lived a full life is usually done because the patient is insistent and somehow believes that he can be cured. The truth of the matter is that the human body is unable to handle the increasing load of chemicals into its system and one way or the other begins to break downeither due to the disease or the drug! Sometimes, of course, certain simple measures and remedies are continued in old age to prevent or avoid possible complications, such as bedsores that make the quality of remaining life hard to bear and again justifiably so. In any case, the safe rule of geriatric practice (medicine for the elderly) is to use few and gentle medicines and in lower dosages as the propensity to side effects is rather high.

3. Can one assist Nature's healing process? Does one have a role to play in one's own healing?

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m Most}$ certainly, yes. There is increasing evidence that we have a great role to play in the healing process, in both minor and major disorders. As a result of this recognition, a whole new field of 'psycho-neuro-immunology' has opened up. It studies how the mind interacts and relates with the immune system and the body through the brain and nervous system. In the recent past there was a tendency to look upon the body as a machine the heart was compared to a pumping machine, the brain to a computer, the circulatory system to a massive pipeline. It is this mechanistic paradigm that saw the rise of strong and powerful medicines to restore the functioning of the body unaided by the body itself. But more recent thinking looks upon the human body as much more conscious than we believed it to be. In fact it is the first solid line of defence—the body not only assists the healing process but actually heals. There is an increasing recognition of the will-ofthe-person, which in a certain sense also translates into a will-in-the-body itself, to recover or to succumb to an illness. When the body decides to get healed, it is healed. It is this growing awareness of the body in its own healing that is the basis of quite a few New Age therapies such as Guided Imagery, Biofeedback, etc. Simply put, it means that if the body can be provided with enough information about its present state and any facts which are desired, it starts activating processes in that direction! And why not? Even plants and animals often heal that way and the human body is supposed to be at least not inferior to them. The role of positive thinking and, more so, of positive emotions and above all, positive faith in helping the healing process has been established beyond doubt. In other words, if we can achieve and maintain a generally overall positive state while ill, we will greatly help the healing process.

4. How does one achieve a positive state?

Yes, it is not easy to achieve this, especially when we are prone to negativity, anxiety and depression even while we are in our 'normal' 'sicknessfree' state. It is only if we cultivate a habitually positive attitude in life that we can then extend it quite naturally to our moments of crisis, such as illness. Some are of course endowed with such a gift, others have to cultivate and develop it. The best way to develop it is through an association with positive books (such as spiritual literature), positive places (those charged with a positive atmosphere, such as some sacred shrines), positive people's influences which are elevated beyond those of ordinary humanity, but most of all, by a positive practice (spiritual attitude, surrender to God, meditation, etc.). A positive state also develops fast if we can place our trust entirely in the Divine and surrender our health or illness completely into His hands. But if we cannot do so due to a lack of a strong spiritual element in our nature, then at least some belief, even an intellectual belief in a Higher Power or sometimes even a religious one that a particular deity can help us if we can call or propitiate it, may provide a sufficient point of support for the healing forces to act.

In fact, if there is a strong faith or some such element of support, then almost anything and everything can serve a healing purpose. Instances are recorded of certain yogis who could heal with the most unconventional methods. One way of looking at it is that when Nature or even the body decides or the moment of healing arrives, then a single word or even a glance is enough to heal. Seen in another way, we may say that faith and expectations make the soil of Nature ripe to respond to whatever method is adopted. In other words, we can almost say that when the patient's mind is full of doubts in anticipation of the worst fears, then even the best healing methods may take time or may not even work. Whereas if the mind is full of hope and trust, then almost anything may be able to help and heal. Such indeed is the power of our own beliefs!

If none of these are possible or, if for some reason or the other, inaccessible to us, then we can use the role of external help to induce a positive state.

Sometimes this can be done spontaneously by a physician's positive outlook and his personality, aided of course by the method or medicine he uses, to which we can more easily lend our faith. At other times, we may need some kind of a specific outer process to positively energise our nature. Some of these well-known methods are guided imagery, creative visualisation, positive suggestions, etc.

One simple method of guided imagery is to imagine a field of healing forces or transparent white light above the head and to bring it down by the power of thought and imagination step by step. At each step one gives suggestions (to oneself or to the person on whom one is trying it) that would facilitate healing. An example of such a suggestion is as follows:

'Peace, peace, peace. ... Peace in my head and peace in my thoughts and understanding. ... Peace and harmony in my heart and feelings'

The basis of this practice is that by the power of thought one can create a zone of forces within and around oneself and thereby induce the body itself to activate the healing processes.



5. What is the role of the environment in the healing process?

The environment does have a role, both physical and psychological, to play in healing. It is easier to understand the role of environment if we understand that everything in this world has a consciousness, however small, and therefore has a role to play in the totality of things. Further, this consciousness can be charged, negatively or positively, by knowing the law of subtle vibrations. That is the secret truth underlying the use of talismans. This world and its contents are much more interconnected than we believe it to be. This is a truth being increasingly recognised in every field, including the physical sciences.

Broadly we can say that there is in the universe a spirit of harmony and order as well as a spirit of disharmony and disorder. The former is active in creating or building bridges of consciousness to support and sustain the superstructure of life. The latter is active in pulling it down towards chaos and disintegration. Normally a balance of these forces keeps things in a state of dynamic equilibrium. But this balance can be disturbed if new elements are introduced which attract harmony, or on the other hand, disorder. This applies to everything from the food we eat to the people we meet. Just as putrid or stale food attracts disorder, there are human beings and places that are repositories of disintegrating forces. The opposite is also true. Thus, for example, a disorderly and chaotically managed room, a disorganised atmosphere, dull and gloomy colours, easily attract the forces of disintegration. On the contrary, a room with a harmonious atmosphere, balanced and soothing colours, attracts harmonious vibrations.

Again, the psychological states of those who attend upon the patient—the physician, nurses, paramedical staff, relatives and assistants—all have an influence upon the patient. It is not only through spoken words, but unspoken hopes and fears that anxiety and agitation can pass into the patient and influence the outcome. What is worse is that even after that person has gone, he may leave an adverse influence in the atmosphere that hangs around

like a negative formation. These subtle truths are being rediscovered, so much so, that there is some evidence that positive thinking and the feelings of others can influence the recovery of a patient even from a distance. How much more then would be the power of collective prayer!

However, considering that the influence of any human being is always a mixed affair, barring a few rare individuals, that is to say it can be both positive and negative, it is perhaps best to let the patient remain quiet with only a few trusted people around him as support. The people who assist should be emotionally strong, with a generous vital and with a basically cheerful and optimistic disposition. Wherever possible, the physical space should be simple, harmoniously arranged, clean and aesthetic. A few flowers around and, if one has faith, the picture of someone who represents an embodiment of the higher consciousness—the *Guru* or God—to the patient will create a perfect atmosphere. The additional touch of some soft soulful music might make it complete.

If the patient is inwardly developed, it is best if he remains at his own home and in his own atmosphere. Alternatively, a change to a quiet healing place will do him good. Unfortunately most hospitals are far from ideal, partly (like the government ones) for want of funds, but largely due to an attitude that does not give due importance to the aesthetic side of life and things and its great role in helping us. The logic of it is very simple—like attracts like. When we dwell in inner and outer beauty then quite naturally forces of harmony are attracted towards us and vice versa.



6. How should one spend one's time during illness?

It is best not to think too much or be preoccupied by an illness. Too much attention usually implies an underlying anxiety and lack of trust. That makes matters worse. There are several ways of keeping our mind away from illness. One way is to practice detachment from the body and its miseries, by adopting a witness attitude towards everything. This can start with an intellectual separation of that part of the mind that sees, in a philosophical vein, the futility of leaping at appearances and our attachment to passing transient things that have very little value compared to the eternity of becoming. One can add to this a more positive contemplation of the boundlessness of space and the endlessness of time against which our present misery is not even a small fraction of a moment. The least it does is to keep us smiling and happy even in the face of danger and that is no mean advantage.

In fact there are patients who get frightened at the smallest scratch and begin to give it too much attention. On the other side are those who take the most painful occurrences in their stride and stay smiling. In between is a whole range of reactions. In any case, whether we live or die, it is pitiable to be all the time worried about the body, to live in a constant state of fear and anxiety. Even if one were to live a little longer one wonders what would be the quality and utility of such a life. If fall we must, better to fall as a fearless hero on the roads of time than to die in a state of fear. If for nothing else, then the journey to the yonder regions is greatly facilitated if our inner state remains calm and clear despite the fate of the body.

The author has personally encountered cases where the patient could stay smiling and peaceful even until a few moments before death. Particularly, I am reminded of the case of a colleague, an atheist to begin with, who later turned towards a spiritual seeking after being diagnosed as fourth stage of disseminated ovarian malignancy. There was very little left to do by way of medical intervention and she was told she had six months to live. Not only

did she continue to live for over two and a half years but also remained active till the last few days. But the biggest surprise of all was that till the very last few breaths of her life, even with an unrecordable pulse and blood pressure she continued to smile and eventually died with a smile upon her lips and possibly in her heart as well. The secret? She had learnt during the last couple of years that there is more to life than this body and its single life.

There are other ways of diverting the mind, perhaps less powerful and of a more temporary nature, but a little easier. One way is to simply read an interesting book or as in the famous case of the author Norman Cousins (Anatomy of an Illness),² you can watch your favourite show, if it is light and humorous so much the better. Or even a light mechanical work itself can be a diversion with an added advantage that if it is done with the right inner attitude, the body can draw the higher forces and energies directly. The sleeping position is too tamasic and if indulged for long, it sets in motion a slow process of disintegration and wastes the body tissues. But in certain instances, this situation cannot be helped when one is unable to move about and cannot either read or work. In such a situation, it is best to keep an inner quietude, call peace into the system and to take it as an opportunity to work inwardly, that is, within oneself.

Of course diverting the mind should not be at the cost of the rest that the body may need in certain conditions. Also one has to keep in mind the law of subtle vibrations to ensure that while diverting, one is not opening oneself to wrong forces. As in all things a balanced view is the best.



7.What about the role of diet?

Diet, like everything else that we absorb in our consciousness, has a role, however small. We can give to 'food' a more general and universal sense, as defined in the ancient Sanskrit word, *ahara*, which includes all that we take or absorb inside, not only food, but all sensory and other inputs. So we absorb not only calories (which is one form of material—vital energy) but also and more importantly, consciousness. Thus, the effect of what we eat depends not only on its material composition but also on the consciousness inherent in the food. This fact alone makes vegetarian food better than non-vegetarian, as plants, herbs, flowers, roots, fruits, etc., have primarily a physico-vital element that nourishes corresponding parts in us, whereas from the animal world, there is an additional element of lower vital energies that intrude, such as fear, rage, ferocity, sexual aggression, etc. We absorb these things too. For this reason, non-vegetarian food may be good for the *rajasic* warring class, while a vegetarian diet is more suitable for the *sattwic* seeker.

While certain kinds of sickness such as deficiencies and extreme weakness or depleted states may warrant a somewhat *rajasic* diet, the consensus is that most illnesses respond much better to a *sattwic* intake. In fact, there is an increasing recognition that a high-fibre vegetarian diet is not only preventive but also curative of a number of maladies.

In addition, other aspects like the consciousness of the one who prepares the food can enter into the dynamics as well. For example, compare the effects of home-cooking to those of a commercial establishment. The consciousness of the recipient and the atmosphere in which he eats are also important aspects that are often overlooked. Or compare the effects when food is eaten hurriedly or restlessly, while watching a melodrama or a horror show, or in a state of anger or under extreme pressure, etc.

Thus, we see that food is not just about chemical composition and calories. Even here, it is best to avoid food fads and extreme diets. Therefore, perhaps the best advice to give on this matter is to eat in moderation, without

greed, at regular times, a tastefully balanced diet with all the essential nutrients prepared hygienically and above all, to offer it to God and receive it as *prasada*. This would be the best diet.



8. Apart from these general issues, aren't there specific matters to take into account, like vitamins, cholesterol, etc.?

These specifics are present but they should not be overemphasised. Most average eaters would not suffer from vitamin deficiency unless they were grossly deprived due to economic reasons or else had food fads and resorted to extreme diets. Again, cholesterol, like everything else, requires balance. It is better to get back to the golden mean principle, that is, avoid excesses on either side—greedy indulgence or wilful deprivation through prolonged or frequent fasting and extreme diets, which are more an obsession than a healthy practice. Practice moderation in your lifestyle and, above all, don't 'think' too much about food, including ways of depriving oneself of it. Of all things, fear is the most harmful, as thinking too much about ways of avoiding illness can become counterproductive for it implies a constant remembrance and subconscious dread of it!

Sometimes we overemphassze one aspect to the detriment of others which are equally, if not more, important. At other times we take up one aspect of the same thing while unable to look at the total picture. Also, we may create contradictory wills within us when we take too much care about certain aspects. For instance, when we give too much importance to our health, by the very fact of this personal emphasis on our physical body and its survival, we may become like small and closed containers. Over time, there may come some kind of fear if we do not follow the prescribed routine of diet, etc. Even by an overemphasis on personal effort we may miss out on the great trust in life itself and the Grace that looks after everyone and natural spontaneous rhythms that adjust us constantly with the cosmos. We must not forget that scientific knowledge, as indeed all mental knowledge, is constantly changing and what is declared as good today is found to be harmful tomorrow. Scientific knowledge has its benefits but even the highest scientific knowledge cannot come even a little close to the Wisdom that built the world and the Power that governs it.



9. So what would be a healthy lifestyle, how many hours of exercise and what type, how much sleep should be taken, how much work and rest?

There are two things to be considered here—the quality and the quantity. The quality itself has two sides to it—the visible and more external and the occult and more intrinsic. For instance, we may say that certain types of exercises are better than some others for certain specific conditions. That is a matter of external visible quality. But then we can further say that the same exercise can be done in many different inner states and very different attitudes. That makes a further difference. Thus, there would be a difference between a man who does a particular form of exercise or rather who exercises his body simply to earn a living—a coolie or a blacksmith, for instance—and one who does it with a deliberate will to develop his body. A further difference would be added if the person were to do his exercises with a conscious aspiration to open his body to the higher forces and energies. This was the original principle behind yoga-exercises.

They were meant to stabilise the body and the breath in a way so that the practitioner can enter into a state of deeper consciousness much more easily without obstructions and disturbances from his physical, emotional and vital being. It is this aspiration that guided the whole process that was crucial for the desired effect and not what is now being guided by fear of diseases and ways and means to ward it off, though still, even here the benefits arrive.

There is no doubt that exercise helps but it is best, however, to use a combination of static exercises such as *asanas* and dynamic ones such as aerobics. Or perhaps play a game appropriate to one's age, or simply walk about 3 or 4 kilometres for about 45 minutes daily. If one is not trying to lose weight, then this will usually suffice. The main thing is that we must enjoy whatever mode of physical exercise we do and then do it with a certain regularity and consciousness. That is to say, a maidservant working all day and doing things as drudgery does not get a great deal of help, even though she may be doing much exercise. A conscious will and purpose makes a

lot more difference than people imagine. And at that point, one must be 'in the body' and not weaving thoughts in the mind's restless factory or sinking and wallowing in a quagmire of emotions. If we can link this physical being and its activities through conscious aspiration, an inner prayer and offering to its supreme source and truth of all things, then we stand a good chance of obtaining the best possible results from our efforts. It is good to use widening imagery or simply gaze at fish in an aquarium or identify with something vast like the ocean or sky for instance, and let go, at least a few times during a long working schedule. For those who are so attuned, it is wonderful to snatch a few moments of solitude and practice inner quietude in between work.

As for sleep, again, both too little and too much harms, but the first more so. It makes the nerves excitable and prevents the body's natural repairing processes that are activated during sleep. An average sleep requirement per day varies from 6 to 9 hours and it is best taken in one snatch or maybe two. The best hours that coincide with the body's hormonal rhythms for sleep are from about 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Here again, a regularity of rhythm helps but more important is 'sleep hygiene'. That is to say, not to fall asleep under a heavy *tamasic* state as with extreme fatigue, use of alcohol and drugs, or watching some show that heavily excites the nerves, or after a heated and animated discussion. Most people find it relaxing to take a bath or lie down and stretch themselves before switching off. A cup of milk (preferably cold or lukewarm but not hot) with honey is also a useful sedative. A short meditation is of course the best.



10. Can one become immune to illness by practicing a better lifestyle?

Even the best lifestyle cannot give perfect immunity for various reasons. Our contribution to illness is only one factor out of many. Illnesses do not arise only through internal causes. There are outer causes too—causes that are not only physical and psychological, but also subtle and occult. Much illness comes from these occult entities that exist on their own plane, those dark and fallen worlds which feed upon our disintegrated vital substance that we throw into the atmosphere through wrong vital movements such as passion, excitement, lust, anger, fear, etc. These entities also feed upon man's ill-will and carry it to those who are susceptible and targeted. Apart from that, these adverse vital forms and forces also feed upon the disintegrating elements of human life that is found after death, especially sudden traumatic ones such as in accidents, warfare, terrorist attacks, etc., that generate a lot of fright and horror or excitement and panic. Sometimes, these things can mount in a cascade that leads to an epidemic. In fact, from an occult point of view, a virus or bacillus is really the materialisation of some of these vital forms and forces. Modern science also recognises that fear and panic make matters worse in any illness.

Besides, it is very difficult—because of the complex nature of man—for man's consciousness to adopt a healthy lifestyle with the regularity and discipline that can truly help. And even if one were to do all the right things as far as our lifestyle is concerned, even master all the outer and occult causes, we would still not be assured of permanent immunity. There might arise, for instance, poisoning and accidents, exposure to chemicals and radiation, toxins generated within the body that would gradually lead to 'cellular errors' and 'internal accidents' at the micro level. The body is still made up of ignorance and governed by it. It is still under the influence of the mental and vital sheaths and their energies and forces, which only perpetuate this ignorance and act falsely and are prone to error. A more detailed description of these sheaths can be found in certain books on Yoga. Thus, to imagine that

changing your diet, following a strict regime of exercise and leading a life of moderation will act as a foolproof preventive would be like believing the moon to be in one's grasp while holding only its reflection in a plateful of water. Human perfection has its natural limits and while we can improve a lot within those limits, we cannot radically change things so long as those limits are not pushed further and beyond.



11. How does the higher consciousness operate and how can one acquire it? Is there a technique to achieve this higher state? Is this what is called a miracle?

'Miracles' can be of two types: authentic and illusory. The illusory type is a fabrication created by generating a certain force field in the environment. In that atmosphere one can temporarily forget the sickness but it often returns once one moves out of the 'vital atmosphere'. A strong power of suggestion also works in this instance. Sometimes this temporary relief may provide enough support for the action of something deeper and give more prolonged relief.

Authentic miracles are due to the intervention of a higher plane of determinism than the physical. Thus, there can be a series of such miracles in an ascending degree—vital miracles, mental miracles, spiritual miracles and of course the very highest Supramental miracles and the miracle of miracles, the healing touch of Grace. Vital miracles are performed by bringing in the forces of the vital world and their impact upon the physical. These forces are relatively easy to connect with and most Reiki channels and Pranic healers are in contact with these forces. Some *tantrics* also act by controlling the powers and energies of the vital world. The characteristic action of these forces is that they have a certain dramatic quality and display about them. They are often contacted through certain techniques, which incorporate, among other things, breathing exercises, since it is one of the best known ways of augmenting 'pranic energy'. But since these are powers of the vital world the relief they provide is often temporary and there is a certain illusory nature about it.

Besides, those who choose to become its channels, often end up harming or even sometimes destroying their inner life because these powers generally aggrandise their ego and blind them to the deeper voice of the soul. Yet these men appear great, as indeed the vital powers are definitely much greater than

those found in our ordinary surface life. Such men, especially if endowed with a certain vital charm, can easily become 'gurus' and sway the masses. One sign of the diabolical nature of this power and those who command it is their lust for wealth, ambition and fame; their need to dominate and possess more and more disciples; and a desire to increase their numbers and extend the empire of their personal influence. Such movements, initiated and started by such a 'vital power', often presided over by a being of the 'vital world' masquerading as 'spiritual' can quickly rise on the crest of population and propaganda, phenomenally expand in a relatively short time but often violently crash once the upholders of this power are gone.

Mental miracles are less dramatic but more steady and their effects last longer. They are effectuated by the powers of thought and the release of mind energies. They rely a lot on the formative powers of the mind and its ability to create images. The techniques involved usually take some form of autosuggestion, imagery, thought-affirmations, etc. Unlike the vital forces, these take longer and do not work in all cases. It needs a certain development of the mind and a capacity for imagery. Besides, the mental domain is a very mixed one, often carrying contrary thoughts and contradictory wills. Doubt, pessimism and anxiety may further cloud the mental field and make it difficult for the mental forces to act. That is why the mind energies act best when our normal mental operations are suspended as in hypnosis or in the twilight state of consciousness between wakefulness and sleep. During such a state, suggestions can sink into the subconscious mind more readily and act from there as strong neutralising influences. Apart from these, one can augment one's mental energies by practising concentration and meditation of certain kinds and influence the course of things by mental will and thought alone. When such thought is joined by a strong emotion, it can sometimes work out a change that we call miracle.

Spiritual miracles operate in another way. Unlike the vital and mental miracles that act with an ignorant power, the spiritual consciousness acts on the basis of knowledge. It does not always rush to create a dramatic result but takes into cognisance the entire field of the play of forces, the larger issues involved and sometimes even the secret need to go through certain struggles and experiences so necessary for one's growth. All the same, when a truly spiritual power acts, it gives a clear sense of inner support even

when we have to go through what we must because that is the cosmic will and secret sanction of the soul. Spiritual forces always act on the basis of peace and carry with them an atmosphere of calm, wideness and light. But the problem is that most human beings are not open to the higher ranges of the spiritual consciousness and have no link with these greater beings, their energies and powers. Neither are our body and mind, our life parts and nerves ready and capable of bearing their pressure. It is seldom that true spiritual powers act or even show themselves in an atmosphere full of excitement and astonishment with loud voices or drumbeats in the background. The best condition for their action is peace and inner purity, trust and an inner surrender. The highest of all spiritually healing forces is the force of spiritual purity. If one has it at one's disposal or one asks for it, then in a moment it can completely dissolve the adverse formation of illness as light destroys darkness. But that is very rare, given the state of our present human consciousness.

Beyond all these is the intervention of the highest determinism, of that which determines all things, of the knowledge and power that built the worlds and the countless systems and universes and the beings that inhabit them. This is the highest power and its intervention can change not only the very course of things but also the very law of things. It can change—not merely suspend by a kind of superimposition—the so-called 'laws of Nature', which are not so much laws as habits and patterns formed by certain movements running in fixed grooves.

From this we can see that there are several levels of determinism and while the outward effect (say relief of symptoms of an illness) may sometimes be similar, the underlying process, the long-term effects and deeper repercussions are different. Also, our physical instrument, the body, is not always open or receptive to the highest force and its touch can sometimes paradoxically even worsen things temporarily due to the emergence of hidden resistance. However, once tackled, the cure is much more complete. A miracle, therefore, is a two-way process when it concerns human beings who, by virtue of having a personal will and a great inner complexity, are not like inanimate objects. The force that heals or performs the miracle has to reckon with the nature of the instrument, the help it offers and the resistance. Even a Beethoven can't play good symphonies on a

crude and badly tuned piano! It is not enough to ask for a miracle, it is also necessary to be ready and prepared for one, for a miracle is neither a magical illusion nor an arbitrary working of a power. There are certain conditions needed for a miracle to happen, and as with all things, certain conditions make a miracle easy and possible.

That is why there is another form of miracle that often goes unrecognised or is misunderstood. It is the subtler energies of the vital, mental and higher spiritual consciousness acting through an intermediary medium such as a doctor, drug, method or even a flower if the individual has faith and is receptive to it. Such cases have always been known but not admitted, not even accepted for examination by mainstream science: They are there as silent testimony! But to act this way requires a certain inner development or a special occult knowledge not accessible to most.



12. What about healing through hypnosis? Is it something like spiritual healing?

Mental power and spiritual power are two different things. Hypnosis works through 'thoughts, suggestions and mental will'. There are several ways of working with mental power. The principle of hypnosis is essentially the principle of selective concentration.

Normally, we are unable to withdraw into our own inner mind and tap its powers because our surface consciousness is crowded by many kinds of forces and impulses which pull us in different, often contradictory directions. So long as we are helplessly caught and driven, we are unable to access and utilise the deeper and higher powers of our mind and our being. The only time we do this naturally is during sleep. The nerves stimulated by jostling throughout the day are fatigued and as the impulses slow down, our surface whirlpool becomes a little more quiescent. When this happens, our consciousness is no longer tightly trapped in its fast running machine and so it begins to slip back to its source. This temporary and natural withdrawal is the way Nature gives respite to us. It rejuvenates us, repairs the damage inflicted during the day, restores the channels of life and allows us to start afresh the next day. But this is an unconscious process ingrained in Nature to keep the form going for a longer time and not suffer an early breakdown as is often caused by sleep disturbances.

Now, a similar thing happens during coma and related phenomenon, such as fainting and unconsciousness. It is an attempt by the consciousness to heal the illness. Either due to a sudden shock, injury, accident or by a prolonged illness affecting the brain (which is the physical seat of consciousness in man), it withdraws to its own depths to allow or even facilitate the healing process in a twofold way.

First, it allows the surface consciousness to enter a restful mode that is so necessary for healing. Second, by going inside or sometimes even outside the body, it can bring in certain deeper and higher energies for healing purposes. What happens unconsciously in sleep and coma, Yoga does consciously by a

willed process of reverse concentration that leads to trance. If one can avoid falling asleep, then one can remain conscious to study and understand the inner worlds, their laws and processes and of course eventually the source of all things. But even if one does not remain awake, this meditative indrawn condition is helpful and restores the nerves, body and mind by a similar, though much more rapid and concentrated process as sleep.

In hypnosis, a similar thing is attempted in a semi-conscious way so to speak. A yogi's withdrawal is with a direction and purpose and through well-known inner doors. It is not a withdrawal for the sake of withdrawal, but with a 'will' to arrive at the supreme object of existence. In hypnosis, the withdrawal is without any such fixed direction or through certain known centres. It is more of a general withdrawal that comes when someone is deeply absorbed in a book or in thought and by doing so becomes relatively oblivious of his surface life and all that is happening around it. In hypnosis, a very similar kind of general withdrawal is there but in a little more methodical and regulated way.

The method used is the selective focusing of the mind to any set of mechanically repetitive words or a repetitive visual stimulus. The repetitiveness induces the mind into a certain groove and the mechanical nature of the stimulus puts the rational and vital mind into the background, suspending their normal operations which keep us interested in things around us. This selective attention and a peripheral constriction gradually lead the mind into a state of semi-sleep condition. Once this happens, the consciousness has entered into the inner fields and is therefore more amenable to manipulation. The various possibilities that arise out of this semi-trance kind of a condition are as follows:

(a) The posting of messages directly into the subconscious mind where the roots of illness and resistance to heal thrive. Waking affirmations have to go through the rational mind which normally does not allow them to pass. It scrutinises and cancels many of them. Thus, one may affirm, 'I am cured,' but in some dim background, the rational mind is actively watching and doubting this. It presents the barrier of doubt for healing by a power of mental suggestion. That is why guided imagery in a relaxed state works better. Hypnosis circumvents this barrier so that the message can directly reach the subconscious and work there.

- (b) The individual will may itself be weak and divided. In hypnosis, this may also be temporarily suspended, like one's reason, and subordinated to the will of the therapist. Imposition of a strong therapeutic will taking the form of thought is an added help.
- (c) Hypnosis puts the surface consciousness to sleep. The nerves become quiescent and the body and organs are rested. The deeper healing powers of our subliminal being can emerge and have a chance to heal and help. Modern psychiatrists use a quick method to induce hypnosis by injecting low doses of a short-acting anaesthetic, which blocks the nerve signals physiologically and thereby allows the consciousness to sink inside and withdraw. But there are negative consequences of hypnosis as one is putting oneself under someone else's control or influence by becoming passive to the person's command which can be frightening from an inner point of view.



13. What about past-life regression therapy? Is it also some kind of a hypnosis, how does it work?

First of all, we must know that a system may work well yet the theory proposed for its working may not be true. Past-life regression works and there are documented instances, but it would be a folly to believe that it works in all cases and that the reason for its working is due to tackling the entangled knots of a past life. The knots of our *karmic* energies are not so easy to break as they are not just individual knots but are linked to the whole in a very subtle play of energies. You can't break the knot in one individual without disturbing the rest of the whole.

There are three ways of interfering with this vast and complex play:

- (a) The individual himself can cancel or minimise the effects of past energies by some counterbalancing *karma* in the present.
- (b) Someone dwelling in the cosmic consciousness with universal compassion reaches out into the net to minimise/mitigate such *karmic* effects.
- (c) The Divine Grace or the incarnate Divine decrees that karma should be annulled and completely cancelled.

Past-life memories cannot be described vividly. There is always a lot of scope for a mixture from the vital imagination and subconscious elements. However, there are in each one of us certain 'complexes' which are also kinds of energy knots that can take the form of illness. These 'complexes' can disguise themselves in fanciful but often symbolic imagery and present themselves before us in dreams or visions as also during hypnotic regression. A bringing-up of these hidden 'complexes', which are usually 'affect laden' and 'emotionally charged' through hypnotic regression can indeed release their energies, bring them under some kind of control by presenting them to our conscious awareness. This may help as an 'energy feeder' to the illness, especially with certain psychosomatic illnesses.



14. Is illness the result of one's past karmas as is believed in some tradition or the wrath of God falling upon a sinner?

The popular idea of *karma* as a system or tribunal of cosmic justice dispensing reward and punishment is a crude rendering of something that is more subtle and deep. The law of *karma* is not a law of retribution, but evolution through a kind of subtle learning process that the soul in us undertakes as it moves through the different fields of forces and energies in its earthly sojourn. It is not some arbitrary God deciding for us, but the soul itself that chooses to go through certain experiences necessary for its growth towards perfection.

In the evolutionary journey, we are influenced and moved by many kinds of cosmic forces and energies, both helpful and harmful. Indeed, sometimes the same force can be helpful as well as harmful depending upon the stage of our evolutionary growth. What happens to us at each moment can be summed up, in a way, as a result of these forces that are at play. The past grooves of Nature provide a kind of predilection in us and we tend to open ourselves to one or the other kind of forces depending upon the kind of response our natural constitution and its elements has made to them. The soul takes upon itself the essence of these experiences and decides its future course in such a way as to either exhaust or make these parts of Nature learn and grow by completing the curve along which they have begun to move. The consequences we face in life, the results that 'fate' presents before us, are nothing more than what the cosmic forces have prepared and the soul has chosen to undergo.

Interestingly, our destiny is written in double terms. There may of course be an 'outer' event or circumstance, say an illness or financial gain, which our ignorant mind values as pleasant and unpleasant based upon its own evaluation and conditioning, but there is an inner repercussion as well—this is the true consequence.

To take an example, one may be outwardly having an illness yet inwardly may not only be entirely free from any suffering or even aware of the secret necessity to go through it. On the contrary, there are instances where everything is fine, outwardly so to say, and yet one is in a state of inner anxiety and agony. It is a question of one's inner state.

Nevertheless, one should not cherish suffering, thinking that it is meant for one's growth or is a *karmic* necessity. In fact, as we have seen, it is not due to any bad *karma* but the result, as indeed everything else is, of a complex play of forces in whose ambiguous net our lives are caught as pawns on a chessboard. But within us is the soul that need not accept an 'adverse destiny'. If we are awake to its full glory and power, it can reverse the wheel of destiny, erase the past formations that prompt us in certain directions, undo the *karmic* knots, free our past personalities that linger in our self from the spell of an adversary [adverse] force and thereby change the fixed front of fate.



15. Is it is okay to ask God to remove one's suffering and cure one's illness?

Why not? Disease is a falsehood imposed upon us by the adverse forces because our body and mind are still open and respond to these dark influences. It is not that the Divine wants us to be ill or it is His will that we suffer! Such a Divine would be more a perversity than a purity! And indeed it is a form of perversity to love suffering and cherish it in oneself. We must throw out and reject an illness, whether by our will or by help from the Divine Grace, indeed preferably both, just as we should reject a wrong movement. Only this must not be done out of fear, since fear is a perverse form of will and paradoxically attracts what we strongly fear. Fear itself is a wrong movement, a dark force that is an ally of falsehood and death. We should pray to be cured not out of anxiety or fear, but simply because the physical instrument must be fit and worthy of the divine dweller and user. Yet something within us can and should always be above suffering.



16. What is this play of forces?

The play of forces owes its origin to the involutionary and evolutionary process of the one Divine Consciousness. As a result of involution, there were created many planes of consciousness, each diminishing in degree of knowledge and power and delight of creation till there came about a total lapse of the perfect consciousness into the other extreme of apparent total oblivion or inconscience. It is like the process of an eclipse taking place in varying degrees and stages. This involution was the first act of the great drama of creation.

The second act starts with the returning path, that is, the evolution of the involved consciousness. But just as in involution something of the Supreme Consciousness goes right below into the nescience, so too in the evolution something of the inconscience is dragged upwards. It is this combination that gives birth to successive forms or different planes of consciousness. Now, the closer we get to the one original Supreme Consciousness, the form becomes more reflective of the true light and power of consciousness. The beings, energies and forces of the higher planes are subtler, purer, refined of dross and mixture, more in consonance with the cosmic will of the Divine and therefore more in harmony with the world's purpose and occult plan. They act more on the basis of unity. These higher beings who reflected the original light and power of the Divine with minimum distortion were called the 'devas' in Indian tradition. The other side saw the nature and work of beings, forces and energies that were closer to the darker pole created by the involutionary process. They were crude embodiments of a deformed knowledge and power that had forgotten or lost its contact with the one original consciousness, and thereby become deviant of the original purpose, prone to error, ignorance and falsehood. Acting on the basis of division, they perpetuate the reign of darkness and cause various kinds of disharmony and disorder in the universe. These were called the asuras, rakshashas and pisachas (the titans, giants and vampires) in the Indian tradition.

Of course, each of these major types can be divided into many subtypes, worlds and sub-worlds so to speak. Yet, fundamentally, we can categorise

them into two major qualities of forces at their two extremes. A third belongs to a mixed category, the mid-worlds where light and darkness meet and blend creating a grey intermediate zone of uncertainty. Each evolutionary form is the result of a balance of forces and energies from these worlds. Now here comes the twist in the evolutionary tale, which is of great relevance to us. The nature of evolution until now is an unconscious process, at least the form and consciousness that inhabits it is not conscious of what is going on. But now, with the advent of man and the touches that the human mind has been receiving off and on from the higher planes (in the embodiment of saints, sages, philosophers and even the geniuses), there has arisen the possibility of a conscious participation in the possibility of a rapid evolutionary transition. This is in contrast to the animal and plant life where evolution is an extremely slow and hazardous process with so much error, accident and waste. The forms that have appeared so far have been largely moulded by the forces of 'lesser darkness' or ignorance, struggling with the forces of 'greater darkness' or inconscience.

But as we have seen, with the advent of the mind, a door opens to a new possibility and thereby also a new difficulty. The mind in its higher reaches can open to the light and truth and receive—even partially embody—something of these higher and subtler energies. This means a greater conflict, a struggle between the forces of light against those of darkness to take hold of the material, vital and mental energies and mould the physical form in such a way that it is no more unconscious and driven by the forces of ignorance but rather conscious and moved by the forces of light. If that happens, then life upon earth will become radically different. It would no longer be a struggling and fumbling life, prone to error and accident, with a precarious security and unstable stability, but one free from disorder, disease, suffering and imbalance: a life closer to the perfection it was intended to be.

Now as we draw closer to the higher regions, the pull and tussle between the forces of light and those of darkness become more and more acute, but also for this very reason more and more decisive. In fact, we stand on the threshold of an age where such a decisive transition is taking place. The old machinery of life governed by ego, driven by desire and led by the uncertain sense-bound analytical mind is being gradually replaced by a life governed by the inner soul, driven by a higher purpose and will, and led by

the light of intuition. This is the first transition, to be followed by a second and still greater transition to a divine life completely under the influence of the Divine Will and led by the Truth and Light. Like all great transitions, it is a period of great upheaval, confusion and apparent disorder. The struggle of forces is becoming more and more acute. This is giving birth to new possibilities of thought, feeling, will and a creative joy of life. Also brought to the surface are deeply hidden resistances pulling us back by the forces of darkness, ignorance and inconscience towards the old order of things.

This struggle is being translated in the human consciousness by a host of new and old diseases, social and psychological pathologies, but also new forms of creativity and ways of life. In a word, we could say that Nature is in an 'experimental' mode and is striving to create a new being, new forms and a new embodied consciousness out of man. But like all experiments, it is a real adventure into the unknown.



17. What are the effects of these forces? How should one handle them?

I his play between the forces of darkness and light, their struggles and conflicts, have been recognised through all ages of mankind. The role of the forces of darkness—adverse and hostile—in bringing about illness is also known. The role of certain spiritual forces in testing the human soul in its upward march by creating difficulties is also widely acknowledged. The effects of these forces are both psychological and physical. The forces of darkness deplete our energy, create disorder in our body and mind and take the form of various diseases and illnesses. They create quarrels and disharmony not only within the organs but also disrupt the peace and harmony outside, giving birth to quarrels, misunderstandings, confusion and rupture between individuals and groups. They are behind any kind of accident and feed upon the excitement and horror that it produces. They do so through unconsciousness and ignorance. Some of these beings and forces feed upon our vital life-energy and deplete us of strength and inner resistance to disease. They can even attack the body, directly or indirectly, through fear and any such movements that are their supporters and allies. These forces act best wherever and whenever there is unconsciousness, falsehood and gross ignorance, or wherever there is crudity and vulgarity, or even where there is crowd and confusion. In the mind, they throw doubt and depression, disrupt clarity and fill us with fear and suspicion, rage or the sense of an inflated ego, full of vanity, ambition and insatiable desire and greed. Lust and violence born of hatred, spite and revenge are part of their ways of working to keep man tied to the animal nature out of which he is emerging. Thus, they keep him tied to the past and prevent him from his evolutionary advance. Some of these forces can be quite clever and cunning. They can imitate the Truth but give it a diabolical name and acceptable face or they may prolong the past into the future by polishing the surface and giving it a more modern and fashionable name. All these factors prolong the reign of darkness in us and perpetuate disorder, disease, disharmony, suffering and death.

The forces of light, in contrast, bring peace and harmony and light wherever they act. They bring balance and unity, but not through a mechanical and regimented uniformity or propaganda. They bring a deeper unity of the heart reaching out to another heart, of thoughts and feelings acting in unison, of a will not divorced from the light of knowledge but one with it. They bring sincerity and purity where now there is only hypocrisy and artificiality. They give birth to hope and faith, charity and love, kindness and compassion and, by so doing, free us from our limited ego-self and release in us the delight of being that is the healer par excellence. The forces of light bring us closer to the truth, to the core of our being, to our soul which is their origin and home. They take us back to the original power at whose beckoning the worlds have run their course since times sempiternal. Their touch fills us with vigour and strength. No illusion or magic of ignorance can stand before these powers as they see through the masks of such ignorance or illusion. Their action is always liberating and unifying and even though the intensity of their might may appear like a violence, yet still at their core there is always wisdom, light, truth and love. They are, in essence, bringers of harmony and peace.

To tackle the forces of darkness is more an art than science. However, in ancient times, an elaborate occult science had developed to keep these beings and forces away and at arm's-length. This science, now largely lost to us except as a dead shell, composed of certain rituals, has in essence three main aspects that work in tandem—yantra, mantra and tantra. The yantra refers to an occult symbol, a sign that carries power in it, the shape and design or pattern of which [that] attracts forces of harmony and light and repel the negative type. One such well-known yantra is the Sri Chakra. Another simple symbol that is auspicious but was twisted and distorted for evil purposes is the Swastika. It is supposed to be clockwise but was reversed and made anti-clockwise by Hitler, indicating retrogression and a backward movement.

The *mantra* is a sound symbol, the power of the word that in its sound and substance embodies something of the higher vibrations. These vibrations naturally attract beings and forces of the higher planes and repel any dark attacks. One well-known *mantra* is the *Gayatri* which is meant to bring and increase the light of intelligence and orientate our thoughts and mentality

towards the light and right. Another *mantra* often used for warding off imminent threat to life is invoking the Eternal who stands as master of death. This is the *Mahamrityunjaya mantra*. Then there are some universal mantras which do not require to be charged by a living master. An example of such a mantra with a universal appeal and action on all the planes of our being and for our highest good is the sacred syllable '*AUM*'. Then there are *mantras* for specific gods and specific purposes such as acquiring wealth, having a progeny and healing illnesses.

Finally, there are the elaborate occult rites or *tantra* that use both *yantra* and *mantra*. There are certain psychophysical processes, involving will, thought and concentration for awakening certain powers in our being. According to the principle of *tantra*, there lies concealed in us, at the base of the spine in our subtle body, an infinite power, coiled up like a sleeping serpent, the *kundalini*. The processes of tantra are supposed to be able to awaken this inexhaustible reservoir of spiritual power by cultivating purity and surrender within us. But this elaborate occult and spiritual science is now largely lost or else buried under a mass of ill-understood rituals, mechanical ceremonies and superstitions. There are very few genuine practitioners and even fewer authentically realised men, which leaves the field open to all kinds of charlatans and posers. Besides, this field of occult knowledge, dealing with great and powerful cosmic forces and their deceptive and imitative counterparts is by its very nature a dangerous and slippery ground.

So what do we do when we do not understand such complex equipment or how to handle its workings? In the physical field, we can take the analogy of an aircraft whose flight involves the play of many physical and psychological forces — electrical, electronic, mechanical, hydraulic, magnetic, gravitational, thrust and wind speed, as well as psychological processes of alertness, cognition, memory, reaction time, etc. Not all of us have the time, money, capacity and the possibility of learning to fly through the haze and maze of space. So we entrust ourselves to a pilot who knows the dynamics and is an expert in the field. In man too, there is the inner pilot who knows the way and the ways of life, the destination, roads and steps, the forces and the aids and hindrances. To trust the inner Divine and leave oneself in His hands is the road to freedom from the entire chain of cause and effect. The Divine Grace cuts through these and it can do so because

ultimately all the forces owe their origin to the Divine and are linked to Him. Faith and surrender to the Grace are therefore the highest wisdom and the supreme science.

Apart from faith and surrender, one can face this complex web of forces with equanimity and fortitude. The other way is of course the inner way of vigilance, sincerity and humility that can save us from the network of the lower forces that take the form of greed, anger, fear, lust, vanity, etc. From the Yogic point of view these forces can be divided into three main categories:

- (a) Forces of the Universal Nature: It is these cosmic forces, in whose net our ordinary 'normal' lives are caught, that thrive in an individual who feeds them by his substance and his consciousness. The more we feed them by repeating a certain movement, say anger, the more they come back upon us. These forces of the Universal Nature keep the individual tied to certain limits. It is to these 'natural' limits, so to speak, that we give the name 'normalcy' and call them 'laws'. They maintain a certain rhythm and balance to the individual with regard to the whole. They are meant to average out the species and maintain the balance between creation, destruction and preservation. An individual trying to rise high above the average pitch inevitably has to tackle them one way or the other. Nature does it in him by creating a kind of imbalance, by an overemphasis on certain points and aspects and an undermining of others. It is Nature's attempt at going beyond its own limits wherein the individual becomes like a reconnoitring unit to see how far he can go. Much of the rules and norms of life for 'healthy living' are actually meant to be ways and means to exploit these natural rhythms and boundaries and to live inside these frames, respecting the natural laws and living in moderation and avoiding excesses. While this can secure some kind of a balance, it cannot ensure a greater flight. That greater possibility can only come by a greater will and faith that endeavours to exceed those safe limits that Nature has set for man. When we try to do that, the same Universal Nature begins to resist. That is why every individual who tries to exceed himself must exercise a certain degree of control over the forces of Universal Nature or else there is some likelihood of imbalance.
- (b) Adverse and Hostile Forces: Outside the range of universal forces operative in human nature, there are the hostile forces on the one side and spiritual forces on the other side. The adverse forces press upon nature

and aggravate feelings such as lust, greed, ambition, vanity, anger and doubt. The hostile forces throw upon us heaps of doubt, confusion, depression, a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, a total lack of faith and will. The person may even be driven to the brink of despair and suicide.

(c) **Spiritual Forces**: These of course have the opposite effect—they bring hope, increase light, peace, strength and joy, creating health harmony and well-being.



18. How are scientists able to cure depression and other psychological illnesses by drugs with no knowledge of these forces and even ridiculing those who believe in them while those who believe in them are unable to get rid of them by occult means?

First of all, let us get rid of the exaggerations on both sides. It is too much to claim that drugs cure all cases of depression. It is mainly in depression due to nervous fatigue where they are helpful. In other forms of depression, they may relieve us only of the symptoms, for very often they come back once the dosage is reduced or stopped. So, it is not only drugs but a whole lot of other factors that help, such as faith, counselling, attitudinal change, and of course, time. In some instances, a medicine may cure without the theory being right! A mechanic may correct a defect without knowing anything at all about the principles of engineering. Now if the mechanic were to build his theory based on 'what worked', he may end up with a fantastic postulate. And if this postulate was meant to justify 'what worked', he will find it true every time his technique works, and this will keep on reinforcing his postulate.

Medicine is in an even worse situation. It has built theories of human nature and psychology based on the effect of certain therapies whose overall efficacy is on average less than 50%. Even if physiological or neurochemical changes were observed, how are we to know whether these changes were the primary cause of the psychological states or else were secondary to it, or were consequential to a third occult cause? The presence of this deeper cause does not negate the surface and immediate causes. And, for obvious reasons, it is often so much easier and faster, at least for us human beings, as is the usual way, to act upon the illness from outside than from within. While doing so may be easier and 'natural' for us, we should not be led to believe

that it is the only or the complete way. What most of our 'treatment' in modern medicine does very often is to put a check upon the symptoms. By a chemical manipulation, which is many times only the last step in the huge and complex machinery of Nature that operates at several levels, we can maintain the check and prevent the illness from entering into the physical domain. Nevertheless, the illness continues to linger in the deeper levels, its roots remain hidden and unaffected by our chemical manipulations. That is why—barring those illnesses which arise due to external invasion (no doubt supported by something within)—the relief of symptoms is not a guarantee of cure. One has to keep taking the medication to prevent any manifestation in the physical. That the roots and seeds of illness are very much present is proved by the fact that the moment you stop the medicine the whole thing returns and often worsens as if in vengeance.

Now Yoga takes its stand on the belief, backed by experience, that it is possible for the human consciousness to enter into contact with or even identify with the Creatrix Consciousness. It builds its vision from there, a top to down or an inner to outer view of things. Perhaps that is why it has the potential to effect the change much more radically if once we get the hang of it and have the central keys with us for help. It is a science in its own right but one that is not yet fully developed and man is still in the process of slow exploration. But it is a science that has existed as long as man has existed and has had efficacy even when there was no other science to lean upon. Spirituality is, in other words, man's second nature. It will become and must become man's first nature for its truths to become self-evident to all. And indeed evolution is tending in that direction if one goes by the signs that are appearing on the wall of life and events that surround us.



19. That could simply be because the original or the background physical cause is not yet tackled, such as an organ damage or a system disorder, or as we say today, the genes?

Well, there are only so many steps in the physical itself. We can trace it this way:

- GENE
- ENVIRONMENT
- ORGAN OR SYSTEM
- BODY CHEMISTRY
- SYMPTOMS

In other words, even on a purely physical level, disease arises due to not one but many factors. Some of these factors have been partially understood, some not at all, and some we do not even know. For example, we do not know how genes and environment interact. At best, it is an extremely complex process. We do not know what really constitutes as 'environmental factors'.

Is it only the physical and physiological environment or does our psychological and other internal states also have a role to play in triggering a gene or directly affecting an organ/system or upsetting our chemistry? After all, we have tried all kinds of chemical/physical methods and manipulations and though there has been some success, often much hyped up by an overenthusiastic and hopeful medical community, the limitations are already becoming more than obvious. In fact, it is precisely due to these limitations that the study of physical causes is being pushed to its extreme limits—the gene. Like the atom, genes are the last wall that the purely material paradigm of man must face and cross. Since we have only begun to explore this area of genetic manipulation, we cannot say how far it will go and can go in finding the perfect answer. Yet, a little common sense, logic and empirical

evidence will tell us that genes cannot solve the human enigma. They are but one piece of the puzzle, especially in the physical domain. They may be an important piece, but certainly not the last or even central piece in the human puzzle.

A logical fallacy here is that, that which is being explained is much more and greater than that which explains it! Explaining life and all that happens to our body and mind on the basis of genes is like explaining everything in a beautiful and multi-tiered mansion, its aesthetics and the thought of the architect, etc., on the basis of the arrangements of the bricks in its wall. Now it is true that the bricks are everywhere and the very foundation of the house stands upon them. Blow away the bricks and the house collapses; get some poor quality stuff and the building will not last long; align them wrongly and the building becomes unsafe—even the design depends upon the way they are laid. But to say that they explain everything is absurd. Least of all the bricks can tell us is about the dweller within the house. It is just the same with the computer analogy. The hardware does not explain the software, it only supports it. Nor does it explain the mind of the user—it only imposes certain limitations to his uses.



20. In the face of worldwide enthusiasm for gene therapy, what then is the relation between the spiritual and physical, if there is any at all?

This kind of enthusiasm had been present earlier too with drugs and certain methods. But enthusiasm and hope are often outweighed by a reality check. Enthusiasts are often people who have a great faith in the method of physical science. But there is a fundamental flaw in this method itself. The very first fallacy lies in the threefold assumption, which is as follows:

- Matter and physical world are the only reality: This assumption puts science within a box with fixed and rigid boundaries that are already beginning to crumble.
- Sensory evidence is the only proof of fact: This seals the boundaries with strong bars and is being increasingly questioned by fresh evidence.
- Rational analysis is the only way of knowing the truth: This puts a lock
 on our own personal growth and our capacity to know and explore;
 we are beginning to discover that there is an intelligence, an inherent
 'knowledge' and 'will' in every element of the universe.

The universe is not only a material but also a spiritual fact. And these two different orders of reality are not disconnected and cut off from each other as if the spiritual world has no bearing upon the material. The spiritual, the material and all the other intermediary worlds with their forces and energies all influence each other. And in this complex chain, the spiritual is the first cause, the base and support of all things, whereas material is the last, the result. But in the material itself there are several steps and one may easily confuse any of these to be the final or sole determinant cause. It is a top-down view of things and not from below above or from the surface to the depth.

Now if we cut off all the rest and only adhere to material causes, then we have serious gaps in our knowledge and a fractured understanding of things. Thus, for instance, how are we to explain how an 'unconscious' gene acts with such precision in steps so as to create a conscious, thinking being? How do 'unconscious' and 'inanimate' chemicals create conscious living

creatures? How do 'blind neurons' create a 'foreseeing thought'? What is the role of will, aspiration, faith and love? Are these also genetically determined? Are they just a fantastic illusion created by the play of genes and the brain and body's neurochemistry? And if that is so, then what is the reliability of all our knowledge, evidence, analysis and data?

It means we are ultimately relying on certain chemicals in order to know other chemicals! But as we understand, chemicals are essentially incapable of intelligent analysis and knowledge! Besides, what is cause and effect in a 'random world'? What we observe instead is an intelligence, a conscious working, even an aim if we may say, an intelligent working out in steps towards a goal adapting a means to an end, a recurrent pattern, rule and law and mathematical order behind everything in Nature. In other words, what is more likely to be true is the deep and profound ancient Indian seer-sight that matter is born out of energy and force, energy and force is born out of consciousness, and consciousness itself is inherent in the being. If that sounds abstract (it is not but it's just that we are not habituated to look at it in this way), then we can put it simply in this way it is the formless spirit that has assumed a form; it is the limitless infinite consciousness that has become a limited and finite consciousness that we call life; and even an 'apparent unconsciousness' that we call matter. But everything is pregnant with consciousness, there is a conscious Intelligence far surpassing the human intelligence that is operating everywhere. What we term 'our mind' is itself one form and aspect or even the result of this selflimitation of the one infinite Consciousness. But since here upon earth, all this is based upon matter, rooted in matter as it were and hidden in matter as a limitless possibility, all seeming to be so heavily dependent upon matter, it has no independent reality save as an epiphenomenon or result of material processes alone. In other words, we can take three possible approaches to reality.

First the physical world and matter are the only dimensions to study. If matter explains itself and we understand the chain of material processes by our material mind alone, then we can find ways to correct whatever goes wrong in this chain by just material means, thereby making ourselves free from disease and death. And since, according to this theory, everything is a question of genes and chemistry, we may also find a chemical means to

change our mind, attitudes, beliefs, hopes, etc., and make man free of evil and suffering as well. This is an attractive hypothesis. But the big question here is that even if it were possible, is it really worth it? For then one may ask who or rather what am I, this 'I' that wants to be free of disease, evil and suffering? They are as unreal as the solidity of objects themselves! Besides leading to a dangerous form of genetic fatalism, this makes everything in life that is grand, noble and beautiful at once worthless and meaningless. The question is, if at the end of things, we have an atomic void waiting for us, is it worth the trouble to explore? Finally, it leads to serious gaps and the biggest of all unanswered questions: Why there is something at all and not nothing? How is material existence born? How did creation arise in this meaningless void?

Second, there is a spiritual reality other than the material but both—the spiritual and material—are closed boxes complete within themselves and with no meeting point or mutual influence. The soul comes from one box and steps into the other for whatever strange reason and then goes back to its home. Both run together like parallel worlds that cannot meet. Such a doctrine raises even more questions and further confounds the confusion. It does not fill the gaps but only widens them. The riddle becomes worse—what need has the spiritual self to enter at all into the material if it has nothing to do with it? If both are closed boxes, then how does it enter at all? What is the use of such a supernumerary and what kind of experience must it take from the material world to which it neither belongs nor has no [any] particular point of contact or any specific influence?

Third, and this is the position that a comprehensive spiritual vision, experience and thought takes, the spiritual and material worlds and all the intermediary ranges are interlinked in a single chain. The spiritual or rather the highest levels of the spiritual are the source and cause of all things and are therefore most free, all-knowing and powerful. The material, or even further below, is the world that is most bound and therefore most resistant to change, least conscious and least able to exercise a will of its own. Man in his present evolution stands somewhere between these two poles, but at a crucial point. He can bring into his body, mind and life the influx of a higher spiritual consciousness, knowledge and power, and change things here, even physically, including the genetic imprints if that is necessary. If the mind can

do it without direct spiritual assistance (indirectly it is always pushed by the spirit from behind to exceed itself and exercise new possibilities), then how much more would it do if it opens to a much greater power beyond mind, a power out of which mind and matter both are born? But the means to open to that higher power is through an inner Yoga and not by a technological manipulation of matter. That is why we are less enthusiastic about things like gene therapy, which though useful in their place, cannot give the ultimate solution since they are not the sole and final determining cause. The final answer lies elsewhere.



21. What then is the way to approach this final answer, this radical remedy?

First of all, an exclusive either/or approach must go. This is happening already as the mutual distrust between modern medicine and alternate systems is being replaced by a certain degree of adjustment and accommodation. There is also a growing acceptance of 'spirituality' in life, though confusion still exists between contact with the authentic spiritual consciousness and those mixed forces and energies of the intermediary worlds of mind, life and body. The unchastened modern mind with little or no experience of deeper things and with the haste and impatience of our times easily mistakes all that is paranormal for spiritual. A genuine spirit of enquiry, a healthy scepticism, a great sincerity, humility and patience are even more necessary here than in the field of material and other sciences. This needs to be cultivated.

Secondly, an overemphasis, sometimes an almost exclusive emphasis, given to the exploration and manipulation of the external world and its processes has led to a lopsided and imbalanced view of life. It has made us increasingly dependent on machinery, purchased comfort at the expense of growth, material advancement at the price of a biological and psychological amputation, outer freedom by forfeiting our inner power.

Our spirit, our mind and life have all been placed at the body's outer needs. The result is that even the body has suffered in the process and has slowly lost all its capacity for natural resistance. It has become now almost helplessly dependent upon doctors and drugs for restoring health, while its own healing capacities have greatly suffered. After all, we should not forget that living creatures have not only existed and survived but also multiplied and evolved much before even man began to conceive of an attempt to study and manipulate external nature. Now that we have interfered and manipulated with the external nature but have still not found the perfect answer to our hopes, it is time to step out of our box and explore beyond. The balance between inner and outer development needs to be restored.

That can come about only as we search and research the limits of our inner psychological and spiritual possibilities and see how far they can go in making life here upon earth more healthy, harmonious, peaceful, happy and beautiful. The stretching of our internal limits and boundaries must be now attempted just as we have done with physical matter.

Thirdly, and simultaneously, there is a pressing need for the spiritual evolution of man, not just as an individual but as a collective. This urge is translating itself in the form of an increasing need for spirituality felt by many, a doomed attempt to revive religions and religious practices, the springing-up of new sects, paths and bypaths promising a quick 'spiritual' ride and so on. Obviously there is much mixture and confusion as there is bound to be when the effort is in its infancy. But it must not be given up for this reason. Most of all, this process will be helped by those who, feeling a genuine inner calling for exploring the uncharted territories of the inner life, respond to that calling and give themselves to it in real earnest. These men should dedicate themselves to exploring the spiritual domains and inner maps, just as one goes out in search of hidden continents and new lands. It is not enough to intellectualise. It is necessary to realise. It is only as the pressure of these realised beings grows that the general mass of humanity will naturally emerge into a greater light. As this happens, the hidden capacities and latent powers of the being will spontaneously develop in those who are ready and receptive. Ignorance will recede and faith will be fulfilled by direct experience and the most convincing of all methods of knowledge—a knowledge by identity. The whole approach to this spiritual evolution has to be in the line [along the lines] of an individual and collective growth into a new dimension. A mere analysis of surface data as our senses present today, a statistical scrutiny of available material, even convincing arguments and logic are not enough; it is only possible if we experience the soul as we do the body and if we know the higher consciousness and its effects personally, and this is possible only by a direct experience and identity. As the number of such a humanity or neo-humanity grows, the problem will be automatically solved. In other words, a dual process is needed. On the one hand, we need to explore, expand and exceed the limits and push the boundaries of Nature, of our physical, vital, mental being and its latent capacities. On the other, we must find the key to open the doors of what is beyond Nature, beyond

our physical—vital—mental constitution and personality, our spiritual self. As a third step, we have to unite these two. The first step will augment Nature. The second takes us beyond it to a more perfect consciousness. The third and final step will bring this greater consciousness into our nature, made ready and strong by pushing its limits and boundaries, and eventually transform it. We might say this is a quantitative change followed by a qualitative one. It has to reduce its dependency on external methods and outer means and increase its inherent capacity to heal and press towards a higher evolution, taking such things as disease as an evolutionary challenge or even a kind of evolutionary opportunity. The key that can open the doors to a higher spiritual consciousness, urge the lower members to progress and bring the higher and the lower together is the psychic consciousness in man.



22. Does this mean that one should never use any external means for one's illness?

That depends entirely upon the individual and his preparedness. No general statement can be made since there is so much variation of response between human beings. Anatomically and physiologically humans may be one species, but psychologically there is undeniably a range of different states of humanity that is often quite independent of our external position. At least there are definitely different subtypes. And this psychological variation may well influence our physiology and response to challenges such as an illness. There is, for instance, one type of humanity that has a very high threshold for pain and can take even major problems stoically. There is, at the other extreme, a delicate and fragile humanity that winces at the slightest touch.

There is, of course, a section of humanity that has been corrupted by comfort and has lost what it once naturally possessed. And there is a whole range in between the crucial issue of 'to treat or not to treat', so the matter cannot be decided by rigid rules. The nature of the illness, the degree of urgency, the individual's constitution, his receptivity and faith, the quality of consciousness, the surrounding environment, and, of course, the physician himself are all contributory factors in one way or another. Each case is therefore different.

Most human beings in their present stage of evolution, labouring in ignorance and with a great degree of unconsciousness in their body and mind, usually need some material/outer support when they are acutely ill. The nature of this support may vary, but in principle it depends largely upon the quality of consciousness that inhabits the individual's body and being. A dull, heavy, crude, inert and *tamasic* consciousness will usually need strong medicines whereas a light, subtle, refined and balanced consciousness can regain its equilibrium with a little support and with much gentler means. The above-mentioned considerations can however be overridden by faith and [or] fear. Faith and openness to the Grace reduce the need for medicines and sometimes, especially if it is a strong integral faith, help dispense with

them altogether. So too, fear upsets any vantage point and annuls the effects of whatever system or method we may be using. One can choose a familiar system and a physician who knows one well and avoid doctor-shopping unless the personal physician himself advises him to do so.

If the illness is acute, one should take adequate physical and mental rest so that the body can draw upon its reserve resources if need be and assist the cure. In all other instances, and so far as it is feasible and possible, it is better to go about doing one's work according to one's own rhythm, provided it is not too taxing. While work helps to draw energy and divert the mind from the illness, fatigue can tire the nerves and depress the mind and immune system. Balance is necessary and for that the body itself will tell us how much we can comfortably do.

In matters such as food, it is best to listen to the body's instinct, but one must not go onto a crash diet as it may excite and exhaust the nerves and also lead to nutritional imbalances.

Diseases are often like early warning systems that we need, but should not fear. They point towards some disharmony somewhere that needs to be explored and rectified. This disharmony may be in the thoughts and feelings, in the inflow and outflow of life energies or in the very body and its various rhythms and functioning or otherwise in its exchange with the environment. It is often a lifestyle problem that we recognise today, which needs to be set right. Lifestyle is not only about the amount of food we intake and the exercise that we do but also concerns our greed and ambition, the fear and anxiety behind what we do or do not do. It is this that constitutes stress—disappointment with the work atmosphere rather than the work itself. It is known, for instance, that ambition, a hypercritical attitude and time urgency are at least as closely linked to heart attacks as bad diet and poor exercise. A change of lifestyle, therefore, implies not only a change in diet and exercise but also a reorientation of attitudes and approach to life. This has to be essentially done in the direction of moderation and balance.

As for attitude, three key factors that help in the healing process are as follows:

- A faith that one will be cured
- A will to recover
- · A state of inner calm and detachment

One should take care to avoid the mind from getting agitated and anxious about the illness and its possible consequences. The mind must be kept free by engaging it by whatever means instead. If it is kept happy, then so much the better, as a state of cheerfulness is conducive to health.

One should especially avoid all kinds of doubts that may creep in regarding the medicine, system or physician. It is better not to go to a physician one cannot trust. But once you choose a physician, then trust him and do whatever he asks you to do to get rid of the illness, including taking any medicines that he advises. (Note: Sometimes a second opinion may be necessary if one does not have the faith and if there is genuine doubt in the physician's mind about the illness or if his competence is clearly inadequate.)

Finally, as in all instances, one must know that there is no perfect answer to the human problems so long as we remain what we are today—creatures made of mud and largely a crude animal that is being led by a little flickering lamp of the corporeal mind. All our present remedies are at best patchwork solutions. The final answer will come only when our consciousness, right down to our physical being, undergoes sufficient change so that we can live constantly in and by the Light. In our present stage of evolution, whatever we may do, whatever method we may adopt or the system we may follow, ultimately we must leave the result in the hands of the Grace. We need to be able to surrender ourselves completely to That and leave it to the Divine Will or a Higher Will that works from behind the scene, to choose either health or illness for us, even as we put our effort on the side of health and recovery.



23. What then are the causes of illness and how can they be prevented?

First of all there is not one cause but a number of causes or rather factors that support the illness. These factors are within the patient, outside in the environment and beyond his immediate space—time field of present life. We can divide them into the following categories of causes and apply the prevention that can operate at each corresponding level:

- (a) Immediate causes: These can be internal and external. Internal causes represent the lowering of resistance to illness due to lack of essential elements, to fatigue, depression, fear, acute stress and all the rest that cuts holes into the body's protective subtle envelope. External causes are trauma and injury, invasion by subtle forces of illness, etc.
- (b) Intermediate causes: These are again internal and external. Internal causes are wear and tear in the organs due to ageing or an immoderate and imbalanced lifestyle, an excessively self-indulgent life given to desires, a bad heredity and poor constitution, etc. Some external causes are chronic stress, an environment that is perpetually hostile, full of unhealthy vibrations and formations of illness and ill will, etc.
- (c) Original cause: This is due to the general collective and individual ignorance, the sense of separation that turns each individual unit of life into a war and a tussle with the All-Life. On the individual level, it translates itself into one organ or group of cells drawing all the life energy at the expense of the others, or one part progressing and advancing, whilst the others are unable to move forward. There is progressive disharmony as a result of this imbalance and ignorance—a disharmony between the different parts and organs within the individual body and being and disharmony between the individual and other individual units of life that are around him. It is this ignorance that has turned life into a conflict and struggle rather than a sweet embrace and a harmonious unity.

Accordingly, prevention too can be applied at each level:

(i). **Immediate level**: A balance between rest and work, a vigilance that rejects all suggestions, thoughts and vibrations of fear, depression,

illness, detecting them even before they enter our personal atmosphere. This can be developed by a growth of consciousness in the different parts through a discerning and methodical self-culture; a training of the consciousness to detect subtle things, forces and vibrations; and a capacity to sense, see, touch and feel subtle things by a development of inner senses. All these things can develop either naturally and spontaneously through Yoga or else by certain practices that involve breath control and concentration. Even if one cannot go to this extent of self-development, it is enough to know that our subtle protective layer becomes strong if we have positive thoughts, a calm and cheerful disposition and a luminous faith. However, contrary elements can damage this too and allow illness to enter.

- (ii). Intermediate level: This is a difficult and complex area. There are certain aspects about ourselves and our environment that we cannot control. For instance, heredity and the people who surround us in our everyday life by virtue of our work or conditions of living. So the stress here is to minimise the risk, say by leading a life of balance and moderation, avoiding excesses of any kind, forming healthy eating and sleeping habits, regular exercise, developing consciousness in the body and mind through a physical culture, breath control and meditation, making one's will strong by developing it, by cultivating a right attitude, faith, peace, detachment from the body sense etc.
- (iii). **Original level**: This can only be dealt through complete eradication of ignorance from every part of our being. This means firstly a fundamental release of one's being from ignorance by a discovery of the Divine Self within. Secondly, it means the discovery of the powers of the Divine Self on all the universal planes of existence, especially the planes beyond the mind. As a result of these two changes, a progressive transformation of our inner consciousness can result and then follows an outer and physical transformation. But this requires a deep and sincere effort, and above all, Grace. It is this that can provide a radical cure and perfect immunity, not only against illnesses of the body and mind but also against injuries, attacks, accidents and even ageing and death—indeed against all the possible sufferings and ills to which humanity is so prone.



24. What then are stress disorders of which we hear so often?

The concept of stress disorder is in a way the recognition that our mind and lifestyle has an increasing role to play in health and illness. Essentially, stress is a matter of habit and perception. To a trained athlete, running half a marathon may not be stress at all but simply a warm up, or for some even a stress-buster. But for another person not accustomed to the same or someone who is lazy and hates to exercise, a simple three-kilometre jog may be felt initially at least as a stress. The same is true at each level of our being, from the most physical to the spiritual. To a genuine and sincere aspirant for spiritual life, the life at a monastery and the strenuous discipline and self-control may all be a matter of joy. But to another person, one whose aspirations hide another motive, the mere act of staying at such a place may become an ordeal, even if he is kept in a comfortable enough state. In other words, the perception and the remedy of stress is more an intrinsic thing than an outward act. To be in circumstances more conducive to one's temperament and deepest aspirations, to lead a life that is more in accordance with one's natural predispositions, to take up a job or work that is truly the deeper need and self-expression of oneself are some of the ways towards freedom from stress.

In other words, stress has a lot to do with the way we perceive and experience things. This itself may be the result of our past conditioning, including the force of habit, learning and heredity, our present circumstances and the way we visualise and place ourselves in the future. Past conditioning and habits are strong determinants as well as deterrents of stress. That is one of the values of education and learning can prepare us for taking stress. Our actions, reactions, habitual responses to life situations get ingrained into our mind and body and often become the source of much trouble later in life, when the general plasticity is lost and we become fixed in certain grooves of nature. There is of course also the atavism that we inherit from our animal ancestors. Thus, many of our reactions were appropriate to the

animal life but have become defunct and even counterproductive in today's context. But we still behave often like the caveman and perceive threats, thereby raising our blood pressure and heart rates where [when] all that was needed was some cool and balanced thinking. But the old pattern of behaviour continues and we like to strike our neighbours, win an argument through heated discussions and even loud voice, whereas the problem could simply be solved by a fair and free discussion, perhaps over a cup of tea.

Then there is the present situation. This has a lot to do with our perception of things. Man by his very nature wants to understand but again his understanding is still very limited due to the general ignorance about life and its goal and also the forces that move us. And even when we understand, we are often helplessly limited in our capacity to act and alter things. This limitation of will and power along with the limitation of knowledge create in man a constant sense of self-limitation, resulting in stress. Man feels stress the utmost because of all living things he is the one most acutely aware of his limitations and ignorance and also most acutely aspires to overcome them. In addition, stress is created by the preferences and the choices we make keeping the future in sight. We want a certain result from life and all our actions strain in a particular way. However, seldom do we trust the wisdom of life that may have other plans for us. We prefer the immediate satisfaction of desires and temporary pleasures to long-term growth that probably nature intends. It is this seeking for quick success on our own terms and time that generates maximum stress in an individual. A lot of problems will be better solved if human beings stopped worrying about things that may actually never happen. If only we could learn to trust Nature's deep wisdom and God's greater power to supplement our limited knowledge and abilities to change things.

A simple approach to stress can be summarised in this simple but meaningful prayer:

'Lord, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.'

That brings us straight to the other side of stress, not as a thing to be frightened of but to take it as an evolutionary challenge, a call to exceed ourselves, a cry for change. Indeed human beings can evolve and what was perceived as stressful and even painful earlier may change its value. Stress

is perhaps one of the mechanisms used by Nature to act as a catalyst for evolutionary change. It is not just a question of training and a habituation of the body and mind to certain conditions, not just a resignation to life situations or a mere acceptance or even an indifference towards it. These things have a considerable value in our spiritual ascension. Most of all it is to discover a new poise of the being, a new station of consciousness, the station of one's inmost soul. Seated there, life changes its entire meaning. Seated there, one can remain calm and even experience a subtle joy amidst the most trying and adverse circumstances. Seated there, one is a master of one's nature, a mastery that can after some time even extend towards a growing mastery over all that surrounds our being—the elements, the life forms, the thought vibrations of others, the occult forces, the subtle vibrations from this world or from worlds invisible.

All authentic spiritual practice leads to such mastery and therefore it is the best antidote to stress. But this mastery must be distinguished from the mere change of lifestyle and attitudes, or even from some easy-to-do techniques being popularised in the name of spirituality and sold at a heavy price to the unsuspecting client who is only eager to find a simple quick-fix method to catapult his soul into some ethereal height. Very often it is not the real spiritual height but the height of his imagination. And while this is not without its benefits and is itself a stress-buster in its own right, it does not last. The bubble bursts one day and one finds oneself back to where one was. An authentic spiritual practice, on the other hand, leads to genuine selfmastery and with this mastery comes not only Peace and Delight but also Knowledge and Power, over oneself first and then over the world around. But this Knowledge and Power is not the knowledge of the ego but the peace and joy that come from the soul as it awakens, and disengaging itself from its narrow moulds set by the ego-self, it expands beyond the frontiers of the body-bound mind and enters the True, the Right, the Vast. It is this which is the permanent remedy of all stress—not only of the stress born of our transient experience with life but the stress of life itself struggling to evolve out of mud, taking man to diviner possibilities. In other words, the self within us realises its deepest and highest evolutionary potential towards which all stress and suffering is the goad and spur in our present state of ignorance.

PART III



THE FRONTIERS OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

THE MYSTERY CALLED 'LIFE'

The greatest mystery of life is life itself. Sir Francis Crick, Nobel Laureate accredited with the discovery of the DNA—the principle building block of life—argued in his book *Life Itself* that the statistical probability of life emerging in matter through some kind of random process and chance accident is so very infinitesimally low that we can safely conclude that life did not evolve out of matter but was simply transported from space, from some extraterrestrial source. He is not the only one to hold this view. Several ingenious experiments done over decades in laboratories of repute have failed to create a single strand of life out of raw matter. But the theory of insemination of planet Earth from outer space does not answer the question. It simply pushes it one step backwards, for the question is not just the how of life upon earth, but the how of life at all? Whether here or elsewhere, the enigma of life remains—how and why did matter stir from its sleep and begin to breathe and crawl and multiply by itself? For this is the main characteristic of life, that it can self-replicate, that is, it can multiply itself without any external aid. All other things are mere processes that may vary and change from one life form to another, but life remains constant; from the virus to man, the cells can multiply by an inner mechanism that seems to be ingrained in the very stuff and substance of life. Outwardly life seems to use the very same chemicals that we find in water. The basic structure of life is also very simple—a few amino acids (simple building blocks of proteins) and a carbohydrate backbone—and life is not only born but multiplies ad infinitum, and we don't have an answer why and how its first step came into existence. The rest is known of course but in the absence of this first step it remains a mystery.

Of course we should not confuse life with the processes it uses. For instance on earth, life is carbon based and depends upon water, oxygen and carbon dioxide. But it does not mean that life must necessarily depend upon this chemical combination everywhere else. Just as the same life

uses different processes, say of breathing and different instruments for its survival, likewise it may use a very different base for its very existence.

Thus far we have the scientific view of life. The spiritual view is that the force of life exists independent of matter. It is a power or aspect of the Supreme Being and it enters the realm of matter and of earth for preparing matter for a great evolutionary journey. According to this view, matter itself is an aspect of the Supreme Being and He has hid Himself and all His powers within it so that they may slowly unfold with time and create multiple centres of the Divine upon earth with matter as base and the Spirit as crown. In between we have the realm and the powers of Mind and Life that come to prepare matter for the crowning glory of the Spirit. This way the One Infinite Being becomes the Many and can express His infinity through form and name. According to this, all birth is essentially a self-limitation of the Spirit consenting to enter the womb of matter and on its own terms. All death is simply reabsorption of that ray of the Spirit that has thus entered into matter and assumed a form and name into its parent Light, the Light of the Spirit.



The Human Body: A Marvellous Miniature Universe

If life is a mystery, the human body and indeed the living cell is a great mystery as well. The cell is often described as a miniature city, albeit one which works more systematically than our typical metropolis. It has a central core that controls the entire functioning of the cell. All the necessary information that a cell would require during its lifetime—the time for its active functioning, the time when it should multiply, the time when it should stop multiplying, the materials it must store or gather for its functioning all this and much more is stored up in this miniscule nucleus, and this information seldom goes wrong. Thus, for instance, a particular group of cells in the heart serve as a trigger to the heartbeats. Once started, they continue to do so faithfully through almost the rest of one's life with inbuilt systems of back-up, of recovery, of adaptation and change of rhythm and also of reverting to its normal pace. In times of need, such as when we are running from danger or for sport, the cells can trigger faster to step up the requirement of an enhanced heart rate. At other times they can slow down to adjust. Similarly the ovum or the female egg is the greatest of marvels in the animal body. Once fertilized, it will divide and multiply itself as if completely programmed to produce a first-class replica of the living human body. Not only does it know when and how much to multiply but also when to stop, such as when a finger reaches its true size. The whole blueprint of the body is as if coded inside it.

The human body has about 60 billion cells and it is simply an extraordinary feat that these cells can stay and function with such a perfect and natural harmony that ironically enough we with developed minds cannot achieve even between two persons. Each cell further has a power station, a wonderful transportation system, a communication system, a system for drawing the needed supply of food and water and all its energy requirements. In its natural healthy state, the cell will take only that much which it needs,

not more, not less. Anything extra simply remains circulating in the blood or gets stored in deposits or thrown out as waste. Only when the final limits are crossed, do we fall ill. Illness, therefore, is the appeal made to our mind and intelligence by the body to halt the assault we are mounting upon it through all our indiscretions.

Another interesting fact about the body is that every cell is in perpetual movement. Each group of cells has a certain lifespan after which it changes into new and fresh cells. The lifespan of a cell may be as short as a few months as in the case of the red blood cells or it may extend through a few years as in the case of bone cells. In fact the entire body cells would have undergone a complete renewal several times during the average lifespan of an individual. The visible fact is that even though the cellular capacity does not alter perceptibly, the organ capacity does decline at a varying rate over the years. Besides, outwardly features of ageing begin to appear. Added to this is the conditioning and the belief by and large that the average age of an individual is around 85 years; however, till date, scientists have not agreed upon the exact process or reason for growing old.

The body has a remarkable capacity to heal and repair injured tissues. In fact some of the things that we call symptoms are simply the body's way of repairing the tissues or of fighting an infection. Of course sometimes it is overdone and also many times our mind with all its anxieties and fears intervenes and spoils the body's surer instinct. In fact it may not be an exaggeration to say that we human beings are unique in this regard that we almost excel in spoiling the body from the moment it is born. Few parents even understand the importance of training the body of their child, of giving it time for exercise and rest, of teaching it wholesome habits and indulging in only the right kind of food. We simply want the child to perform mental feats, but little do we understand that a strong and healthy mind resides in a strong and healthy body. That was the ancient Indian way of proceeding with education of a child: first laying a strong foundation through healthy habits of food and sleep, correct posture and correct breathing, exercises and selfcontrol, so that one is able to master the bodily life and its energies and even direct them to desired purposes.

What we must remember in any case is that the human body has evolved over billions of years. It is the end result (not the final result though) of a long and hazardous series of more or less successful experiments that Nature has conducted in its laboratory that we call planet Earth. Each system and each cell that this body contains has been tested and retested to withstand a lot of things. Besides it is still evolving and each disease, each pollutant, each environmental calamity is like a challenge thrown upon it and indeed it fights it well. In fact, the human body's capacity to face a survival crisis is phenomenal and if the will to live is there it can truly perform miracles. There have been well-documented instances of people surviving on nearly nothing but air for days, enduring life under a heap of rubble and debris with little air to breathe, as happens during earthquakes. While the exact mechanism of such extraordinary feats is not known, the important factors perhaps are a will to survive (sometimes even a mechanical subconscious and automatic will in the body), an absence of fear, and a generally relaxed condition of the being. One only has to read the survival stories of air crashes and shipwrecks to understand what the body is really capable of during times of crisis.

If this is true of an untrained body, how much more true it would be for a body that has been duly trained and systematically educated as in the case of commandos in military, space travellers, even sportspersons. In other words, we can expect so much more from the body if only we can place our faith in its latent capacities. The ideal attitude of course should be that the human body is not given to us as an instrument to satisfy desires, greed, lust and all the perverse enjoyments to which we have become habituated, but for higher and deeper purposes. This role of the body is best described in an ancient Indian verse, *shariram khalu dharmasadhanam*, that is to say, the body is a means for the fulfilment of dharma. Thus, the right attitude towards it should be neither one of neglect nor one of fear and anxiety born of too much concern about it as if we are nothing else but physical bodies; it is more appropriate to regard it as an instrument and a base, just like the mind and the life energy.

The higher evolutionary destiny of the body is of course to become not just an automatic and unconscious instrument of vital forces, but a conscious and luminous and plastic instrument of a higher spiritual consciousness and subtler and greater forces that come from the higher regions of our being. If humanity can survive long enough and does not yield to the contrary forces

of disintegration and disorder that are rampant with the advent of the mind, then this further evolution of the body is not only a logical possibility but also inevitable. Perhaps the diseases are simply one reminder, like a wake-up call, or even a narrow and dangerous path that the Evolutionary Force may be taking to leap beyond Man.



EAT FOR LIVING RATHER THAN LIVING TO EAT

It has been said that there is an intimate link between the food we eat and thoughts we think. While this may be somewhat of an oversimplification, it is true that food is the basis of the bodily energies, at least the way we are still constituted. We draw energy for life and sustenance from the food we eat though this is not the only source of energy. We draw energy also from breath and if we sufficiently train ourselves; in fact we can draw energy from practically every sense organ. That is why the ancient Sanskrit term ahaara is so meaningful. We can absorb energy from the environing consciousness, through smell and sight and hearing and taste and even through touch. We can draw energy even from the sun and the moon, the flowers and the oceans. Above all we can draw energy directly from the domain of thoughts and the higher spiritual consciousness. But while it is possible for us to thus draw energy and survive for a long time without food, it is not possible to replace its necessity altogether at present. This is so because our physical bodies are built of gross matter and it needs gross food to renew its substance. However, if one day we can learn the science of converting the vital and spiritual energies into material ones, exactly the way life came into existence, then it is not difficult to envisage a day when we shall no more need food to subsist and the energy we draw through the developed and sharpened senses and from the vital force and the spiritual worlds will be directly converted into the physical substance.

Such a possibility may not be something of a distant future considering the long evolutionary trail taken from dust to man, but as of now we need food to build our bodies. Therefore we need to know something about it. The overall quality of food depends upon the following factors:

1. Its caloric value or the energy status: The amount of calories needed by a man who is physically active is naturally more than someone who is sedentary in work and habits. A calorie imbalance occurs when the amount and rate of

energy intake is more than what we spend. The rest of it usually gets deposited in various places in the body or circulates in the blood as various molecules of fat and carbohydrates. The body has to then work extra to dispose of this heavy load. After a while it accumulates and begins to damage the body tissues.

- 2. The chemical composition of the food: A healthy diet is a balanced diet. Here it is good to remember the maxim that fad food is bad food. No doubt the body may adapt for a while to wrong or unwholesome food, but over a period of time it begins to tell upon our system and deficiency states begin to occur. Thus a vegetarian diet without milk may lead to certain vitamin deficiencies, particularly B12. So also a largely non-vegetarian diet may lead to a deficiency of certain antioxidants and cancer-fighting agents. The overall consensus today is almost fully in favour of vegetarian food, though fish may be useful for some and an occasional non-vegetarian meal does no particular harm. An ideal healthy diet should consist of at least one helping of fruits, two or three helpings of vegetables, preferably with some greens, milk or egg, pulses and wheat/rice. The diet should be high in fibre content that is excellent for fighting a number of illnesses such as high cholesterol, diabetes, hypertension, coronary artery disease and cancers. Fibres are found in vegetarian diet and are that portion of the food that goes undigested through the intestinal tract—whole wheat bread, atta rather than maida (that means rotis over pizzas!), brown rice, porridge, green leafy vegetables (such as spinach) and fruits.
- 3. The element of cooking: This is an important part and it is not just for taste and cosmetic value. Certain spices are known to have a protective value, such as chili for the heart. Besides spices, vegetables are a rich source of phytochemicals that are powerful cancer-fighting agents. It may be worthwhile mentioning that the newer methods of cooking, especially the microwave, may not be a good idea and the radiation absorbed in the process may have harmful effects as well. However, more studies are needed to confirm this. It is also possible that certain cooking practices handed over the generations may be a sort of collective wisdom and the combination of spices, etc., used for cooking are useful in some way for that climate and terrain.
- 4. Finally, apart from this there are other factors that act unseen, such as the consciousness of the person preparing the food, the environment in which we sit and eat and above all the state of our mind.

A word about cholesterol. Cholesterol is an essential component of body cells but like everything else, here too, an excess is bad. The body has its own mechanism for manufacturing cholesterol if it is deficient. Similarly, if we take more than required, then the body can dispose it off up to a certain limit. The upper limit of daily cholesterol intake is up to 300 mg of which the one single largest source of supply is egg. One single egg supplies nearly 250 mg of cholesterol, all of which is in the yellow portion. Unsaturated fats are found in vegetable oils, such as mustard, soya, sunflower (no particular advantage of one over the other), which further have an effect of lowering cholesterol, whereas saturated fats such as butter, ghee and animal fats have an action of increasing the cholesterol levels. However, a healthy diet should contain a certain mix of both. A diet consisting only of unsaturated fats, while lowering the cholesterol level, has the disadvantage that it lowers the immunity as well and also increases the tendency for the blood to clot. That is one reason why crash diets are lopsided and work upon the body just as an extreme viewpoint works upon the mind—it helps one side but hinders another!

A couple of quick points about a few other things: First, regarding nuts-whatever we may believe, nuts are not essential to diet. They do provide calories in a small grain and therefore may have some usefulness in extreme cold areas where other foods are not available or cannot be carried, but if one must take them, then almonds and walnuts are the safest for the heart. As regarding fruits, it is generally better to have them full rather than as juice as it takes away the necessary and useful fibre content. Two of the best fruits are banana and apple. Finally for the sake of completion it must be mentioned again and again that alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, aerated drinks, etc., do not come in the category of foods, though we use them as such, but are rather poisons that merely increase the calories and eventually harm the system in more ways than one, whereas water, which we hardly think of as food is not only indispensable—though one of the most neglected elements of diet-but also, its absence has perhaps a role to play in a number of diseases. If we understand that the human body is nearly three-fourth water, the same ratio of land and sea upon earth, then we shall surely understand and ensure that we have at least 6 to 8 glasses of water every day in some form or the other, except as tea, coffee and alcohol, because being diuretics they end up depleting the body of water rather than supplementing it.

As to vitamins and minerals, when one is taking a normal vegetarian diet, one does not need any extra vitamin or mineral supplements, however the salt being used should be an iodised one. Iodine deficiency is a major cause of hypothyroidism in some countries including certain regions of India such as Tamil Nadu. Iron is necessary and banana, dates, green leafy vegetables (such as spinach), beetroots etc. are a good source. Some diets prescribe beetroots and carrots as helpful in fighting cancer. The only two vitamins that a purely vegetarian diet does not supply are Vitamin B12 (which can be taken through milk) and Vitamin D, manufactured in the body through an exposure to sunlight. Vitamin C is known to help fight against infections and to augment immunity. It can be taken during infections, especially the common cold, and can be procured through citrus fruits.

The simplest of rules is 'eat for living, do not live for eating'. If we remember and more importantly, put it into practice, then we are not likely to err.



WALK YOUR WAY THROUGH LIFE

Of all the methods of maintaining health and the preventive strategies devised, exercise is still the cheapest and the best with beneficial effect upon nearly every part of the body. Of course like everything else it should not become an obsession or be done in excess. Physiologically, exercises are classified into two broad categories—low- and high-intensity aerobic exercises. The first makes one draw the oxygen requirement for the exercise during the exercise itself, for instance during walking, running, *yogasanas*, etc. In contrast, anaerobic exercises are high-intensity, short-duration exercises that do not allow sufficient time to take in the oxygen requirement commensurate with the intensity. This leads to an oxygen deficit, necessitating rest soon after the exercise so as to draw the extra oxygen requirement. Anaerobic exercises also lower the immunity for a short while immediately after. But apart from this, both offer common benefits though generally speaking aerobics are better overall than anaerobics. Examples of anaerobic exercises are weightlifting, short sprints, etc.

Generally, about half an hour of walking is enough to keep the body fit and provide health benefits. But exercises have other benefits as well. They lower the weight, stimulate the appetite but not necessarily the intake, increase the sense of joy and well-being in the body itself (presumably through the endorphin pathways in the brain), burn away extra calories and sugar, prevent osteoporosis, lower blood pressure and blood sugar, regulate sleep, stimulate the immunity (except soon after anaerobic exercises), and improve the body image.

Exercises have psychological benefits also. It is one simple way to sublimate and thereby convert certain unhealthy emotions and impulses into a creative and meaningful outlet. To derive the utmost psychological benefits from exercise, the best way is to play some game or else take to dancing or swimming, an activity that not only the body but the mind too can enjoy and participate in.

Finally as is being increasingly recognised, the body is the base for everything that is done upon earth, including leading a spiritual life. Exercises provide a good foundation for the body for spiritual purposes. Done with the right attitude, it can open the very body consciousness to the higher spiritual forces and thereby prepare the body for a greater spiritual work. In other words, exercise is much more than a mere physical workout or burning of calories. It is the art and science of becoming conscious of the body, of increasing its present capacities and even preparing it for future possibilities. Any hard physical work does not become an exercise. Thus, a woman working at home doing daily chores or a blacksmith using his hands for a long time in the smithy is not exercising. Rather, many times, by the overuse of one group of muscles (the back or the hand, for instance) they are sometimes even risking an imbalance or a frank disease. An ideal exercise harmoniously uses all the muscles in a balanced way. Some exercises such as yogasana postures additionally try to give some kind of massage to the internal organs. At the same time any physical activity, such as climbing stairs, reaching out for the phone, walking up the stairs can become useful to awaken the body consciousness if these are done consciously.



SLEEP THAT KNITS THE SEAMS AND SLEEVES

What then is this cloak of darkness that Nature has put over the world of dreams or shall we say over the inner worlds now hidden to our sight? Perhaps it is just a little replica of the same darkness that separates one life from another and divides our journey so artificially into two incomplete halves—this life and another, this world and another. This dense and dark cloak that hangs over an entire lifetime is called death. It is so because when we die to the earth realities we wake up to the realities of the beyond. And when we are awake in the other realms we tend to lose contact with the earth. But perhaps one day man will be able to integrate the two worlds and, by uniting these two halves of our existence, understand the events and circumstances that link the life one lives, with all the events that look so chaotic and leave one puzzled and baffled simply because we are unable to pierce the iron curtain of death and peep behind. Sleep is nothing but training in that direction.

Modern science speaks of the different phases and stages of sleep. As we begin to slip into sleep we pass from surface to the depths. Sleep scientists recognize it by the electroencephalography (EEG) changes and also the changes noted in certain biological parameters. Thus, as sleep passes to deeper and deeper stages (overall four recognized stages) the brain waves, as recorded by an electroencephalogram, become slower and slower as if the brain was just sustaining its activity. However, this passage is through the dreamworld and the person tends to wake up from the dream stage or come back to the superficial stages of sleep, before lapsing back again. In the early parts of the night, one has more of the dream phase, also known as rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, so-called due to the rapid eye movements observed during this phase. In addition, other activities of the body do indicate that this is a rather turbulent phase. In contrast, the dreamless phase is calmer and that is how it perhaps serves its restorative function. It is the

dreamless and the deeper phases of sleep that restore, rejuvenate and refresh the individual. While the exact biological functions of the dream phase are not known, it is perhaps required for the consolidation of memory.

Psychologically and spiritually we may say that in sleep we pass from one depth to another, from one layer of consciousness to another till we touch some bedrock of 'peace' and 'power' within us. We may say that during sleep we come in contact with our own soul as Nature moves from the surface inwards to its own depths, passing through the dreamworlds to the Ultimate Reality behind all things, the spiritual base known in Indian thought as the *Sacchidananda* Consciousness, the Triune Reality and Being of Existence—Consciousness—Bliss. Sleep gives us a chance to meet our Creator or our deepest Self face to face, and having received His rejuvenating touch to come back to the surface to resume the great battle of life.

It is perhaps this restorative ability of sleep in general that makes the body tend to sleep more during a physical illness and it is good to listen to this demand made by the body and take rest to restore what is being rapidly depleted through the sickness. In contrast, many physical and psychological disorders start as sleep disturbance. A recurring sleep debt (less than required sleep over a few days) suppresses immunity and predisposes us to infection amongst other diseases or psychological conditions such as depression and schizophrenia, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, coronary heart disease, neuropathies (pins and needles) as well as stroke. In other words, we cannot take our sleep lightly nor afford to ignore and lose it for long. That takes us straight to the question: What is normal sleep?

As we have seen, sleep has a quantitative side as well as a qualitative one. The latter is certainly more important than the former. Thus, for example, though sleeping from 10 pm to 5 am gives the same number of hours as from 1 am to 8 am, yet the former is considered better. This is so because the natural sleep is linked to the body's other biorhythms such as endocrine secretion. This rhythm that has evolved over millions of years of human existence is almost the reverse of the rhythm of the animal world. This too must have a purpose. Perhaps reversing the rhythm, as does happen in certain pathological conditions that make us sleep in the day while awake at night, may be a retrograde step, one that regresses us towards a past stage of evolution. Be that as it may, on an average, human beings require about 7 hours of sleep

(6–9 hours). The requirement falls with age and so does the quality of sleep. The elderly have lesser periods of deep sleep, a mechanism that may contribute to ageing and loss of memory. The best time for this is between 10 pm to 5 am. If we miss this time by a couple of hours, then the next sleep cycle will come later. That is why sleep is among the good habits that one must form. This will optimize our health and prevent rising medical bills.

What about insomnia? With an exponential increase in man's mental and vital activities, and pursuits such as watching television and surfing Internet, to keep it alive, more and more of the human population is suffering from sleep deprivation and sleep debt. Changing shifts, frequent travel, etc., are adding up to this loss. In an age of quick-fix remedies, there is an increase in the consumption of sleeping pills. What people do not understand is that sleeping pills are no substitute for natural sleep. Apart from the risks of dependency and side effects, they actually suppress both the dream phase and the dreamless phase of sleep. Thus, even though the individual 'sleeps' for whatever number of hours, most of this sleep is superficial, therefore depriving the body and mind of the real restorative functions of sleep. While an occasional use may be okay, the real answer to insomnia is not the sleeping pill but sleep hygiene.

If insomnia is of a short duration, it is better to just wait for the rhythm to adjust naturally. If there is no underlying pathological condition, the body will bring back the rhythm in a day or two. However, if the sleep debt continues for longer than a couple of days, then it may be worthwhile doing a few things as well as not doing few others.

The Dos:

- 1. See that the day is spent usefully and the body has received sufficient exercise. A day well spent is often the key to a restful sleep.
- 2. A cup of warm milk and light music played softly is one of the best soporifics. Try it before anything else.
- 3. One can also try practicing *yoga-nidra* or *shavasana*, well-known means of relaxing the body and the mind.
- 4. It is good to keep the noise levels down—both inner as well as outer—by whatever means that are helpful. One of the most effective means for lowering the inner noise is the use of a mantra or a conscious surrender of one's problems in the hands of the Divine.

5. Sleep as if you were going to meet the Lord and rest your head in His lap for a while. This is the inner fact of sleep. Our mind's will in this direction will surely help.

The Don'ts:

- 1. Avoid any kind of exciting activity before sleep. It releases adrenaline which will certainly interfere with the sleep process.
- 2. Avoid waking up with an alarm. A simple thumb rule is that if you are not feeling fresh in the morning, then you are sleep deprived, either quantitatively or qualitatively. Find out the real reason and address it.
- 3. Avoid sleeping on a heavy stomach. It makes the quality of sleep poor. It is best to have at least a one-and-a-half hour gap between dinner and sleep.

If none of these help and the sleep problem continues over a week, then it may be good to see a doctor.

As a final piece of suggestion, it is better to sleep sideways as sleeping flat on the back and sleeping after consuming alcohol predisposes one to sleep-apnoea, a condition that may well prove fatal.



DREAM DISCLOSURES

The world of dreams has always fascinated human kind. Though certain higher mammals, notably the cat, do show some brain activity that corresponds to the dream phase in human beings, yet for all practical purposes we can say that, like speech, dreams are rather typical of the human being. Surely this must be serving some function, otherwise Nature would not evolve it or having evolved persist with it. Some people believe that dreams are like fantasy, a kind of imaginary world, only it is an unconscious imagination or a fantasy where we hardly have any say. But then we may well ask if imagination itself is not simply but one mode of experiencing and relating with the cosmos. Besides who or what is to decide what is real and what is imagination. This is especially true when it comes to the effect of dreams upon our body and mind. Just as an imaginary state can influence us (for instance television shows which have been known to affect our body and mind), so also dreams do have an effect upon us. What else is a nightmare but the rapid thumping of the heart and a terrified mind following a frightening dream? In fact we can safely say that the human body registers all impacts that come through our mind, whether they are impacts from the world cognizable with the physical senses or the impacts that arise in the mind itself through imagination or dreams.

Having said this we can take one more step. Normally, the line between the so-called real world and dream-world is drawn on the basis of a common-sense perception. Scientists investigating the phenomenon tell us that perhaps dreams arise as a result of direct activity in the brain itself. In other words, we can safely conclude that the brain can trigger sensory experience even without the passage of stimulus through the senses. But then what about the images that have no correspondence either to our past memory or sometimes to anything that we have ever experienced in the physical world? A possibility at least does exist that human beings have in them other senses that are generally asleep or undeveloped. However, these

senses are released in a state of sleep. This may be because the overwhelming traffic through the input of our gross material senses is reduced in sleep, and also the usual control that the conditioned physical mind of man applies is not so active. Whatever may be the reason, the fact is that dreams do have some correspondence to the real world, both ontologically as well as teleologically. While the ontological basis of dreams is more readily and widely accepted, few persons recognize that some dreams may be a transcript of a future event. It is as if in the dreamworld there is a certain telescoping of time such that we may seem to have spent a long time, even years whereas we were dreaming only a few minutes. What it means is that in dreams we probably enter another order of reality, another time-space continuum, another set of worlds that are nevertheless linked to our own in some way. Seen thus, the world of dreams may be the first gateway devised by Nature for man's entry into a deeper and inner life. However, since man is still to grow into this vast and complex multiverse of a Reality and since too rapid an exposure to unknown realities may well leave us confused rather than enlightened, Nature in her deep wisdom has put a cloak of sleep over this passage dug out for man from his surface consciousness to the deeper layers of his own and the world's being.

But always there have been people who have tried to decipher the language of this fascinating world of dreams, at times with partial success. The difficulty is there because just as different languages and different customs exist in different parts of the world, so too the dreamworld is not one and depending upon the type of dream, the layer or the level at which we are experiencing it along with the nature of our own relation with the world, the meaning of the dream changes. After all, the world is not just a fixed mechanical thing. The same planet Earth looks different when seen from one side as from the other, whether we see it at night or at day. And then of course depending upon our unique psychological state at a given point of time, the same moon may appear romantic or haunting! That is what makes dream interpretation not so easy a task. Yet with some practice it can become interesting and one can find common elements and decode the language.

Thus, we have dreams that are largely memory fragments or transcripts of events that either happened or are happening around or within us. Or we may see the events of the day—the routine mechanical activities turned over

as if churned in a dream mixer with fragments missing or wrongly placed. Then there are dreams that are more of the nature of wish fulfilment, what we can call as fantasy dreams. In these dreams we may meet someone who is otherwise inaccessible or accomplish feats that are normally not possible or even speak languages unknown to us and so on.

But there are also dreams with a deeper quality generally recognized by their clarity rather than coherence. These are symbolic dreams that come to tell us something but the meaning or language may not always be clear. Of course some general broad lines can be interpreted. Thus, for instance, missing a train or any vehicle for that matter means losing an opportunity for progress, climbing a mountain means an upward growth, meeting with difficulties on the road may indicate inner or outer obstacles in the movement that we are currently pursuing. Sometimes the dream may indicate the solution as well or point the nature of the actual difficulty, thereby helping us to overcome it. Here we need to understand that the symbols are of two types—those that are universal and those that are personal to the individual. Universal symbols are obviously those that are engraved in the common repertoire of experience of the race. Thus, snakes would almost always represent menacing energies such as fear or sometimes other corresponding lower movements such as lust. In Yogic parlance, one would say that they represent the forces of a low order, what are generally called as dark and hostile forces. The exceptions of course are golden or white serpents or sometimes a many-hooded or jewelled serpent. So also birds or flowers would almost always represent beautiful movements or soul moments. A sea would indicate world forces, while a ship would mean something or someone that is helping us carry through the wide and complex world on the path of progress. The symbols are many and do vary to some extent from one civilization to another. The forces that govern the dreamworld do use the means that are closer to our experience and relational understanding. Their purpose is to convey and not to confuse us. It is just that we hardly notice them and have not cared to learn their language at all. Otherwise we could get a wealth of information about self and others through the dreamworld and its messages.

Finally there are dreams that are actual events on other planes and if we take note, they can caution us about an imminent future. Even if we are not

always able to alter it, we can be at least better prepared to face it. Here we need to understand that according to the spiritual vision of things, the events happening on the physical plane are first enacted in the subtle realms and then they are later precipitated upon earth. There is a time when they can be so altered that the final event is either a little different or even completely changed when it happens upon the earthly plane. But this of course requires a highly developed consciousness and mastery over the subtle and occult realms. It is because of this that we can say that the future is not rigidly fixed and therefore it is always more difficult to predict the future than the past. Future is still in the making and many forces that are presently not active may come into play with time and completely alter the course. This is especially true of spiritually developed individuals. These dreams are truly teleological.

One such example from my own diaries is that of a patient who was suffering from a disseminated cancer of the ovaries. She had a series of dreams that would even indicate the actual forces at play, sometimes her inner state, her deepest aspirations, even the way the cancer was spreading. But one of the most fascinating dreams that she saw was where she was near a clock that had a pink background and was surrounded by jasmine flowers. She noticed that the both the hands of the clock were stuck at 6 showing the time as six-thirty. In the dream she was trying to move the hands but could not succeed. Next day she asked me for the meaning. I did not interpret it directly but started preparing her for the imminent exit that I interpreted as coming after six-and-a-half months. I noted the date for my own reference. Sure enough she died exactly six months fourteen days after!

Thus, the world of dreams can be a whole field of education. Though there have been many dream interpreters yet this is still an infant science. It is only when humanity will develop enough so as to consciously enter into these dreamworlds that we will understand the full significance of our dreams. Perhaps we will no more then call them dreams but simply a journey into other realms of consciousness from where we can bring a wealth of useful material for use on earth.



AGE GRACEFULLY, DIE PEACEFULLY, DREAM OF IMMORTALITY

Once mankind's focus on disease is taken off due to a reduction or at least a reasonable practical knowledge of disease and its prevention, it is but natural that its mind will turn towards understanding and conquering ageing and death itself. That would take us right to the frontiers of research in medical sciences. However, it is a truism that for all our practical understanding of diseases and the powerful drugs to stop or to contain them (one seldom cures), the fact is that we are still far from truly mastering them. And even if we were to do so one day, it is quite different from mastering ageing and death. The one obvious reason is that disease is not 'natural' in the sense that Nature does not want us to fall ill; it rather helps us to fight it with all its force. Ageing and death are natural phenomenon or processes for Nature to maintain a certain balance between the individual life and the All-Life that surrounds it. When we fight against diseases, we are fighting with Nature on our side, but when we fight ageing and death we are putting ourselves against it, so to say.

For example, gene therapy means finding a way to change a person's genetic structure so that an inherited condition may be reversed. In practice, it can mean taking a leukaemia or HIV virus, altering its genetic structure, and hoping the cure doesn't turn out to be worse than the disease. It took over a year for evidence to suggest success—one patient lost some vision, the other some points on a non-verbal IQ test—but the general course of the disease had been halted. But to extrapolate this to mean that one may be able to control every disease and halt ageing through genetic modification alone is still a distant dream.

Still there is no harm in dreaming and the dream itself indicates that one day Nature does intend to lend this secret too to man. But not before we are ready, as to be ready for immortality means to be able to bear the burden of All-Life, it means to live in a vast cosmic consciousness just like Nature, to act with the flawless Divine spontaneity where each and every individual action is in perfect harmony with the greater Divine Law for the collective. It means, paradoxically, to be completely free of every trace of the protective ego sense. This is no easy task and it is not likely to be possible only through the means that biological science puts at our disposal.

Nevertheless, the dream is on and almost for the last fifty years or so, mankind is trying various ways to retard ageing and to achieve the ultimate goal of immortality. Initially it was cryogenics, that is, preservation of the body under conditions of extreme cold—sub-zero temperatures—so that the body tissues were preserved until science advanced to a point where every disease was treatable. Then the dead could be raised and thawed out of their sleep with the kiss of a surgeon's scalpel or a micro-injection and lo, there would be life. The logic was sound, since extinct species such as mammoths do remain buried under snow for ages without any decay. But neither life nor Nature work according to human logic and they find ways and means to get past our efforts if the cosmic Will does not sanction it. Soon it was discovered that the water inside the body cells preserved under such extreme cold temperatures readily turned to ice and the ice crystals would damage the cells mechanically. The effort was aborted even before it could take off properly.

That, however, does not matter since such are the early beginnings of any victory. The failures of today pave the way for tomorrow's victory. The scientists refused to give up and in the process discovered a whole lot of causes for ageing. But still the victory eludes since at its bottom ageing is a question of genetic programming. It is one thing to extend the average human lifespan from 51 years at the start of the previous century to 76 years at its close, and it is quite another to push it further beyond 90. The reason is that the chromosomes have a limit to the number of times they can divide or multiply. This limit is fixed by a little repetitive gene sequence called 'telomere' at the end of each chromosome. It is like a ticket—each time a cell divides, a portion of the telomere is cut off like a ticket to enter some place. This can go on for nearly 80 times due to repetitive gene sequence. The ticketing process is done by an enzyme called 'telomerase'. Once all the telomere sequences have been chopped off, the cell can no longer divide. It grows old and ineffective and then drops off naturally and dies. It runs out of

its tickets, so to say. Interestingly this discovery came through the backdoor of cancer research. In studying the reasons for the cancer cells survival beyond all limits it was found that they have something that inhibits the enzyme telomerase that takes the cap off and so they have a free unlimited entry into the arena of a cell. The same ticket can run over several times before it is accounted for! The research, therefore, focuses now on finding drugs that can inhibit this enzyme, but without turning them cancerous. For the moment you inhibit it, the cell would keep on dividing ad infinitum and what we have is not longevity but cancer!

But the scientists won't give up. The latest addition to this list is the flight of fantasy by an Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) graduate computer scientist and inventor, Ray Kurzweil. At 56, the scientist has a fantastic program for himself. He takes around 250 dietary supplements, drinks about 8 to 10 glasses of water daily, takes about 10 cups of green tea every day and goes through a daily round of 40 to 50 fitness indicators including 'tactile' functions to fine tune his body. He sincerely believes (and with reason) that in another 20 years science would have the ability to prolong life indefinitely and he does not want to miss the bus.

The sliver of hope on which he hangs is the rapid revolution in biotechnology. He believes there are three bridges to immortality. The first is a perfect health regimen to keep fit. The second is biotechnology that would eliminate genetic causes of diseases—already gene therapy is being tested with some success in mice where it can prolong life and retard certain diseases. The third bridge is nanotechnology with the help of which mankind will be able to devise ultra-small nanobots that are like mini computer chips which would circulate in the body and repair all that is damaged immediately. Sounds like a fiction? Well already two such devices are being tested and tried. The first is a Respirocyte (an artificial red blood cell), 5 cc of which can help us run for 12 minutes without the need for taking oxygen! The other is called Microbivores that are like artificial white blood cells, which swallow, digest and eliminate pathogens just as white cells do! They may be useful for many conditions that depend upon the immune system from infections to cancers. However, what Kurzweil has forgotten is the last and formidable bridge within the human consciousness itself, the bridge between the present limited ego state that wants to devour All-Life,

expanding infinitely by subduing others, and the Oneness that stands behind the cosmos as its safety against any exclusivity, whether of a species or an individual or group life. Unless we find inwardly and outwardly the right or true balance between the individual unit of life and the All-Life, death will find a door and discover us wherever we hide, even if it be behind a highly sophisticated machine, a nanobot or more that may come.

The fact is that Nature has already achieved a slowing of the ageing process and even the immortality of the cell in certain earlier and simpler forms of organisms. There are certain species of rockfish, whales, turtles, and other animals that are known to live for hundreds of years without showing any signs of aging, a phenomenon known to bio-gerontologists as 'negligible senescence'. No one knows for sure how long these animals can live for, but we know that they can live for over 200 years without showing any observed increase in mortality or any decrease in reproductive capacity due to age. Striking examples are a 109-year-old female rockfish that was captured in the wild while swimming around with fertilized eggs, and a 100-plus-year-old male whale that was harpooned while it was having sex. The other line of approach that is being pursued in man's quest for longevity and eventual immortality is the Ageless Animals Project. Its purpose is to understand why these animals don't seem to age and then to apply that understanding to human longevity.

Finally, a third line of approach is of course the occult and the Yogic way. Here again we find that there is some correlation to longevity and breath. Animals with slower breathing rate such as the turtle live longer while those that breathe faster, such as the rabbit, have shorter lives. This is not difficult to understand even from the purely biological point of view. Perhaps the time trigger for cell division is the number of breath cycles or the number of times it exchanges the gases, oxygen and carbon dioxide. After all, cells do not wear watches and yet have a precision when it comes to timing. Nature may well have evolved this biological clock by linking it to the breath. And so it may well mean that to breathe at a slower rate as happens in a state of relaxation lengthens our life while when we breathe at a faster rate, as when we are excited or agitated, shortens the lifespan. Breath is the mystic link between the force of life around us and the same force within us. Nature has quietly pointed this door to us by leaving this one function in man that is at

once both involuntary and voluntary. No other function shares this unique property.

But the occult process goes deeper than mere control of breath and heartbeats. The ancients tried a number of things including <code>kaya-kalpa vidya</code> or the science of total rejuvenation of the body cells, but as noted earlier this is unlikely to work. They have also tried isolation so that one does not have to come in contact with the All-Life that constantly acts upon the individual unit in some mysterious way to threaten it. The Buddhist lamas and the Himalayan mystics perhaps owe their longer lifespan to this singular fact of living in a Shangri-La kind of environment that minimises exchange with the outer world. Their reluctance to come in contact with the outside world or to admit it easily in their group life is understandable. Yet death comes even if after a long time. Besides such a longevity is not of much use to the world unless one also lives in the cosmic consciousness and pours the higher energies to which one has an access upon the world to change it.

Be that as it may, death for the present is a reality and we must know how to face it and to age gracefully rather than supplicating before it with fear in one's eyes and anxiety in the heart. Though opinions are divided, it is perhaps better to know if one is afflicted by a terminal illness than to remain in a state of denial. While denial does delay the inevitable and may sometimes even slow down the disease process so much that it almost appears as if cured, on the flip side, men often go back to their same old lifestyle and the extra lease of life doesn't help much from an inner point of view. On the other hand, an awareness of death standing by our side may well force open a door of inner strength within us, a door of peace and calm that does not depend any more upon our little ephemeral bodily existence. Death is a moment for great inner concentration of our entire consciousness. If we know how to use this moment rightly, that is instead of concentrating upon fear and anxieties and physicians as hope givers, we should rather concentrate upon the Deathless Eternal within us and then death too becomes a means for progress.

It is said and rightly so that ageing is all in the mind. True, one may continue to feel young at heart even at 90, and it is good to remain so. At the same time, the body does place certain realistic limitations with the passage of time and it will be unfair to demand from it at 80 what it can do

rather easily at 20. To age gracefully and to die peacefully is an art but to achieve this state we must have lived gracefully and done what best we could do to leave this earth at least a little better, our nature a little more divine than when we were born. The ultimate mystery of life is found neither in birth nor in death but in life itself. For with life comes progress, evolution, growth, with life comes hope and despair, stress of struggle and the joy of victory, with life comes the great possibility of an endless ascent into the Life Eternal, the Life Immortal, the Life Divine.



THE NUMBER ONE KILLER

The number one killer is not heart disease, diabetes or stroke but stress. Or we may say that stress is the mother of many maladies and the single common factor that stands silently behind many diseases including the ones listed above. A lot of research has gone and continues to go in studying the phenomenon of stress and its mechanisms, though very little into a way to come out of it. The mechanism of stress is now fairly well understood. What was once a survival response has become a threat to survival. Thus, for example, a tiger chases a deer in the forest. Now both of their bodies release certain hormones that help in fight or flight, the two main options available with most animals (of course the third is the freeze response which has its own survival value). The sympathetic nervous system gets activated (so-called because it indeed sympathises with our situation), the heart beats faster, an extra dose of adrenaline is pumped into the system, glucose is mobilised from its stores. All this helps the muscles to move quickly through the extra blood and glucose for energy. The result is that the tiger and the deer both run faster. The pupils dilate to make night vision better. Nature, like an impartial mother, has helped both its children and left it to the game of life to decide their fate. Once the game is over, the response soon settles down. The deer does not shut itself indoors out of fear of a future attack and the tiger does not give up because it has failed (on an average its failure to catch prey is much more than its success). Now the scenario changes; we come to the modern city and the situation is repeated in the chase for money, fame, power and success. Unfortunately the body still reacts in the same animal way. We have a disagreement and adrenaline is shot, glucose rises, the heartbeat increases but there is no movement of muscles except the facial grimaces and frowns or sometimes finger gestures. The extra glucose is not utilised, the blood flow increases our blood pressure since it does not reach inside the muscles where it is meant to go. We anticipate the worst and then acute stress turns into chronic one. The hormones released this time are

steroids, and while they make us feel pleasant they also weaken our immune system. This in turn predisposes us to infections and also lowers cancer immunity. Thus, we end up with high blood pressure, diabetes, cancers and frequent colds and infections.

It may be noted here that stress is not only about negative events (in fact negative and positive are just our mental evaluations, nothing more). The so-called positive events such as a child birth, career promotion, marriage, etc., also create stress upon the body. The body reads excitement and the sympathetic nerves respond—that's all. Spiritually as much as materially it is true that pleasure and pain are two sides of the same coin.

We may say that what may have ended with a little wind turns into a huge storm. Once our responses turn into habits, then we do not need external stress to arouse us. The body simply learns to remain as if under perpetual tension even when there is no apparent reason for it. Illness, perhaps, is also a habit, a bad habit so to say. And we must persevere against it with every means at our disposal.

What is the remedy? Nature has given us another nervous system called the 'parasympathetic' that counteracts many of the effects of the sympathetic. We need to activate that. A number of ways are known to activate this part of our autonomic nervous system, from deep breathing to yogic postures, to conscious relaxation and meditation. Daily exercise tones up the parasympathetic system besides releasing the endorphins (the opium in the brain that gives us a healthy high). Add to this a diet rich in fresh fruits (especially the ones that contain Vitamin C) and a good night's sleep, and you have all that you need to fight stress at the physical level.

But stress returns since we are not just a bundle of molecules and nerves and blood sugar levels. We are also a mind that thinks (at least claims to) and stress has a lot to do with attitudes, beliefs, habitual responses, emotions and so on. To work upon these levels is as important. An age-old advice in this context is 'to live in the present'. Sage Vasistha notes: "What has happened to me today and what will happen on the morrow again? I am not afflicted by such worries. Therefore I live without diseases." Sure enough it is a wise advice. But a lot more goes into practicing it. One has to be equipped since one's childhood by developing the qualities of endurance, increasing frustration tolerance by learning to postpone gratification, and having a

natural trust in life and what it has to offer. But as adults we can also learn to step back from an event and look at its real place and importance and significance from a larger perspective. That is, not to let the smaller picture of life come in the way of the larger picture. Witnessing, detachment, self-reflection and widening are so many psychological ways to do the same and any method is as good if one takes a liking to it or is temperamentally predisposed to it. Looking at the problem with the light of reason and trying to solve it with a calm and clear head in a rational way is also good though not all problems have a solution that is perfect to our liking. Yet if we can state the problem correctly and break it into smaller units giving a hierarchy to them, then we can find some kind of a rational solution to at least some of the life situations. We can also talk to someone or if no one is there simply pour out our feelings in a diary with God as witness.

Finally, there is the spiritual way, and it consists in learning to hand over our problem to a higher Light, placing ourselves at the disposal of a higher Will, learning to surrender our being and all its events and circumstances of life at the feet of God. Depending on our faith we can choose the way, the essence of course is in bringing our personalities and its small and big difficulties in contact with Grace and handing it over to That whose wisdom far exceeds all our mental calculations. This does not mean, as many believe, a dependency or an encouragement to complacency. It simply means augmenting our personal efforts by linking it to a greater Power, joining our ignorant hope and narrow vision to that which is the ultimate Hope and All-Wisdom, the All-knowing Consciousness of our very Highest Self.



MIND MATTERS

The last century explored the possibilities and the limits of physical medicine. If one can read the writing on the wall, the next century may well see mankind taking an active interest in higher dimensions of consciousness, those which we now call as 'spiritual'. But the passage from the obscure material paradigm and its exploration to the luminous spheres of higher dimensions will take time, not just because it is a difficult field to study scientifically and scepticism abounds but because the higher dimensions are not yet a common experience of humanity. Though destined to become so, yet till that happens man will have to fall back perforce on what he presently knows and can experience best—the body and the human mind. The body we have largely explored and what remains will be known within the next couple of decades. By then we would have seen the limits of our genes and analysed every possible molecule that matters for health purposes. What next? Quite naturally man will turn his gaze towards an understanding of his own mind, more so because at present he identifies himself with the mind alone.

In a way this has already started. The last couple of decades saw the emerging interest in the powers of thought and suggestion, belief and emotions, will and hope in healing. The interest is now gaining momentum. 'Mind—body medicine', as it is called, is likely to serve as the passage from our excessive interest in gross matter to the deeper understanding of the subtle spheres of the Spirit existence. In a way there is nothing new in mind—body medicine. The role of mind in health and healing has always been known in every civilization. Ayurveda lays a great emphasis upon our lifestyle, attitudes, basic constitution, personality type and our thought and emotion on health and healing. Fear is the root of all diseases declares the 'Yoga Vasistha' boldly and fear springs up from desires. The *Gita* describes how anger can work to the utter destruction of a human being through successive steps and stages of our total fall.

These ideas are coming back sometimes through strange and unexpected doors. For instance the medical doctor, Dr Andrew Weil, M. D., who is also an author of repute, notes what was to later continue as a lifelong freedom from the cat allergy to a lifelong interest in 'mind–body' medicine:

'If a cat touched me, I would get hives. If a cat licked me, I would get hives and my eyes would swell. So I always avoided them. Then, one day when I was twenty-eight, I took LSD with some friends. It was a perfect day. I was in a wonderful state of mind, feeling totally relaxed and at one with everything, and a cat jumped into my lap. My immediate reaction was to be defensive, and then I instantly thought, well, here I'm in this state, why don't I try to pet the cat. So I petted the cat and I had no allergic reaction. I spent a lot of time with it, and I've never had an allergic reaction to a cat since.'

The point is not about drugs; it is well known that most often they cause bad trips and nightmares and the physician's case is rather an exception. Yet it does indicate an important fact that if the mind can enter into a state where it feels a perfect harmony and a sense of ease, then it reacts very differently to the same stimulus, in this case to the allergen. Though most ancient healing practices, such as traditional Chinese medicine and Ayurvedic medicine, emphasize the important links between the mind and the body, Western medical views were shaped by systems of thought that emphasized the opposite—the mind and body are separate. As science developed and with Louis Pasteur's discovery of germs, the notion of a connection between mind and body was thought to be superstition.

While phrases such as 'mind over matter' have been around for years, only recently have scientists found solid evidence that mind—body techniques actually do combat disease and promote health. In 1989, for example, a landmark clinical study by David Spiegel, M.D., at Stanford University School of Medicine dramatically demonstrated the power of the mind to heal. Of 86 women with late-stage breast cancer, half received standard medical care while the other half received the standard care plus weekly support sessions in which the women were able to share both their grief and their triumphs. Spiegel discovered that the women who participated in the social support group lived twice as long as the women who did not. A similar clinical study in 1999 showed that in breast cancer patients, helplessness and hopelessness are linked to lesser chances of survival.

Other clinical studies also document the effect of meditation on mood and symptoms in people with different types of conditions (such as high blood pressure, irritable bowel syndrome, and cancer) as well as an overall improvement in the quality of life. In 1964, psychiatrist George Solomon saw that rheumatoid arthritis (an autoimmune disorder that affects, apart from other systems, primarily the small joints leading to much inflammation, pain and often deformities) worsened when people were depressed. This led him to investigate the impact of emotions on inflammation and immune function in general. In the 1960s and early 1970s, a physician named Herbert Benson, who coined the term 'relaxation response', studied the effects of meditation on blood pressure. Further understanding of the mind-body link came in 1975 when psychologist Robert Ader showed that mental and emotional cues affect immunity. Today, there is renewed interest in age-old traditions such as yogasanas and meditation. No longer viewed with suspicion, mindbody programs are now established at prestigious medical schools in the United States and around the world.

What Are Mind-Body Techniques?

The key to any mind—body technique is to 'train' the mind to focus on the body without distraction. It is in this state of 'focused concentration' that an individual may be able to change their health. The following are some of the most commonly practiced techniques.

I. Biofeedback: *Biofeedback* is a technique in which people are trained to improve their health by learning to control certain internal bodily processes that normally occur involuntarily, such as heart rate or blood pressure. The patients are provided signals from their own bodies. Strangely the very fact of receiving the signals, either through a visual or an audio display, makes their mind send the message to the body in ways that they end up controlling the function intended. Thus, biofeedback has blurred the distinction of the voluntary and involuntary systems of the body and extended the possibilities of the mind to control even the autonomic nervous system (that part of the nervous system normally considered to be not under voluntary control). Physical therapists use biofeedback to help stroke victims regain movement in paralyzed muscles. Psychologists use it to help tense and anxious clients to relax. Specialists in many different fields use biofeedback to help their patients cope with pain.

For patients, the biofeedback machine acts as a kind of sixth sense which allows them to 'see' or 'hear' activity inside their bodies. One commonly used machine, for example, picks up electrical signals in the muscles and translates these signals into a form that patients can detect. It triggers a flashing light bulb or activates a beeper every time muscles grow more tense. If patients want to relax tense muscles, they try to slow down the flashing or beeping.

Like a pitcher learning to throw a ball across a home plate, the biofeedback trainee, in an attempt to improve a skill, monitors the performance. When a pitch is off the mark, the ballplayer adjusts the delivery so that he performs better the next time he tries. When the light flashes or the beeper beeps too often, the biofeedback trainee makes internal adjustments which alter the signals. The biofeedback therapist acts as a coach standing at the sidelines, setting goals and limits on what to expect and giving hints on how to improve performance. Of course many such machines have now come into the market and most do not need the help of another person. Besides if the mind can control the function as long as information is provided to it, then there is no reason why it cannot control it through the direct use of will alone even when the information is not provided in detail. The only possible reason is that the feedback of a growing control may be very satisfying and is likely to enhance the patient's faith in himself or rather in his own mind and its ability. When the local physician tells you that you can take charge of your illness one doesn't easily believe it but when a machine says so then it must be authentic! Such are the uses or abuses of technology that we have replaced our faith in ourselves and lent it to the machine that stands by our bed. But that's a different story. The fact is that biofeedback works.

The feedback signal may also act as a kind of reward for reducing tension. It is like a piano teacher whose frown turns to a smile when a student finally plays a tune properly. The value of a feedback signal as information and reward may be even greater in the treatment of patients with paralyzed or spastic muscles. With these patients, biofeedback seems to be primarily a form of skill training like learning to pitch a ball. Instead of watching the ball, the patient watches the machine which monitors activity in the affected muscle. Stroke victims with paralyzed arms and legs, for example, see that some part of their affected limbs remains active. The signal from the

biofeedback machine proves it and can guide the exercises that help patients regain use of their limbs. Perhaps, just as important, the feedback convinces patients that the limbs are still alive. This reassurance often encourages them to continue their efforts.

Clinical biofeedback techniques that grew out of the early laboratory procedures are now widely used to treat an ever-lengthening list of conditions. These include:

- High blood pressure
- Asthma
- Coronary heart disease
- Obesity
- Cancers, such as pain and nausea/vomiting related to chemotherapy
- Insomnia
- Anxiety
- Diabetes
- Stomach and intestinal disorders (including dyspepsia, irritable bowel syndrome, constipation, diarrhoea, ulcerative colitis, heartburn, and Crohn's disease)
- Fibromyalgia
- Menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, depression, and irritability
- Migraine headaches, tension headaches, and many other types of pain
- Cardiac arrhythmias (abnormalities, sometimes dangerous, in the rhythm of the heartbeat)
- Raynaud's disease (a circulatory disorder that causes uncomfortably cold hands)
- Epilepsy
- Paralysis and other movement disorders

In an analysis of mind—body studies, researchers found that cognitive behavioural therapy is the most long-lasting treatment for tinnitus (ringing in the ears), but relaxation techniques, hypnosis and biofeedback were all also effective treatments. Some researchers believe that chronic fatigue syndrome, which affects the immune system, is best understood and treated with mind—body medicine.

Many combine other techniques as well to enhance the effect of the biofeedback. Patients usually are taught some form of relaxation exercise.

Some learn to identify the circumstances that trigger their symptoms. They may also be taught how to avoid or cope with these stressful events. Most are encouraged to change their habits, and some are trained in special techniques for gaining such self-control.

II. Cognitive behavioural therapy: This technique is used to help people recognise and change dysfunctional thought patterns. For example, people with phobias might deliberately expose themselves, under the direction and guidance of the therapist, to what they are afraid of. Brain scans show that over time this therapy can actually change how the brain functions. Cognitive therapy is primarily used in psychosomatic disorders to change the pattern of thoughts and behaviour. Thus, for instance, a patient suffering from depression is shown how his thoughts are coloured and onesided, leading to a state of increasing negativity. Such a person becomes increasingly critical and negative about everything and everyone in the world. Quite naturally this draws a negative response from his environment. This is then pointed out by the patient who then justifies his negative self-image and his own further negative responses to people. A vicious cycle tends to build up leading to a spiralling downward effect till the patient becomes hopeless and begins to nurture death wish. Sometimes, especially in cultures where it is not considered good to be depressed, these negative patterns of thoughts and feelings begin to tell upon the body. Today we recognize that almost half the patients who visit a medical outpatient department (OPD) are suffering from some undercurrent of depression that goes undetected, while the therapist goes on adding one pill after another. Besides, depression is now known to predispose a person to various physical illnesses such as heart attacks and strokes.

The cognitive therapist identifies these negative patterns of self-defeating thoughts in the patient and teaches him to change these thought structures. Like all such therapies it is a specialized subject and not everyone who tells us to think positively can claim to be a cognitive therapist. Besides, no therapy can change someone who does not want to change. Sometimes an illness serves as a protective shield that prevents the patient from facing certain uncomfortable truths about his life. The patient under these circumstances is unwilling to let go of the illness, and often he or she does not even recognize it. What is even more astounding is that they will

risk surgeries and brave physical interventions, bear with the side effects of drugs but refuse to acknowledge the real problem. This is the inverse side of mind—body medicine if one likes. The mind holds on to the disease because of some psychological or even physical benefit that it derives from this sick role. I had a patient who was brought by her husband as the lady had suddenly grown blind one morning. Since the ophthalmologist found nothing wrong with her eyes, the patient was referred for a psychological check-up. She would refuse to admit or yield. When the ophthalmologist threatened to give her an injection in the eye that may be painful (under the plea that it will detect the illness), she went through with it as if it was nothing. This went on for quite some time. Finally she spilled the beans under hypnosis, of a neglectful husband who had suddenly become caring once she 'lost' her sight.

A new variation of therapy acting upon thoughts and feelings is the Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP). The therapy is based on the premise that our thoughts and feelings are like memory traces upon the mind. It is possible to wipe them off and to rewrite the slate. The therapy is mainly useful for traumas that continue to haunt and affect our lives.

- **III. Relaxation techniques:** There are three major types of relaxation techniques, which are as follows:
 - **Autogenic training**: This technique uses both visual imagery and body awareness to move a person into a deep state of relaxation. The person imagines a peaceful place and then focuses on different physical sensations, moving from the feet to the head or vice versa. For example, one might focus on warmth and heaviness in the limbs, easy, natural breathing, or a calm heartbeat.
 - **Progressive muscle relaxation**: This technique involves slowly tensing and then releasing each muscle group individually, starting with the muscles in the toes and finishing with those in the head.
 - Meditation: Of course the word is used loosely here, and while meditation can be used for many other purposes—from learning to focus the mind to mind control on to, as its highest possibility, Self-Realisation—it is also used as a means of relaxation. The two most popular forms of meditation in the United States are transcendental meditation (students repeat a syllable, a single word or phrase, often

meaningless), and *mindfulness meditation* (students focus their attention on their moment-by-moment thoughts and sensations).

With an increasing interest in Eastern thought, many such techniques have come into vogue, often with pecuniary interests. The bazaar for this market is growing every year, and a new kind of consumerism, 'spiritual consumerism', seems to be in vogue. But if we cut out the details, most techniques have certain common features in them. They usually require a quiet setting and time. Often the sessions require a guide, at least in the beginning, and works better that way than if the client does it on his own.

For the session to be effective, the body must be relaxed to begin with. This relaxation is aided by willed suggestion and even an imagery that one uses to relax different parts of the body. Then with the help of a suitable imagery, corresponding in some way to the desired condition, one enters a subjective state of peace, calm, wideness, expansion, wellbeing, etc. Finally, in this relaxed state of being, one can give suggestions of health, wellness, and even freedom from disease. A typical session would last about half hour or so. Light and comfortable clothing is best, and one should not feel any pressure from natural urges or waiting for some next appointment soon after. Some like to add a little music that can help in calming down. Some also like to add an incense or aroma that is known to have a beneficial effect, for instance, frangipani, lotus or jasmine. Similarly focusing on one's breathing or simply breathing deep and consciously before the session helps as well. Though the session can be done anytime anywhere and in any position, for obvious reasons it is best to do it at a fixed time when one is least likely to be disturbed, and at a fixed place and preferably lying down on a rug or mat or even sitting. Care must be taken not to slip into sleep, at least till one has gone to some degree of depth inside one's subjective space.

Of course once one has learnt and later mastered the art, then it becomes easy, spontaneous and even natural to enter into this deeper state of self with little effort or even effortlessly. Then one may even get rid of the imagery that was used as a key to open the path in the initial stages. Once the road is wide open, and one takes care not to lose sight of it by falling back into the old stupidities, then it is enough simply to remember or invoke the state of peace and calm for it will be there as a dear friend waiting to be near

us. Even this peace may be made so intimate as to never leave us even on the battlefield and in the midst of a storm. Once established it becomes difficult and even painful to fall back into the small and narrow little self that one mistook to be oneself. It is then enough to direct this peace that is now at one's disposal on to the diseased part to release the contraction and to bring relief. With practice one can even extend this to others and send a stream of peace onto someone who is in pain just as one injects a drug into the human system. The method can then be dispensed with as peace becomes our natural state and joy and wideness the simple spontaneous way to be.

IV. Hypnosis: During hypnosis (taken from the Greek term *hypnos*, meaning 'sleep') a person's body relaxes while their thoughts become more focused and attentive. It is in this state of deep concentration that people are highly responsive to a hypnotherapist's suggestions.

Though it is mentioned in the ancient Indian texts, hypnosis was rediscovered by Franz Anton Mesmer, an Austrian, somewhere towards the close of the 18th century. Mesmer hypothesised that hypnotic suggestions are transmitted through a medium that he called 'animal magnetism', which he believed to share properties with physical magnetic forces. His use of hypnosis was a very novel one. Patients were seated around a tub that had a number of iron rods protruding from the sides. The patients were to sit holding the handles while Mesmer and his colleagues did a number of rituals in the middle of the tub to induce a hypnotic state. Surprisingly, he could cure a number of cases both organic and functional. The French Government of the day discredited Mesmer, not on account of his cases but by declaring that the results he achieved were due to imagination rather than anything to do with the tub! What they missed out completely was that if imagination was the cause of recovery, then Mesmer had discovered a very important tool for the physician. He had, like Dr Coue, hit the central issue in medical practice, the question of faith and its great role in our recovery. Nevertheless, he was recognised nearly 60 years after his death and the American Medical Association officially accepted hypnosis as a form of therapy in 1958.

The interesting thing about hypnosis as we know it today is that it is not just about faith or will as we understand it. Hypnosis is real and it works. For the effect of hypnosis does not depend so much upon faith (more than in any other condition or method of therapy) as upon something known as

hypnotisability of the subject. Persons with a strong mind and will, especially if they are determined not to, cannot be easily hypnotised. Secondly, the person is unable to reproduce in the waking state the changes that he can bring about in his body under a state of hypnosis. Thus, for example, it is possible under hypnosis for a person to experience blisters on the skin as if it were touched by a hot object while the object was actually cold! One cannot so will it while awake.

While several theoretical constructs have been used to understand hypnosis, none of them explains it completely. It is one of these anomalies that may unlock a new door of understanding for us. One thing we know is that hypnosis helps and also that there are powers that sleep within some unknown tracts of our mind. For want of a better word, we use the word 'unconscious' mind to describe it. In terms of states of consciousness, hypnosis stands somewhere between wakefulness and sleep.

The methods to induce hypnosis are quite a few, but the essence of all these methods is to let the mind focus on a repetitive image so that slowly the conscious waking and rational mind slips into a kind of torpor and the unconscious mind (that is normally guarded by the rational parts with their ifs and buts) is released into action. In clinical settings, hypnosis is often induced by administering a drug that is supposed to sedate the person. However, the therapist keeps the patient lingering at the threshold of wakefulness and sleep by talking to him just when sleep seems to be catching up. The same principle is incidentally used in autohypnosis, wherein one gives suggestions to oneself just as one is slipping into sleep. The message then bypasses the mental filter and enters deep into the subconscious parts and acts from there with much greater power than if it were given in a state of wakefulness. One can well understand the influence that modern commercials can have simply because they run on a television screen or flash suddenly, thereby bypassing the rational mind. Before one can think and apply reason, it is already absorbed by the unconscious mind and has gone inside us to spring to life in an unsuspecting moment of choice. Mental health professionals use hypnosis to treat people with addictions, pain, anxiety disorders, traumatic disorders, and phobias. There are even reports of conducting surgeries under a state of hypnosis and the patient not feeling any pain. Nevertheless, there is also a sinister side to hypnosis as it has been misused for political ends through brainwashing.

Recently hypnosis has been tried in a rather novel way in what is termed Past-Life Regression Therapy. Here the therapist takes the patient backwards in his journey of life in a state of hypnosis right beyond this present formation of personality into the past life or so it is believed to be. The roots of a present illness or symptoms are then traced to the past and treated there by bringing knowledge and awareness about our sickness. Thus, for example, a lady having severe respiratory problems could trace this to her past-life experience of drowning in a well. Regression therapy is of course not only used for past life but also for unearthing memories of this life as well that may be contributing to the present symptoms. Thus a woman suffering from chronic pain for nearly three decades was encouraged to go to the root of the problem. She traced it back to the moment when she was being operated upon under anaesthesia. Though to all outer appearances she was under an anaesthetic and therefore unconscious and oblivious of what was happening around, she remembered the older surgeon telling the younger and rather inexperienced surgeon that she is likely to suffer much pain due to this. Her mind caught on to this strong suggestion and kept experiencing the pain as if under a spell. She became free of it only after discovering its root and then there was no reason or any necessity for her to have pain anymore. Having said that, all this is still a very mixed affair. I have known cases where so much romanticism was obviously mixed in the accounts of previous lives that its only use was to see the fantasy life of the person rather than his past life!

Whatever it may be, hypnosis is still a mystery and its full potential remains to be explored. As always with fields that are on the margins of human thought, there is much mixture in it. It is only as the human consciousness advances and experience grows that one will understand clearly as to its exact mechanism and also sift the various phenomenon that one experiences under hypnosis in their right place and give them a just meaning and a true significance. But the exploration has surely begun.

How Does Mind-Body Medicine Work?

Researchers have found that stress hormones are associated with particular unhealthy emotions. These hormones affect systems and organs throughout the body. For example, stress related to hostility and anxiety can result in disruptions in heart and immune function. Similarly, depression

and distress may diminish the body's natural capacity to heal. In contrast, emotional expressions that encourage openness and active coping with problems helps stabilize the immune system. Certain emotions have been linked to disease. For example, hostile attitudes may increase your risk for coronary heart disease, obesity (particularly having excess fat around the waist), insulin resistance (which can lead to diabetes), and abnormal cholesterol (specifically, high triglycerides and low levels of high-density lipoprotein [HDL]—the good kind of cholesterol).

Generally, research shows that being stressed and having negative emotions is unhealthy. One study found that unconsciously being defensive or stifling feelings resulted in serious medical consequences, such as high blood pressure. High blood pressure is also associated with feelings of hopelessness. How a person processes emotions also affects how long they may survive a chronic illness. The goal of mind—body techniques is to activate the relaxation response and reduce the stress response. When you are relaxed, the levels of hormones related to stress are reduced and your immune system is more efficient. High levels of stress hormones circulating in the body may actually prove to increase one's susceptibility to infection as well. There is however a danger that mind—body medicine might encourage you to feel that you caused your illness. This idea can lead to blame, and blame only causes feelings of distress and guilt, things that in themselves are negative emotions and only add to the internal stress.

Psychoneuroimmunology

That our thoughts and feelings influence us is an old story. Now the scientists are busy finding out the how of it. Essentially it means that our mind (psycho) influences the immune system (immunology) through the nerves or the nervous system pathways (neuro). In one of the early experiments in the field, scientists demonstrated the power of the mind's conditioning upon the body. A group of volunteers were given the immunosuppressant cyclophosphamide (a drug that suppresses the immune system). The result was an obvious immunosuppression. After a few weeks, the immunosuppressant was withdrawn and replaced with saccharine (an artificial sweetener) that has no effect whatsoever upon the immune system. The subjects of the experiment were however not told about this change. Strangely (though not so strangely as we can understand now), the body

continued to suppress the immune system as if it was not saccharine but cyclophosphamide that was being given!

In yet another experiment, patients suffering from cancer were given a computer game to play in which they were supposed to kill the tumour cells by manipulating the white cells. The group that was given this game was compared with another group that was similar in every way except that they were not given this game. Again, the group playing the game responded better and had an overall faster recovery and a greater survival rate.

Many such experiments are being conducted throughout the world that even the physicians do not come to know of. Such is the power of the mind again that it has been induced to believe that chemical pills popped into the system or a massive surgery is the only hope, while the healing powers that we inherit remain asleep within. Nevertheless, once acknowledged, the power of these truths that are being revealed now—despite the heavy resistance from the State and the drug lobby and even the present lords and ruling class of medicine—have the power to radically alter our self-view and world-view. Especially they can alter our current view of a rigid mechanical determinism of life and its small field of observable cause and effect.



THE POWERFUL PLACEBO

One of the most significant but widely misunderstood phenomena is the placebo effect. Research shows that the placebo effect can be greater and is far more ubiquitous than commonly thought. A placebo is often described as a pharmacologically inactive substance that nevertheless has a certain desired pharmacological effect upon the patient. Thus, for example, distilled water is not known to have any known pharmacological effect in any recognised diseases. However, if administered to a patient under the garb of a medicine the patient may respond to it just as he would to a known pharmacological agent. That is why any drug that comes into the market must first be testified to have a response superior to a placebo. Though the pharmacological testing is supposed to strictly eliminate the placebo effect by double-blind trails of the drug, that is to say, the doctor and the patient neither knows which one is the drug being tested and which one is the placebo and who is getting what, yet in practice it is almost impossible to do so. The placebo effect is often communicated not only through the drug but the heightened expectation, hope and a general state of trust that the patient puts in a physician. Some physicians naturally inspire hope, others do not. Besides it is difficult to monitor pharmacological companies closely, given the number game that has come into play with almost a vulgar force. The consumer believes that a drug is discovered after much research into a disease but often a drug is discovered first and the disease it would fit into is found later. Not that this is true of every drug but a significant number of drugs may well be flooding the market through this backdoor of medicine.

One of the questions that sceptics are asked most persistently is to explain how Acupuncture, Homeopathy, Faith Healing, Qigong, and other treatments work. Sceptics often use the placebo effect—a response to the act of being treated, not to the treatment itself—as an answer, but usually to no avail. This only goes to show that most people, both logical and confused thinkers, don't truly understand what the placebo effect is.

Spontaneous remission and the placebo effect, which are known as non-specific effects, are significant phenomena that have great impact upon the patients and health-care professionals. Recovery from illness, whether it follows self-medication, legitimate treatment, or avant-garde therapies, may lead one to conclude that the treatment received was the cause of return to good health.

A common saying is that if you treat a cold it will last a week, but if you leave it alone it will be gone in seven days. Even serious diseases have periods of exacerbation and remission; arthritis and multiple sclerosis are prime examples. There are even cases of cancers inexplicably disappearing. The major logical error in plotting disease progress is: post hoc, ergo propter hoc ('after it, therefore, because of it'). This common fallacy credits improvement to a specific treatment just because the improvement followed the treatment.

There are certain misconceptions about the placebo effect. Thus, for instance, it is common for young medical interns to believe that if a patient responds to a placebo, then his problem is or was imaginary. However experiments confirm that placebo effect is real and for real diseases. Research also illustrates how difficult it is to separate valid treatments from 'apparently' valid ones. In other words, we're never without some level of non-specific effects.

Another myth is that a patient has to believe in the treatment for the placebo response to occur. While a belief is surely helpful, yet it is not so much our surface beliefs that count as much as the power of our unconscious mind. Our unconscious mind often contradicts what our surface mind believes or disbelieves. And this unconscious mind is acted upon not only by our personal hopes but by the collective suggestions and hopes that swarm around us. Now, whether legitimate or not, it is a fact that most human beings today put their trust almost subconsciously in the Allopathic paradigm, even those who say they do not much believe in it. I have witnessed a number of persons who would otherwise scoff at Allopathy but easily believe in its prognostications. It is not their fault. It is simply the power of the subconscious mind that is working, silently but powerfully. That is why it is said that take a remedy while it is in fashion and it will cure you! Fortunately we are also witnessing today the birth of a new hope, a hope in our own deeper possibility to help and heal.

It appears that belief, operant conditioning, and suggestibility all play important roles. In an interesting experiment, a man experienced pain and exhibited marked depression of a specific part of his heartbeat while being monitored by an electrocardiogram (ECG) machine during a treadmill diagnostic test. This occurred at a treadmill setting of 44. For a second test, when the treadmill number was miscounted so that the patient exercised less, he exhibited the same pain and ECG depression as at the setting of 44 (Jarvis 1990). This dramatically demonstrates the power of suggestion.

In one review of the relevant literature, it was found that placebos gave substantial relief to diabetics and patients suffering from peptic ulcer, rheumatoid arthritis, Parkinson's disease, radiation sickness, and other serious health problems. [The clinical study of the effectiveness of minoxidil, the drug that is used to re-grow hair in balding men and women, showed the surprising result that 11% of the patients in the placebo condition regrew new hair!] People will even develop some of the adverse side effects associated with the 'real' medication (e.g., headaches, nausea, insomnia and constipation)! Given that there is no active substance in the placebo, this research shows that the cures and symptom alleviation are triggered by the patient's own mind, even though the person is completely unaware of it.

Contrary to popular belief, placebos can be harmful. Placebo responses can 'teach' chronic illness by confirming and/or reinforcing the delusion of imagined disease (Jarvis 1990). Patients can become dependent on nonscientific practitioners who employ placebo therapies. Such patients may be led to believe they are suffering from imagined "reactive" hypoglycaemia, non-existent allergies and yeast infections; dental filling amalgam 'toxicity'; or that they are under the power of Qi or extraterrestrials. And patients can be led to believe that diseases are only amenable to a specific type of treatment from a specific practitioner. On the other hand, the practitioner can also be blinded to the real disease because of being convinced that the patient's condition is only imagined. Not just that, one often encounters patients who begin to react 'adversely' to a medication even before it is absorbed from the gut! Some report effects that are neither plausible by any known mechanism nor ever reported. These are again due to the suggestion of harmful effects that one often associates with certain kind of therapy such as Allopathy. In certain places there is a belief that all Allopathic drugs

are very toxic. While I am no votary for an excess use of Allopathic drugs, there is no harm in giving the devil its due. However, I prefer to follow a simple rule of practice. If a patient does not like or want to take a particular medication due to real or imagined side effects, it is best avoided. The relation of a doctor and a patient is a sacred one; it is built upon trust and not on the ego. The physician is not given the role to prove his point about the superiority of one system over another with a 'I know it all' kind of logic or attitude. Rather he has to be sensitive to his patient's belief system and use it to the therapeutic advantage.

We must also remember that as far as the body is concerned, the line between imagination and reality is rather blurred. Imagination produces similar effects, as we shall see later, and real things may not work if we imagine them to be ineffective! Having said that, we must know the difference between genuine hope and a false one. Genuine hope stems from a patient's or the physician's belief, even if it is based upon false premises. False hope is what some new-age healers practice by capitalizing on patient's fears and hopes, making all kinds of fantastic claims. They know that they are fooling around and are simply selling a lie. While we may know that there is nothing wrong if it helps, sometimes they delay the patient from a timely intervention that may have saved a life or helped better. These newage hope-sellers range from a variety of products sold over the counter or shipped from clandestine locations, nevertheless using powerful means to impress and to advertise.



WHY CANCERS REGRESS SPONTANEOUSLY

Medicine has its own mysterious side, and perhaps the key to this mystery lies in the anomalous and the abnormal. Seen from one angle everything about medicine is a mystery even when we are able to explain it. Thus, for example, it is a mystery as to how a single blast cell (the first stage of cellular differentiation) multiplies to develop into an embryo and then differentiates and advances and then stops at just the right time. Though we know the steps and the stages, even the nature of chemical exchanges and the genetic process, yet the mystery remains. The precision, the timing, the detailed programming that would seldom go wrong and almost everything else about it is a mystery. Similarly, a most commonplace occurrence such as how a wound may heal remains a mystery. It is as if the whole body's resources are placed at the disposal of that little nick to heal it. Maybe the Earth also heals this way. When a nation or a group of humanity scars and injures its beautiful body, then the whole earth reacts and over a time we see a nation or a civilization removed (just as toxic substances are) and in its place come up new cultures and ways of life that cover up the wounded area.

Another mysterious phenomenon is fire-walking. Practiced in many cultures of the East and West, fire-walking has defied any simple explanation though scientists have attempted quite a few. The explanations range from mind mechanisms to pure physics, that is, the formation of a micro layer over the feet. However, physicists have more or less concluded that such a mechanism is almost impossible given the fact that fire-walkers have walked ankle deep in temperatures over 600-degree Fahrenheit. But what is astonishing are the well-documented cases of spontaneous regression of cancers. It is easily one of the most fascinating phenomena observed in medicine. It is generally regarded as inexplicable, although there are now some laboratory studies of regressed or regressing tumours, as well as new theoretical possibilities about the mechanisms.

Whatever the physiological or biological mechanism involved, it is one more proof of the body's innate ability to cure itself. This becomes even more important because some of the cancers that regress, malignant melanomas (mole cancer), for example, are known to be otherwise fatal in a small time. Besides, this regression is obviously not related to any placebo effect. *It is the body that heals itself without the intervention of the mind* and that's what makes it fascinating. One would very much like to know why certain bodies take this course whereas others succumb. There is perhaps a secret will in the body independent of the mind and everything else that can reverse the course of things, if it so chooses. But what exactly makes this choice is a difficult nut to crack.

Spontaneous regression of cancer is defined as the complete or partial disappearance of malignant tumour in the absence of therapy that is capable of inducing anti-neoplastic effects. Many patients may ultimately relapse but they have nevertheless broken the cycle and snatched a long lease of time from what seemed to be, from the medical point of view at least, near and certain death. There is however one interesting instance (among a few others) that opens the doors to a new understanding of this phenomenon. It is the case of a 26-year-old female diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease. The lady was also carrying a baby in her womb. All conventional medical measures to contain the malignant growth only made her worse. Now it so happened that the physician treating her was also studying the effect of the psychedelic drug LSD in the terminally ill to help them adjust to imminent death. The patient in question also took it under guided control. During the LSD experience the physician encouraged her to go deep inside herself and get in touch with the baby in her womb and ask if she had the right to cut off that life. Suddenly she had a reversal of sort during which a realisation dawned upon her that she had a choice whether to live or not. She decided then and there that she wanted to live and knew that to do so she will have to put all her resources at the disposal of the body and to the side of recovery. In the weeks that followed she changed a number of things in her life. She left her husband, moved to her parents' home, dropped her present vocation and joined another one, began working on the theme of death and dying along with a doctor and under her supervision took up working with other patients having cancer. She got trained in Gestalt psychology, learned the

practice of Zen meditation, and began to visualise energy flowing around her body. She also changed her diet radically, eliminating sugar and learning to eat mainly high-fibre raw food. After five years she was not only free from her cancer but also from a host of her psychological baggage. Her life itself had changed radically. Perhaps cancer or maybe death itself is a cry for change and if we listen in time to this inner voice, the change may be here and now in this very body.

Boyd, the famous pathologist, suggested that tumours that regressed spontaneously could be called 'Saint Peregrine tumours'. Near the end of the 13th century, Saint Peregrine, a young priest, developed a large bone tumour, requiring amputation. On the night preceding surgery, he prayed intensely and, it is alleged, awoke without any trace of the tumour. In 1345, aged 80 years, he died without recurrence of the tumour. Anecdotal cases of spontaneous regression have appeared in medical literature since the early 19th century. The first case of complete regression of malignant melanoma was reported in 1899. In 1901, William Osler published an article entitled 'The Medical Aspects of Carcinoma of the Breast with a Note on the Spontaneous Disappearance of Secondary Growths'. The second of Osler's cases was desperately ill, bed-ridden with metastatic involvement of the spine, right eye and opposite breast. Two years later when Osler returned from England, he noted, 'she drove a mile and a half to the station to meet me and drove me to the station on my return'. Osler commented that the phenomena 'presented by these cases are among the most remarkable which we witness in the practice of medicine ... and illustrate the uncertainty of prognosis and the truth of the statement that no condition, however desperate, is quite hopeless'.



HEALING COMMUNICATIONS

While the science of healing explores the various body processes—the anatomy and physiology as well as the body chemistry in states of health and illness—the art of healing explores the psychological dimension of the patient as well as the physician and their complex interaction that catalyses the natural healing processes ingrained within the human body. The body is not a dead machine but a living one! Like all living systems, it responds to environmental challenges and to assaults, injury, external threats and invasion of organisms. This is in fact the first line of defence, Nature's first aid if we may call it. It is still one of the most powerful aids available and the swiftest one. Most Allopathic systems do not much rely upon it and, besides, a faulty lifestyle and an overdependence on external methods has further dulled our natural body responses. And yet it is possible to awaken and activate them. The body reads us and if we can instil in it hope and the will to recover, it will usually do what needs to be done to extricate itself out of a difficult situation. Many alternate methods involve precisely such a possibility. The close personal interaction between the patient and the therapist, the hope that is inspired, a sympathetic outlook, some soothing words and of course the use of hands such as in Reiki and massage can really act as powerful triggers to start a chain of self-healing mechanisms. It is being increasingly recognised that physicians who communicate well with the patient become better healers. This communication has two parts to it. The first is to listen, not just to the physical complaints but also to the emotional component, the psychological and social issues that are arising in the patient's life due to the symptoms. The second part is to inspire hope and trust, the will to live and faith in the recovery. In earlier times, when the pharmacopeia was much less extensive, the lack of it was largely compensated by the physician's healing touch, his friendly appearance, his soothing words, his sympathy and intimate understanding of the patient's life and problems, his faith in a higher Power that heals and helps. Unfortunately, with the increasing

reliance on drugs and surgery, medical practice is turning into a fast-food industry with treatment made to order, provided you can pay the price. Due to this dehumanisation of medicine, physicians are fast losing the healing touch, which is one of the greatest gifts and a potent tool in actual medical practice.

We must understand the power of communication, that wonderful gift to man that he most misuses to create disorder and disharmony though its essential purpose was to concretise and crystallise vibrations of harmony and order and to promote better understanding. Communication is not only verbal or mere gestures. Not only our thoughts and feelings communicate but also our very DNA relates and has effect upon the environment. In an experiment, DNA was introduced into the vacuum of an empty tube. The photons inside the tube aligned themselves in a double helix. Even when the DNA was removed the photons remained aligned, the 'DNA-Phantom-Effect'. More astonishing experiments show that everything in this universe is linked, is part of a gigantic web. DNA got isolated from its donor, who was placed in a room on a different floor of the building. When the donor received an electric shock, his DNA reacted instantaneously, as if time and space didn't exist. Even emotions have a traceable influence on our DNA. Anger and depression tighten its structure and influence the internal technology that changes our bodies. Love and gratitude provoke relaxation and the harmonious arrangement of molecules.

Not only do we communicate with the universe but the universe also communicates with us and there are people who have studied this silent or occult language of the universe and know how to listen and to communicate back. Perhaps that is what lies behind certain forms of neo-sciences such as astrology, numerology and the rest. Maybe one day we shall learn not only the human speech but also the language of the universe, of plants and flowers, of water and the springs that heal, of trees and magical herbs that the ancient seers discovered without statistics and which continue to be effective till date. Above all, we may learn one day the language of the gods and of the One who sits silently in the heart unheard and unfelt, even ignored and doubted. Then we may speak not only to the body of the patient we treat but also to his soul and know what the deeper self in him wants. While it is good to have the power to act, it is perhaps a greater power to withhold action, a

dilemma that physicians often face and to which there are no easy answers. Yet if we know that a doctor is simply one of the representative forces in this world and even if he is a perfect instrument, nevertheless, he is but one determining factor in the vast and complex play. True one must play one's part well, but as to the rest leave it to the All-Knowing Will to decide. To hear and heed that greater Will in the world is one of the most difficult tasks in the art of medicine as indeed in every other field where the individual and the personal relates with the collective and the universal.



MANTRA, MUSIC, MATTER

Music, chanting and singing are applied in psychic as well as physical healing. Their effect has been observed on plants and animals alike. Sound changes the vibration of the aura, and has an effect on the way the molecules of matter crystallise and align themselves. If we look at the functioning of the human body, we can identify in it rhythms and patterns. It is no wonder that outer rhythms such as the change of seasons and the phases of the moon and beats of music and melodies and chants affect the human body, for better or for worse.

In various experiments sound was made visible in awesome formations of sand, iron filings and water. Circles, spirals, ripples and waves were created according to different tunes, a certain word, the AUM of the Vedas or various mantras. A Japanese scientist, Masru Emoto, experimented with water and a number of words (love—gratitude—hate—aggression, etc.) and described their effect on water crystals. Words such as love cast a beautiful crystallographic image of a diamond shining at its core, whereas words such as hate were reflected in the crystal as a heart split into three pieces! If the water crystals can respond in this way, then how much more would be the effect upon human beings?

Jewish cabbalists insisted that words, even just single letters of the Holy Scriptures, were fragments of the infinite Breath of Life. The recitation of sacred texts provided the necessary help in the healing process of a person, who had gone 'out of tune' with the universal rhythm of life. So also, in ancient China and Egypt, music, sound and colour were applied in temples of healing, not only for the sick but also as a preventative for healthy people. The search continues right into our age to find the most perfect way to realign what we have lost—the natural balance and happiness of Paradise. This is the mythical fall of Adam. But now we must complete full circle and reclaim the Paradise Lost by once again discovering the spontaneous oracles and the voice of our soul. Music and mantras help us both ways. They not

only realign us with the cosmic movements and universal rhythm but also help us go deeper within and come in contact with our inmost soul. At least this is the effort in Indian music. Notable is the fact that there is a *Raga* (metered rhythm of music) for every mood of nature and for every state of being and feeling and experience.

When we recite sacred mantras or do *japa* (repetitive recitation of a syllable or phrase), a mysterious process takes place within our physical frame as well as in the space around us. The principle of Sound, the Primal Vibration, is the first step of creation that arises out of etheric space. It is through sound that we materialise what we think and feel—we create ripples on the surface of the universal consciousness. The unspoken sound is subtler and therefore more potent, though its immediate effects are less visible on the surface and perhaps that is why we ignore it. This is why it is so important to watch our thoughts and emotions. Our unspoken thoughts, our hopes and our fears all create ripples of consciousness within and around us. Our hate and anger or our love and kindness will affect us just as much as others. Unkind thoughts and aggressive feelings corrode our stomach, for instance.

If we understand that thoughts, feelings and will are all energies and influence us and influence matter, then the rest becomes simple to understand. But since it is not so easy to control our thoughts and feelings we can take an external help through music and mantra. It leads us to a more positive state of being and thereby releases the secret springs of healing energies that lie concealed within our own depths.

Which mantra can we use? Two simple rules are helpful. First of all there are universal mantras that can be used by anyone such as the sound symbol AUM. But also a mantra can spring up in our heart or be given by a Guru and if we have a natural affinity with it, then it becomes a most powerful means to unlock an inner door of strength and peace and joy within us and carries us through all suffering and pain that is inflicted upon our life.



THE HIDDEN FORCES OF LIFE

Psychic healing is one of the most difficult processes to understand. Most medical doctors in their superior belief or an abject conditioning to the conventional medical paradigm would not even consider it worth studying. Nothing seems to inspire more widespread condemnation from the medical fraternity than psychic healing. And yet of all the known healing methods, nothing fascinates the patient more than the psychic powers to heal. Doctors have their reasons. They have been trained in the reductionist model that recognises nothing else but physical bodies and gross matter as the beginning, middle and end of all existence. They are taught to look only at the physical forces, more specifically the chemical events and the chemical causes to the exclusion of every other. Some had to focus exclusively on the material side of life, strictly so to speak, to unravel its mystery. But, of course, having explored it so rigorously, it is quite natural that their mind is fixed, almost glued and hypnotised by their own image. Most physicians are so identified with their role as specialists that they come to regard other ways of healing as almost a threat to their identity and to their dignity. Instead of opening and widening their horizons, they become narrower. Yet cases of psychic healing continue to enamour and attract, and one cannot help but come to study them more seriously.

One of the best documented cases of psychic healing is of Prophet Edgar Cayce. Edgar Cayce (pronounced Kay-see) was a man who, over the span of his lifetime (1877–1945), had more near-death experiences than anyone ever documented. Cayce learned that when he was hypnotised, he could leave his body and journey into the afterlife realms. Cayce made over 14,000 other worldly journeys in his life and the information he gained from these journeys has astounded people all over the world. In 1910, the *NewYork Times* carried two pages of headlines and photographs in which he was declared the 'World's Most Mysterious Man'. A national magazine ran an article, titled 'Miracle Man of Virginia Beach', and Cayce was swamped with an avalanche of 25,000 requests for medical help, including President Woodrow Wilson, who sought his services for healing and guidance while he was President. In

1954, the University of Chicago accepted a Ph.D. thesis based on a study of his life and work. Cayce is also considered to be the father of holistic medicine by the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), one of the most prestigious medical journals. He was a wonder to the medical community because of his ability to diagnose and specify a treatment for gravely ill people often hundreds of miles away through his out-of-body journeys.

At 16, Edgar was injured by a blow on the head while playing baseball at school. He returned home in a dazed condition, and was put to bed where he suddenly and authoritatively instructed his mother to apply a specific type of poultice to the wound. The next morning Edgar had no memory of the events after being struck by the baseball and could not explain why he had ordered the poultice. Nevertheless, he was feeling quite normal again.

That was just a starter. Later, without any medical training whatsoever, Cayce went on to perfect this 'healing' ability to help others, though it is important to remember that he claimed not to heal, but to diagnose and then offer a course of treatment that might lead to a cure.

Cayce's diagnoses would involve him going into a self-induced hypnotic trance, after which the patient's condition would be described to him. A diagnosis expressed in medical terminology would follow and, finally, a recommendation for treatment. From the very beginning, Cayce and his associates insisted that the treatments be administered by local doctors with access to the patients. Many of Cayce's prescriptions were extremely simple: massage, relaxation, tonics, diet, poultices, exercises, plasters and home-made teas and tonics. Cayce's philosophy behind his trance healing was a holistic one, meaning that he saw the body as a 'system', an interconnected network of organs and tissue, and if one part was not functioning properly, then it would affect the rest. In essence, Cayce would treat the cause and not the effect, helping the health of the entire system in order to defeat the disorder, though suggestion must surely have played a part in the successful treatment of patients.

Since then, psychic healers and even psychic surgeons have come into news and focus but surely Cayce was perhaps the most tested and authenticated phenomenon, possibly a forerunner of some hidden human capacity that Nature will unseal for the larger section of humanity one day.



THE POWER OF PRAYER

There are different kinds of prayer: colloquial, petition, ritualistic prayer and silent meditation. There is prayer for everything conceivable. For example, when in an experiment, a couple of years ago, 6,000 people in a mass gathering in Washington, DC, meditated on peace, crime rates and the number of accidents dropped for that day. Prayer can change the field of vibration around us. It is an internal technology independent of religion, culture and belief. We must become the very thing we want to manifest. Then a power not limited in time and space can arrange the great shift, and can evoke the healing of our bodies, the world and universe.

In downtown St. Paul, in January 1877, the Minnesota state legislature convened to hear a report from a state entomologist. His report was terrifying. Although grasshopper and locust invasions had occurred across the state in 1873, 1874, and 1875, they were not significant. In the fall of 1876, however, tests revealed that grasshopper eggs were found over the entire southern and western portions of Minnesota, an area covering 50,000 of the state's 80,000 square miles. Neither the legislators nor the state's best scientific minds knew what to do. To understand the size of the problem one has to realize that each female grasshopper plants about 20 egg pods in the newly ploughed fields in autumn. Each egg pod usually contains approximately 150 baby hoppers. Twenty times 150 multiplied by millions amounts to literally trillions of plant-eating insects which would soon consume every crop in the state. Everyone in the nation was concerned because this was where much of the nation's grain was produced. As grain goes, so goes the economy. If a warm spring developed, all the eggs would hatch and disaster would be guaranteed. Sure enough, as the month of March turned into April the weather became mild and warm.

Alarmed by the impending disaster, most of the farmers asked the governor to proclaim a Day of Prayer and to ask God to intervene and save their fields from the plague. Governor John Pillsbury agreed and set aside Thursday, April 26, as a state-wide day of fasting and prayer. Many less religious citizens denounced the governor's actions and proclaimed that it was a discredit to the intelligence of the people of Minnesota. In fact, a group called 'The Liberal League' went so far as to publicly denounce the governor's action as nonsense with these words: 'We hold that this belief in the power of prayer is palpably untrue, its influence pernicious and in this day a marked discredit to the intelligence of Minnesotans. From the beginning down to this day, outside of so-called Sacred History, there is not one well-authenticated instance of such prayer having been answered—not one.' Priests and clerics, however, were not dissuaded and held masses and prayer vigils to appeal for heavenly assistance. Not only did the entire nation watch these events, but newspapers across the country sent reporters to cover the story. Other states also pitched in and prayed in sympathy with Minnesota's plight. Prayer Day, April 26, turned out to be warm and sunny over most of Minnesota and predictions were that the same sort of weather would prevail on April 27.

As midnight approached, however, the sky clouded over and a cold rain began to fall over most of the State. Then the wind shifted from the south to the north and the cold rain turned to heavy snow. Throughout the day the snowstorm raged, alternating between rain and snow and heavy sleet. The ice storm continued through most of the following day, April 28, as well. Surveying the outcome of the storm, the state's grain farmers discovered that the vast majority of grasshoppers had been frozen and destroyed just as they were hatching. Even the few eggs that did hatch gave forth hoppers who immediately flew away. No eggs were deposited in Minnesota that summer, and the year's grain harvest turned out to be the most bountiful in the state's history. Entomologists were astounded. Some Minnesotans were so grateful they built a church to honour the event and in gratitude for God's answer to their prayers.

An influential study employing an experimental design on the efficacy of prayer was conducted by Dr Randolph C. Byrd, in 1988. The study focused on intercessory prayer (praying for the benefit of others) to the Judeo-Christian God. The question in study was if prayer has any effect on the patient's medical condition and recovery while in the hospital? The study has been often cited as a proof of the efficacy of prayer under the

catchy title 'God in the ICU'. Byrd studied 393 patients who entered the coronary care unit of San Francisco General Hospital between August 1982 and May 1983. Subjects were randomly assigned into two groups. One group would receive prayer, the other would not. The research utilised a double-blind experimental design. Researchers, staff, physicians and patients didn't know who was in which group. Intercessors were chosen on the basis of being 'born again' Christians who pray daily and go to church. The group was composed of both Protestants and Roman Catholics. Patients in the experimental group were assigned three to seven intercessors. The intercessors were asked to pray daily for recovery with no complications and offer prayers in other areas they felt beneficial. The intercessors were told their patient's first name, health problem, and were later given updates on their conditions.

Patient progress was measured on the basis of 26 variables which Byrd characterized as 'new problems, diagnoses, and therapeutic events after entry'. Statistically significant differences were found between the prayed-for group and those not prayed for on six variables (congestive heart failure, diuretics, cardiopulmonary arrest, pneumonia, antibiotics and intubation/ventilation.)

This is one of the rather well-documented cases right in the heart of material science. In India, of course, these cases are much more common and hardly anyone would dispute the power of prayer, individual or collective. Collective *yajnas* (sacred sacrificial rites) and prayers were often used in ancient India for the well-being and prosperity of a nation and its people, for rain during droughts, for appeasing the adverse entities behind diseases and so on and so forth. The sceptics may argue and doubt till the very end just as the man who prays will continue undeterred, secure in his belief.

Of course it is true that prayers are often combined with other things that may well have an additional role to play. After all, if we regard the cosmos as the result of a complex play of forces, then prayer is one such force. If powerful enough and if the sincerity and spontaneous trust in the heart is like that of a child, then prayer on its own may be enough. But if the prayer is done with a hesitating mind or a doubting heart, or if everything else is not in favour of the recovery, then there is nothing wrong in supplementing our prayers with other positive forces such as positive suggestion and even

the use of some gentle medication. After all, one need not be too rigid about these things; given the complexity of human nature, one does not have to insist on an either—or approach. One can and must use all means at one's disposal to bring about the healing faster and more completely and of these prayer is surely the most ancient and spontaneous means—one that is always the first aid available.

Prayer works best when we can trust fully and do not press for an instant result or begin to doubt when things are not going our way. After all, prayer is neither a mechanical thing nor God a prayer-answering machine. Not all prayers may be answered for God is surely wiser than our ever-dissatisfied heart and His wisdom supersedes our wishful thinking that cannot see beyond the tip of our immediate problem.



A NEW SCIENCE IN THE EMERGENCE: CONSCIOUSNESS STUDIES

Just around the close of the previous century, in 1900 AD, Lord Kelvin, the well-known British physicist and inventor, declared at the Royal Institute that Science had sorted out all the major issues in its search for reality except for two black clouds. He thought that these two clouds will also be dissolved in the light of reason. The two clouds of Lord Kelvin were the 'Black Body Radiation' (why atoms absorb and emit radiation in spurts rather than continuously) and the Michelson-Morley effect that had disproved the existence of ether as a medium through which light travels. The confidence that Lord Kelvin displayed was based on Newton's model of reality which he thought (along with many others) will eventually resolve all questions of material existence. Many illegitimately extended it and still do to explain all kinds of existence. The very same year, Max Plank cleared the first cloud but along with it he pulled the rug of Newtonian mechanics from below the feet of the universe. It was also the year that quantum theory was born in a way, and would try to explain the subatomic phenomenon and its laws and in the process change our entire view of physical reality for good. Later Einstein resolved the other issue through his special theory of relativity and with it the neat symmetrical world of Newton collapsed completely. The two anomalies opened the door to an entirely new understanding of the universe we inhabit. The language of the physicist started drawing closer to the mystic's as his theoretical constructs began to resemble the mystic's understanding of the universe!

This is not to discredit the great scientist Sir Isaac Newton. His laws still apply but for practical purposes. It is only when we probe deep into the heart of the dumb atom or sail far into the farthest silences of Space and observe the movement of the stars that Newton's theories do not work anymore. The law changes, and that changes the whole thing that stands between the vastness of the macrocosm, the galaxies and the constellations,

and the minuteness of the microcosm, the atomic and subatomic particles. And these two form the base and support of the world as we know it at present.

The universe does have its magical side even as it has its logical one. Magic is not about trickery. There are no tricks in this world—only the deft use of laws that we do not yet know. Magic is based on the premise that the microcosm within man and the macrocosm are interlinked and our thoughts and hopes have an effect upon our perception of reality. Quantum Mechanics had just arrived at that. It declared that the observer influences the field he observes, even at the molecular, nay the subatomic level. That redefined everything. Modern medicine is much at the same spot today where physics was at the turn of the last century. We can explain the body through the laws of genetics and inheritance, but we cannot explain the gene behaviour itself. At the other end of the spectrum, we cannot explain the mind and surely not the spiritual impulse in man, purely on the basis of genetic laws. Like the atoms, we discover that genes are mere processes that are buttressed between two 'unknowns'. Knowing the processes and our ability to manipulate them has its immediate practical advantages, but there is a limit to it. The anomalous escapes our understanding completely. And unlike the physical world of gross matter, the abnormal and the anomalous abounds in the world of life and even more in the world of mind where the degree of differentiation tends to touch its extreme limit. Thus, to take one example, each human being has something unique about him, but he also is different even in his sameness from moment to moment. We are now angry, now happy, now sad, now calm, now indifferent, now thrilled with joy. To insist that all these multiple variations can be explained on the basis of genes is an illegitimate extension. And we are being pushed to explain the mind and its many moods, now that we know how much it influences our bodies and our state of health and sickness. The Mind-Body medicine of today has to evolve further into something much deeper that will have profound impact upon our understanding of life and the cosmos and most of all of man himself. The mind is but only a shadow of something far greater. As the mystics saw and boldly declared:

Yanmanasa na manute yenahurmanomatam Tadeva Brahman tvam vidhi nedam yadi damupasate That which the mind cannot know but That from which the Mind itself is known.

Know That to be the *Brahman* (the Ultimate Reality) and not this (mind and body) that men seek hereafter.

Not in the barren mud of the body, not in the rich and varied rainbow colours of life, not even in the mazes of the mind can we find the Truth. It lies beyond these and is the birthplace of all. Scientists, especially those who have been walking through the corridors of Mind—Body medicine, seem to have strayed into or perhaps stumbled upon a door like Alice in Wonderland. They call it consciousness even though it is still not clear as to what they exactly mean by it. As of now it is being used as an umbrella term for a number of things. But what is clear is that through this magic door the scientist is trying to peep behind the phenomenal world and find that single Truth in which all things can be united comprehensively.

A brief look at a few experiments will suffice. As we have seen, the problem is being approached from two sides: from the side of the brain, the neurological angle, and from the side of the mind, the psychological angle. As of now each side is busy pulling the main strings on to its own territory. Thus, the brain-oriented scientist believes that consciousness is related to certain still unknown brain processes. This is an obvious fallacy since it presumes that there is no other consciousness anywhere else. Simple observations betray this. Not only plants and animals but also atoms and electrons display behaviour that seems to be intelligent, as if there is a will even in the atom that chooses. Consciousness is as if it is something sprinkled everywhere in the cosmos, that is, it is the common ground of everything. If this was not so, the physicist (Nobel Laureate David Bohm case in point) would not be interested in it. The mind or the mental consciousness as we know it is only one mode of consciousness and it does not exhaust all the possibilities of consciousness just as an electric bulb does not exhaust all the possibilities of electricity. Therefore, the problem is being taken up from the psychological side as well. But here too there is a fundamental flaw in the premise. If consciousness is truly something that is the substratum of the universe, including man and bird and beast and mineral and rock, then surely it is much vaster, much more complex, powerful and intelligent a thing for the human mind to know it completely. For all the marvellous

creations of man and the wonders of science, we are yet to replicate a single living cell and it is a far cry from even successfully imitating Nature, leave alone copying the original.

Nevertheless, there is no harm in pushing the door and we may find, much to our amazement, not some cold, dead mechanical reality, full of force and fury without wit and wisdom but the living body of God, not just bare Truth but also Beatitude and *Ananda* (Supreme Bliss), since these are also aspects of creation and man and Nature that the eye of the scientist often misses while counting the trees. Even its very first infant steps show the immense possibilities that await us if we pass through this door. Let us take a peep into this kind of new world from both the sides.

From the side of the brain, the scientists have discovered a neural circuit that they call 'mirror neurons'. Now the interesting part about these neurons is that our perceptions influence us as much as real actions. Thus, brain imaging from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) demonstrates that specialised brain cells, mirror neurons, activate both when we observe the actions of others and when we simply read sentences describing the same action. When we read a book, these specialised cells respond as if we are actually doing what the book character is doing! We always knew that somehow, didn't we? Together, the findings suggest that mirror neurons play a key role in the mental 're-enactment' of actions when linguistic descriptions of those actions are conceptually processed. Mirror neurons have been hypothesised to contribute to skills such as empathy, socialised behaviour and language acquisition; on the flip side, there can also be damage done through a bad example or a book with negative suggestions.

It has therapeutic implications as well. Though it might seem like a chore to you, visiting a sick friend or relation in hospital really could make a difference to their health. A close relationship with a friend, partner or relative has been found to reduce the risk of heart patients having another cardiac arrest, while the lack of a close confidante puts sufferers at a greater risk of having further heart attacks. Positive emotions have also been shown to increase a person's resistance to illness. Scientists have discovered this might be because of the mirror neurons activated when we experience an emotion. However, more crucially, they also fire off when we watch others experience feelings we can identify with, leading us to mimic these sentiments and become infected by

the mood. So during and after a visit from a loving and cheerful friend or relation, mirror neurons will stir similar positive feelings in the brain of the person in the hospital bed, lifting their spirits and making them feel better.

In the same way, if we are with someone who is awkward or socially clumsy, mirror neurons cause us to begin to behave in a similar fashion. According to Daniel Goleman, author of *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, mirror neurons enable emotions to spread like a contagion allowing one person to infect another with their mood, particularly if these feelings are strongly expressed. The most potent exchanges occur with those people with whom we spend the greatest amount of time.

Recently, researchers at the University of California found that mirror neurons are more dysfunctional in autistic children. The more severe the autism, the more silent the mirror neurons, suggesting that activity of this brain region is a direct measure of how empathetic someone is. This lack of active mirror neurons could explain why autistic children have such difficulty making emotional connections. The research also suggests that we were genetically programmed to act this way to encourage sociability, which was vital for survival in prehistoric times. Love and caring are critical tools for helping patients get better. If it were a form of medication, we would prescribe it.

Meanwhile, friends failing to turn up for a visit could actually be bad for the patient. Not only are they deprived of the benefits of loving contact, says Daniel Goleman, but their feelings of rejection activate the very areas of the brain that generate the sting of physical pain. So even if you have nothing to say, your presence at a sick friend's bedside is enough.

Similarly, when you see others laugh or cry, it is often normal to feel the impulse to do the same. But what if watching another person being touched made you experience the sensation yourself? New research describes people who experience just that. It's a rare condition known as 'mirror synesthesia', the ability to feel a touch when watching another person being touched. 'Watching another person being touched activates a similar neural circuit to actual touch and, for some people with "mirror-touch" synesthesia, can produce a felt tactile sensation on their own body', researchers Michael Banissy and Jamie Ward reported in their findings, published in *Nature Neuroscience*. ¹

Let's see another example of how consciousness is being explored from the other side and in ways that are truly unconventional to science. For the past few decades, experimental evidence has been accumulating in almost all areas of science that non-local and mind-directed effects upon the physical world are more ubiquitous than we have had so far cared to admit. As institutional research becomes more open about these matters, a theoretical framework is beginning to emerge. We may have, at this point, a vague idea about the extraordinary potential lying in store for humanity, but we are still very much at a loss about how to approach this 'new science'.

Experiments have been conducted on remote sensing where one person attempts to describe the physical characteristics of a geographical location that they have no sensory information about. It is termed 'Transcontinental Remote Viewing' and was a long distance study between the United States and Italy. The viewer was in Michigan, and the agent was in Rome. They had a pool of target sites-40 different geographical locations. On each of the 10 days they would go to a random generator and randomly select one of those target sites. They would then go to that location and stay there for a period of 20 minutes. Meanwhile, the person in the United States was attempting to describe that geographical location. Then all of those sets of mentations, the viewers' descriptions of the site, and the actual list of geographical locations, were given to five independent judges. They were asked to go visit the sites and to evaluate the degree of correspondence between the subject's mentation and the geographical location. So it was a way of blindly matching the degree of correspondence between these two data points. The scientists involved got phenomenal results. They got six direct hits out of ten, which statistically had a probability of about four in a million. Other studies replicated the results. This means that we have ways of 'knowing' that transcend the accepted methods of receiving sense-data and that consciousness is non-local and extends as a common substratum in ways that we do not understand.

Studies have also been done in the area of 'distant mental interaction on living systems', or DMILS. Those experiments were essentially to look at claims made by psychic healers that they can heal somebody at a distance. A volunteer was made to sit in the lab and have his autonomic nervous system activity monitored. Meanwhile, a healer, a psychic, or an

experimenter, who had been trained to do that kind of thing, was in another room. Randomly, throughout the session they would attempt to calm the distant person's physiology, or activate it, whatever the direction was that was pre-specified. Then one would sum the average amount of autonomic activity in the intentionality periods compared to the control periods. It was found that in 13 experiments the results demonstrated highly significant differences in the mean amount of autonomic activity in those two separate conditions. This again proves that there are not only means of receiving but also of transmitting information that defy our simplistic understanding of the universe based on purely physical forces. Perhaps thought waves are as much of a reality as light waves or sound waves and so are waves of desires and waves of anger and also waves of peace and joy—all these we can transmit or receive directly without an external medium and at a distance.

There was a study done recently by Rupert Sheldrake, where he surveyed all of the mainstream scientific journals in physics, chemistry, and biology, and then looked at parapsychology as well. He looked at the incidence of randomized, double-blind protocols. What he found is that less than two percent of the mainstream scientific studies were making use of this gold standard, while in the parapsychology literature the figure was very high, something between 60 and 80 percent. So it's as if the parapsychologists are playing the game better. They are trying to conform to the rules, but the rules keep shifting.

These then are some of the early hints of the direction science intends to take in the future. But one thing is certain—science and its methods can take us thus far, to the doors of the consciousness which stands at the foothills of the temple of the Beyond. Neither science nor religion, neither philosophy nor even occult knowledge can take us further. For beyond it are tracts of knowledge and power that do not lend themselves to thought's profaning touch. Peep we can and peep we must, but if we are serious about stepping farther and climbing the summits of the hidden regions of consciousness and explore its multi-layered, many-tiered mansion, then we must shed our mental attire that is woven of the mixed tissue of doubt and seeking. We must take a leap of faith and with courage light up the fire of aspiration that can lead and open the eyes of the soul. It is that which can understand and learn the law of surrender carrying us to where none can live nor breathe

who has shed not the stain of desire and slain not the adversary that always comes between our sight and the Absolute Truth—the ego. Let's hope this too shall come to be one day and man will no longer be merely a scientist or a philosopher, but holding the Truth in his purified bosom declare that 'Thou art Divine', *Tattvamasi*.



PART IV



HEALTH AND HEALING: GUIDANCE FROM THE MOTHER AND SRI AUROBINDO

WORKING UPON THE PHYSICAL INSTRUMENT

THE AIM OF PHYSICAL CULTURE:

Physical education has for its aim to develop all the possibilities of a human body, possibilities of harmony, strength, plasticity, cleverness, agility, endurance, and to increase the control over the functioning of the limbs and the organs, to make of the body a perfect instrument at the disposal of a conscious will. This programme is excellent for all human beings equally, and there is no point in wanting to adopt another one for girls. . . .

CWM 12: 296

There can be no physical education without discipline. The body itself could not function without a strict discipline. Actually, the failure to recognise this fact is the principal cause of illness.

Digestion, growth, blood-circulation, everything, everything is a discipline. Thought, movement, gestures, everything is a discipline, and if there is no discipline people immediately fall ill.

CWM 12: 382

Physical culture is the process of infusing consciousness into the cells of the body. One may or may not know it, but it is a fact. When we concentrate to make our muscles move according to our will, when we endeavour to make our limbs more supple, to give them an agility, or a force, or a resistance, or a plasticity which they do not naturally possess, we infuse into the cells of the body a consciousness which was not there before, thus turning it into an increasingly homogeneous and receptive instrument, which progresses in and by its activities. This is the primary importance of physical culture. Of course, that is not the only thing that brings consciousness into the body, but it is something which acts in an overall way, and this is rare. I have already told you several times that the artist infuses a very great consciousness into

his hands, as the intellectual does into his brain. But these are, as it were, local phenomena, whereas the action of physical culture is more general. And when one sees the absolutely marvellous results of this culture, when one observes the extent to which the body is capable of perfecting itself, one understands how useful this can be to the action of the psychic being which has entered into this material substance. For naturally, when it is in possession of an organised and harmonised instrument which is full of strength and suppleness and possibilities, its task is greatly facilitated. I do not say that people who practise physical culture necessarily do it for this purpose, because very few are aware of this result. But whether they are aware of it or not, this is the result. Moreover, if you are at all sensitive, when you observe the moving body of a person who has practised physical culture in a methodical and rational way, you see a light, a consciousness, a life, which is not there in others. . . .

Therefore we can say without fear of being mistaken that physical culture is the sadhana of the body and that all sadhana necessarily helps to hasten the achievement of the goal. The more consciously you do it, the quicker and more general the result, but even if you do it blindly, if you can see no further than the tips of your fingers or your feet or your nose, you help the overall development.

Finally, one can say any discipline that is followed rigorously, sincerely, deliberately, is a considerable help, for it enables life on earth to attain its goal more rapidly and prepares it to receive the new life. To discipline oneself is to hasten the arrival of this new life and the contact with the supramental reality.

As it is, the physical body is truly nothing but a very disfigured shadow of the eternal life of the Self. But this physical body is capable of progressive development; through each individual formation, the physical substance progresses, and one day it will be capable of building a bridge between physical life as we know it and the supramental life which is to manifest.

CWM 10: 30-32

Physical perfection does not at all prove, not the least, that one has taken one step farther towards spirituality. Physical perfection means that the instrument the force will use - any force whatever - will be sufficiently

perfected to be remarkably expressive. But the important point, the essential point is the force which will use the instrument, and it is there that the choice is necessary. If you perfect your body and make of it a remarkable instrument, you must not at all think that because of that you are nearer to the spiritual life. You prepare a remarkable instrument so that this spiritual life may manifest in it, if it manifests itself. But it is for you always to choose what will be manifested. There are people who perfect their body, who build a strong, solid, energetic, agile, capable body, and all this simply to be able to better affirm their ego and the strength of their ego. Others may prepare the body to be sure that when the spiritual light manifests, it will find an instrument capable of doing all that is asked of it. Whatever the work required, the instrument will be so perfected as to be able to do it without difficulty, spontaneously, immediately.... This is to arouse your attention to the most important fact which is the choice of the force you will allow to manifest in your body. Perfect your body, make it a remarkable instrument, but never forget that there is a choice to be made and that this choice ought to be made constantly - one doesn't make it once for all, it must always be renewed. Because, before one reaches the total union, the total expression, there will always be this invasion of external things which will try to enter you and spoil all the work. So the necessary, indispensable condition is a constant vigilance.

CWM 4: 325-326

PHYSICAL CULTURE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Those who really want to practise physical culture as it is conceived now, everything they do, they do consciously. They walk downstairs consciously, they make the movements of ordinary life consciously, not mechanically. An attentive eye will perhaps notice a little difference but the greatest difference lies in the will they put into it, the consciousness they put into it. Walking to go somewhere and walking as an exercise is not the same thing. It is the conscious will in all these things which is important, it is that which brings about the progress and obtains the result. Therefore, what I mean is that the method one uses has only a relative importance in itself; it is the will to obtain a certain result that is important.

..... But you only have to try it, you will understand very well what I mean. For instance, all the movements you make when dressing, taking your bath, tidying your room... no matter what; make them consciously, with the will that this muscle should work, that muscle should work. You will see, you will obtain really amazing results.

Going up and down the stairs - you cannot imagine how useful that can be from the point of view of physical culture, if you know how to make use of it. Instead of going up because you are going up and coming down because you are coming down, like any ordinary man, you go up with the consciousness of all the muscles which are working and of making them work harmoniously. You will see. Just try a little, you will see! This means that you can use all the movements of your life for a harmonious development of your body.

You bend down to pick something up, you stretch up to find something right at the top of a cupboard, you open a door, you close it, you have to go round an obstacle, there are a hundred and one things you do constantly and which you can make use of for your physical culture and which will demonstrate to you that it is the consciousness you put into it which produces the effect, a hundred times more than just the material fact of doing it. So, you choose the method you like best, but you can use the whole of your daily life in this way... To think constantly of the harmony of the body, of the beauty of the movements, of not doing anything that is ungraceful and awkward. You can obtain a rhythm of movement and gesture which is very exceptional.

CWM 9: 155-156

THE POWER OF IMMOBILITY

The Hathayogic system of Asana has at its basis two profound ideas which bring with them many effective implications. The first is that of control by physical immobility, the second is that of power by immobility. The power of physical immobility is as important in Hathayoga as the power of mental immobility in the Yoga of knowledge, and for parallel reasons. To the mind unaccustomed to the deeper truths of our being and nature they would both seem to be a seeking after the listless passivity of inertia. The

direct contrary is the truth; for Yogic passivity, whether of mind or body, is a condition of the greatest increase, possession and continence of energy. The normal activity of our minds is for the most part a disordered restlessness, full of waste and rapidly tentative expenditure of energy in which only a little is selected for the workings of the self-mastering will, - waste, be it understood, from this point of view, not that of universal Nature in which what is to us waste, serves the purposes of her economy. The activity of our bodies is a similar restlessness.

It is the sign of a constant inability of the body to hold even the limited life-energy that enters into or is generated in it, and consequently of a general dissipation of this Pranic force with a quite subordinate element of ordered and well-economised activity. Moreover, in the consequent interchange and balancing between the movement and interaction of the vital energies normally at work in the body and their interchange with those which act upon it from outside, whether the energies of others or of the general Pranic force variously active in the environment, there is a constant precarious balancing and adjustment which may at any moment go wrong. Every obstruction, every defect, every excess, every lesion creates impurities and disorders. Nature manages it all well enough for her own purposes, when left to herself; but the moment the blundering mind and will of the human being interfere with her habits and her vital instincts and intuitions, especially when they create false or artificial habits, a still more precarious order and frequent derangement become the rule of the being. Yet this interference is inevitable, since man lives not for the purposes of the vital Nature in him alone, but for higher purposes which she had not contemplated in her first balance and to which she has with difficulty to adjust her operations. Therefore the first necessity of a greater status or action is to get rid of this disordered restlessness, to still the activity and to regulate it. The Hathayogin has to bring about an abnormal poise of status and action of the body and the life energy, abnormal not in the direction of greater disorder, but of superiority and self-mastery.

The first object of the immobility of the Asana is to get rid of the restlessness imposed on the body and to force it to hold the Pranic energy instead of dissipating and squandering it. The experience in the practice of Asana is not that of a cessation and diminution of energy by inertia, but of

a great increase, inpouring, circulation of force. The body, accustomed to work off superfluous energy by movement, is at first ill able to bear this increase and this retained inner action and betrays it by violent tremblings; afterwards it habituates itself and, when the Asana is conquered, then it finds as much ease in the posture, however originally difficult or unusual to it, as in its easiest attitudes sedentary or recumbent. It becomes increasingly capable of holding whatever amount of increased vital energy is brought to bear upon it without needing to spill it out in movement, and this increase is so enormous as to seem illimitable, so that the body of the perfected Hathayogin is capable of feats of endurance, force, unfatigued expenditure of energy of which the normal physical powers of man at their highest would be incapable. For it is not only able to hold and retain this energy, but to bear its possession of the physical system and its more complete movement through it. The life energy, thus occupying and operating in a powerful, unified movement on the tranquil and passive body, freed from the restless balancing between the continent power and the contained, becomes a much greater and more effective force. In fact, it seems then rather to contain and possess and use the body than to be contained, possessed and used by it,- just as the restless active mind seems to seize on and use irregularly and imperfectly whatever spiritual force comes into it, but the tranquillised mind is held, possessed and used by the spiritual force.

SABCL 20: 509-511/The Synthesis of Yoga 23-24: 531-533



WORKING UPON THE LIFE-ENERGY

MASTERY OF THE LIFE-ENERGY

Asana deals more directly with the more material part of the physical totality, though here too it needs the aid of the other; Pranayama, starting from the physical immobility and self-holding which is secured by Asana, deals more directly with the subtler vital parts, the nervous system. This is done by various regulations of the breathing, starting from equality of respiration and inspiration and extending to the most diverse rhythmic regulations of both with an interval of inholding of the breath. In the end the keeping in of the breath, which has first to be done with some effort, and even its cessation become as easy and seem as natural as the constant taking in and throwing out which is its normal action. But the first objects of the Pranayama are to purify the nervous system, to circulate the life-energy through all the nerves without obstruction, disorder or irregularity, and to acquire a complete control of its functionings, so that the mind and will of the soul inhabiting the body may be no longer subject to the body or life or their combined limitations. The power of these exercises of breathing to bring about a purified and unobstructed state of the nervous system is a known and well established fact of our physiology. It helps also to clear the physical system, but is not entirely effective at first on all its canals and openings; therefore the Hathayogin uses supplementary physical methods for clearing them out regularly of all their accumulations. The combination of these with Asana, - particular Asanas have even an effect in destroying particular diseases,- and with Pranayama maintains perfectly the health of the body. But the principal gain is that by this purification the vital energy can be directed anywhere, to any part of the body and in any way or with any rhythm of its movement.

The mere function of breathing into and out of the lungs is only the most sensible, outward and seizable movement of the Prana, the Breath of Life in our physical system. The Prana has according to Yogic science a fivefold movement pervading all the nervous system and the whole material body and determining all its functionings. The Hathayogin seizes on the outward movement of respiration as a sort of key which opens to him the control of all these five powers of the Prana. He becomes sensibly aware of their inner operations, mentally conscious of his whole physical life and action. He is able to direct the Prana through all the Nadis or nerve-channels of his system. He becomes aware of its action in the six Chakras or ganglionic centres of the nervous system, and is able to open it up in each beyond its present limited, habitual and mechanical workings. He gets, in short, a perfect control of the life in the body in its most subtle nervous as well as in its grossest physical aspects, even over that in it which is at present involuntary and out of the reach of our observing consciousness and will. Thus a complete mastery of the body and life and a free and effective use of them established upon a purification of their workings is founded as a basis for the higher aims of Hathayoga.

SABCL 20: 512-513/The Synthesis of Yoga 23-24: 534-535

NADI-SHUDDHI: PURIFICATION OF THE SUBTLE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Now Pranayam, in its proper sense, the mastery of the vital force in oneself and Nature, is essential to every Rajayogin, but it can be brought about by much simpler methods. The only process that the Rajayogin finds helpful enough to be worth doing is *nadisuddhi* or purification of the nerve system by regular breathing, and this can be done while lying, sitting, reading, writing, walking. This process has great virtues. It has a wonderful calming effect on the whole mind & body, drives out every lurking disease in the system, awakens the yogic force accumulated in former lives and, even where no such latent force exists, removes the physical obstacles to the wakening of the Kundalini sakti.

But even this process is not essential. The Rajayogin knows that by tranquillising the mind he can tranquillise the body, by mastering the mind he can master both the body and the prana. This is the great secret of the Rajayoga that mind is the master of the body, creates it and conditions it,

body is not the master, creator or lawgiver of the mind.

SABCL 3: 407/Early Cultural Writings 01: 508

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE HATHAYOGIC METHODS

Pranayama is a very powerful thing, but if done haphazardly it may lead to the raising of obstructions and even in extreme cases illness in the body.

SABCL 23:747 [Letters on Yoga Parts Two and Three (pp. 503 - 1089)]

The results of Hathayoga are thus striking to the eye and impose easily on the vulgar or physical mind. And yet at the end we may ask what we have gained at the end of all this stupendous labour. The object of physical Nature, the preservation of the mere physical life, its highest perfection, even in a certain sense the capacity of a greater enjoyment of physical living have been carried out on an abnormal scale. But the weakness of Hathayoga is that its laborious and difficult processes make so great a demand on the time and energy and impose so complete a severance from the ordinary life of men that the utilisation of its results for the life of the world becomes either impracticable or is extraordinarily restricted. If in return for this loss we gain another life in another world within, the mental, the dynamic, these results could have been acquired through other systems, through Rajayoga, through Tantra, by much less laborious methods and held on much less exacting terms. On the other hand the physical results, increased vitality, prolonged youth, health, longevity are of small avail if they must be held by us as misers of ourselves, apart from the common life, for their own sake, not utilised, not thrown into the common sum of the world's activities. Hathayoga attains large results, but at an exorbitant price and to very little purpose.

SABCL 20: 29-30/The Synthesis of Yoga 23-24:35

On the whole, for an integral Yoga the special methods of Rajayoga and Hathayoga may be useful at times in certain stages of the progress, but are not indispensable. It is true that their principal aims must be included in the integrality of the Yoga; but they can be brought about by other means. For the methods of the integral Yoga must be mainly spiritual, and dependence

on physical methods or fixed psychic or psycho-physical processes on a large scale would be the substitution of a lower for a higher action.

SABCL 20: 520/The Synthesis of Yoga 23-24: 542

DIRECTING THE PRANIC FORCE: THE ROLE OF FAITH AND WILL

Most men are not conscious of this pranic force in the body or cannot distinguish it from the more physical form of energy which it informs and uses for its vehicle. But as the consciousness becomes more subtle by practice of Yoga, we can come to be aware of the sea of pranic shakti around us, feel it with the mental consciousness, concretely with a mental sense, see its courses and movements, and direct and act upon it immediately by the will. But until we thus become aware of it, we have to possess a working or at least an experimental faith in its presence and in the power of the will to develop a greater command and use of this Prana force. There is necessary a faith, sraddha, in the power of the mind to lay its will on the state and action of the body, such as those have who heal disease by faith, will or mental action; but we must seek this control not only for this or any other limited use, but generally as a legitimate power of the inner and greater over the outer and lesser instrument. This faith is combated by our past habits of mind, by our actual normal experience of its comparative helplessness in our present imperfect system and by an opposing belief in the body and physical consciousness. For they too have a limiting sraddha of their own which opposes the idea in the mind when it seeks to impose on the system the law of a higher yet unattained perfection. But as we persist and find this power giving evidence of itself to our experience, the faith in the mind will be able to found itself more firmly and grow in vigour and the opposing faith in the body will change, admit what it first denied and not only accept in its habits the new yoke but itself call for this higher action. Finally we shall realise the truth that this being we are is or can become whatever it has the faith and will to be,- for faith is only a will aiming at greater truth, - and cease to set limits to our possibility or deny the potential omnipotence of the Self in us, the divine Power working through the human instrument.

BALANCE OF ENERGY BETWEEN RECEIVING AND EXPENDING

A proportion has to be kept between the receptivity and the expenditure. It is a kind of harmony in the being which must be established. Only, some people have an almost instinctive power of attracting towards them the vital forces or absorbing them - the universal vital forces, I mean - and so they make up their expense as they go along spending. These people can produce much more than others. Some of them, in certain conditions like sleep or a kind of repose or relaxation, can accumulate forces and later they exhaust them, so to say, in their activities and they must yet once again charge the battery afterwards - this is already a much less favourable condition.

Some don't know how to receive the forces at all. These live on the energies concentrated in the body - for there is some concentrated energy in all the cells of the body. They live upon that, but after some time, they are drained out completely if they don't know how to recuperate; when they have spent all the energies which were concentrated inside them either they fall ill or they never recuperate them. So this cannot last very long; it lasts the average lifetime of human beings, and yet at the end of a certain number of years they are no longer able to make the same effort or to produce as much, or above all to make any progress.

When one knows, sometimes just two or three minutes are sufficient to recuperate the energies spent over a long period. Only, one must know how to do it.

But those who draw back upon themselves, who turn and double up on themselves, cannot do this. One must live all the time in a very vast and very expansive consciousness (. . . something which extends very homogeneously and quietly, as when the tide is at its height and the water spreads like this, quietly — that's the impression). The vital must be like that - then one is open to the universal forces.

When one has this capacity in his own consciousness - for example, you go for a walk and come to a place which is somewhat vast, like the seashore or like a great plain or the summit of a mountain, a place where the horizon is fairly vast, then if you have this kind of physical instinct which suddenly makes you as vast as the horizon, you have a sense of infinity, immensity; and

the vaster you become, the quieter and more peaceful you become.

It is enough for you to have a contact with Nature like that.

There are many other means, but this one is very spontaneous. There is also... when you see something very beautiful you can have the same thing: a kind of inner joy and an opening to the forces, and so this widens you and fills you at the same time. There are many means but usually one does not use them. Naturally, if you enter into contemplation and aspire for a higher life and call down the forces from above, this recuperates your energies more than anything else. But there are numerous methods.

CWM 7: 71-73

But all the while you externalise yourself and all the while you bring back something from this externalisation; it is like something porous: a force goes out and then a force comes in. There are pulsations like that. And that is why it is so important to choose the environment in which one lives, because there is constantly a kind of interchange between what you give and what you receive. People who throw themselves out a great deal in activity, receive more. But they receive on the same level, the level of their activity. Children, for example, who are younger, who always move about, always shout and romp and jump (very rarely do they keep quiet, except while asleep, and perhaps not even so), well, they spend much and they receive much, and generally it is the physical and vital energy that is spent and it is physical and vital energies that are received. They recuperate a good part of what they spend. So there, it is very important for them to be in surroundings where they can, after they have spent or while they are spending, recover something that is at least equal in quality to theirs, that is not of an inferior quality.

CWM 5: 207-8

SOURCES OF ENERGY

In fact, the vital has three sources of subsistence. The one most easily accessible to it comes from below, from the physical energies through the sensations.

The second is on its own plane, when it is sufficiently vast and receptive,

by contact with the universal vital forces.

The third, to which it usually opens only in a great aspiration for progress, comes to it from above by the infusion and absorption of spiritual forces and inspiration.

To these sources men always strive more or less to add another, which is for them at the same time the source of most of their torments and misfortunes. It is the interchange of vital forces with their fellows, usually in groups of two, which they most often mistake for love, but which is only the attraction between two forces that take pleasure in mutual interchange.

Thus, if we do not wish to starve our vital, sensations must not be rejected or diminished in number and intensity. Neither should we avoid them; rather we must make use of them with wisdom and discernment. Sensations are an excellent instrument of knowledge and education, but to make them serve these ends, they must not be used egoistically for the sake of enjoyment, in a blind and ignorant search for pleasure and self-satisfaction.

The senses should be capable of enduring everything without disgust or displeasure, but at the same time they must acquire and develop more and more the power of discerning the quality, origin and effect of the various vital vibrations in order to know whether they are favourable to harmony, beauty and good health or whether they are harmful to the balance and progress of the physical being and the vital. Moreover, the senses should be used as instruments to approach and study the physical and vital worlds in all their complexity; in this way they will take their true place in the great endeavour towards transformation.

It is by enlightening, strengthening and purifying the vital, and not by weakening it, that one can contribute to the true progress of the being. To deprive oneself of sensations is therefore as harmful as depriving oneself of food. But just as the choice of food must be made wisely and solely for the growth and proper functioning of the body, so too the choice of sensations and their control should be made with a very scientific austerity and solely for the growth and perfection of the vital, of this highly dynamic instrument, which is as essential for progress as all the other parts of the being.

VITAL CONTAGION

You live vitally in the vital world with all the currents of vital force entering, going out, joining and opposing each other, quarrelling and intermingling in your consciousness, and even if you have made a personal effort to purify your vital consciousness, to master in it the desire-being and the little human ego, you are constantly under a sort of obligation to absorb all the contrary vibrations which come from those with whom you live. One cannot shut oneself up in an ivory tower, it is yet more difficult vitally than physically, and one takes in all sorts of things; and unless one is constantly wide awake, constantly on one's guard, and has a quite an efficient control over all that enters, so as not to admit in one's consciousness unwanted elements, one catches the constant contagion of all the desires, all the lower movements, all the small obscure reactions, all the unwanted vibrations which come to us from those around us.

CWM 4: 334 (19.4.1951)

VITAL INTERCHANGE

There is always a drawing of vital forces from one to another in all human social mixture; it takes place automatically. . . . In the ordinary consciousness one is not aware of these things; the effects come into the surface being, but the cause or process remain unknown and unnoticed because the interchange is subtle and covert, it takes place through what is called the subconscient, but is rather a behind-consciousness covered by the surface waking mind. When one gets into a certain Yogic consciousness, one becomes very much aware of this covert movement, very sensitive to all this interchange and action and reaction; but one has this advantage that one can consciously build a wall against them, reject, refuse, accept what helps, throw out or throw back what injures or hinders. Illnesses can also pass in this way from one to another, even those which are not medically regarded as contagious or infectious. . . . This fact of vital interchange, which seems strange and unfamiliar to you, becomes quite intelligible if one realises that ideas, feelings etc. are not abstract things but in their way quite concrete, not confining their movements to the individual's mind or body but moving out very much like the "waves" of science and communicating themselves to anyone who can serve as a receiver. Just as people are not conscious of the material waves, so it is and still more with these mental or vital waves; but if the subtle mind and senses become active on the surface--and that is what takes place in Yoga--then the consciousness becomes aware in its reception of them and records accurately and automatically their vibrations.

'Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo 1061-1062'



WORKING WITH THE MIND

METHODS OF MEDITATION

There are all kinds of meditations..... You may take an idea and follow it to arrive at a given result - this is an active meditation; people who want to solve a problem or to write, meditate in this way without knowing that they are meditating. Others sit down and try to concentrate on something without following an idea - simply to concentrate on a point in order to intensify one's power of concentration; and this brings about what usually happens when you concentrate upon a point: if you succeed in gathering your capacity for concentration sufficiently upon a point whether mental, vital or physical, at a given moment you pass through and enter into another consciousness. Others still try to drive out from their head all movements, ideas, reflexes, reactions and to arrive at a truly silent tranquillity. This is extremely difficult; there are people who have tried for twenty-five years and not succeeded, for it is somewhat like taking a bull by the horns.

There is another kind of meditation which consists in being as quiet as one can be but without trying to stop all thoughts, for there are thoughts which are purely mechanical and if you try to stop these you will need years, and moreover you will not be sure of the result; instead of that you gather together all your consciousness and remain as quiet and peaceful as possible, you detach yourself from external things as though they do not interest you at all, and all of a sudden, you brighten the flame of aspiration and throw into it everything that comes to you so that the flame may rise higher and higher, higher and higher; you identify yourself with it and you go up to the extreme point of your consciousness and aspiration, thinking of nothing else - simply, an aspiration which mounts, mounts, mounts, without thinking a minute of the result, of what may happen and especially of what may not, and above all without desiring that something may come - simply, the joy of an aspiration which mounts and mounts and mounts, intensifying itself

more and more in a constant concentration. And there I may assure you that what happens is the best that can happen. That is, it is the maximum of your possibilities which is realised when you do this.

CWM 4: 104-5

BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

The physical consciousness is a sort of apparatus for recording and transmission which is open to all the contacts and shocks coming from outside and responds to them by reactions of pleasure and pain which welcome or repel. This makes in our outer being a constant activity and noise that we are only partially aware of, because we are so accustomed to them.

But if through meditation or concentration we turn inward or upward, we can bring down into ourselves or raise up from the depths calm, quiet, peace and finally silence. It is a concrete positive silence (not the negative silence of the absence of noise), immutable so long as it remains, a silence one can experience even in the outer tumult of a hurricane or battlefield. This silence is synonymous with peace and it is all-powerful; it is the perfectly effective remedy for the fatigue, tension and exhaustion arising from that internal over-activity and noise which generally escape our control and cease neither by day nor night.

CWM 16: 229

THE POWER OF THE MANTRA

If you develop the habit,, of calling as by a mantra, of repeating a word, that has an extraordinary effect. You choose your mantra; or rather, one day it comes to you spontaneously in a moment of difficulty. At a time when things are very difficult, when you have a sort of anguish, anxiety, when you don't know what is going to happen, suddenly this springs up in you, the word springs up in you. For each one it may be different. But if you mark this and each time you face a difficulty you repeat it, it becomes irresistible. For instance, if you feel you are about to fall ill, if you feel you are doing badly what you are doing, if you feel something evil is going to attack you,

then.... But it must be a spontaneity in the being, it must spring up from you without your needing to think about it: you choose your mantra because it is a spontaneous expression of your aspiration; it may be one word, two or three words, a sentence, that depends on each one, but it must be a sound which awakens in you a certain condition. Then, when you have that, I assure you that you can pass through everything without difficulty.

CWM 4: 388

Japa, like meditation, is a procedure--apparently the most active and effective procedure--for joining, as much as possible, the Diving Presence to the bodily substance. It is the magic of sound, you see.

Naturally, if there is also an awareness of the idea behind it, if one does japa as a very active <conscious> invocation, then its effects are greatly multiplied. But the basis is the magic of sound. This is a fact of experience, and it is absolutely true. The sound OM, for instance, awakens very special vibrations (there are other such sounds as well, but of course that one is the most powerful of all).

It is an attempt to divinise material substance.

From another, almost identical point of view, it fills the physical atmosphere with the Divine Presence. So time spent in japa is time consecrated to helping the material substance enter into more intimate rapport with the Divine.

And if one adds to this, as I do, a mantric program, that is, a sort of prayer or invocation, a program for both personal development and helping the collectivity, then it becomes a truly active work....

For me, you know, japa means a moment when all physical life is <exclusively> for the Divine. A moment when nothing but the Divine exists--every single cell of the body, each second, is <exclusively> for the Divine, there is nothing but the Divine.

When you succeed in doing that, it is good.

Japa should not become so exclusive that it is done twenty-four hours out of twenty-four, because then it is equivalent to asceticism--but there should be a good dose of it.

The Mother; Agenda 3: 69-71 (3.2.1962)

ROLE OF WORK IN HEALTH AND PROGRESS

CONCENTRATION IN WORK

If you want to do something well, whatever it may be, any kind of work, the least thing, play a game, write a book, do painting or music or run a race, anything at all, if you want to do it well, you must become what you are doing and not remain a small person looking at himself doing it; for if one looks at oneself acting, one is... one is still in complicity with the ego. If, in oneself, one succeeds in becoming what one does, it is a great progress. In the least little details, one must learn this. Take a very amusing instance: you want to fill a bottle from another bottle; you concentrate (you may try it as a discipline, as a gymnastic); well, as long as you are the bottle to be filled, the bottle from which one pours, and the movement of pouring, as long as you are only this, all goes well. But if unfortunately you think at a given moment: "Ah! it is getting on well, I am managing well", the next moment it spills over! It is the same for everything, for everything. That is why work is a good means of discipline, for if you want to do the work properly, you must become the work instead of being someone who works, otherwise you will never do it well. If you remain "someone who works" and, besides, if your thoughts go vagabonding, then you may be sure that if you are handling fragile things they will break, if you are cooking, you will burn something, or if you are playing a game, you will miss all the balls! It is here, in this, that work is a great discipline. For if truly you want to do it well, this is the only way of doing it.

For everything, everything, it is the same. There is nothing which cannot be a yogic discipline if one does it properly.

CWM 4: 362-63

For one who wants to grow in self-perfection, there are no great or

small tasks, none that are important or unimportant; all are equally useful for one who aspires for progress and self-mastery. It is said that one only does well what one is interested in doing. This is true, but it is truer still that one can learn to find interest in everything one does, even in what appear to be the most insignificant chores. The secret of this attainment lies in the urge towards self-perfection. Whatever occupation or task falls to your lot, you must do it with a will to progress; whatever one does, one must not only do it as best one can but strive to do it better and better in a constant effort for perfection. In this way everything without exception becomes interesting, from the most material chore to the most artistic and intellectual work. The scope for progress is infinite and can be applied to the smallest thing.

CWM 12: 53

WORK AND ILLNESS

[Question] Would it not be better to continue the work even if one feels lazy?

That depends on the work;

If it is a work that you are doing for the collectivity and not for yourself personally, then you must do it, whatever happens. It is an elementary discipline. You have undertaken to do this work or have been given the work and have taken it up, therefore you have accepted it, and in that case you must do it. At all times, unless you are absolutely ill, ill in the last degree and unable to move, you must do it. Even if you are rather ill, you must do it. An unselfish work always cures you of your petty personal maladies. Naturally, if you are really compelled to be in bed without being able to move, with a terrible fever or a very serious illness, then that is quite different. But otherwise, if you are just a little indisposed: "I am not feeling quite well, I have a little headache or I have indigestion, or I have a bad cold, I am coughing", things like that - then doing your work, not thinking of yourself, thinking of the work, doing it as well as you can, that puts you right immediately.

CWM 5: 120-121 (24.6.1953)

WORK AND FATIGUE

Fatigue comes from doing without interest the things you do.

Whatever you do you can find interest in it, provided you take it as the means of progressing; you must try to do better and better what you are doing, the will for progress must always be there and then you take interest in what you do, whatever it is. The most insignificant occupation can prove interesting if you take it that way.

But even the most attractive and important activity will soon lose all its interest for you if the will for progress towards an ideal perfection is not there while you act.

CWM 14: 248-49

Think of your work only when it is being done, not before and not after. Do not let your mind go back on a work that is finished. It belongs to the past and all re-handling of it is a waste of power.

Do not let your mind labour in anticipation on a work that has to be done. The Power that acts in you will see to it at its own time.

These two habits of the mind [of thinking of work already done or to be done]<?> belong to a past functioning that the transforming Force is pressing to remove and the physical mind's persistence in them is the cause of your strain and fatigue. If you can remember to let your mind work only when its action is needed, the strain will lessen and disappear.

SABCL 23: 705 [Letters on Yoga Parts Two and Three (pp. 503 – 1089)]

WORK AS OFFERING

The best way to work without getting tired is to offer the work you do (whatever work it is) to the Divine and to find in the Divine the support you need - for the Divine's Force is inexhaustible and He answers always to whatever offer is made to Him sincerely.

CWM 14: 315

WORK AND REST

In the ordinary condition of the body if you oblige the body to do too much work, it can do [it] with the support of vital force. But as soon as the work is done, the vital force withdraws and then the body feels fatigue. If this is done too much and for too long a time, there may be a breakdown of health and strength under the overstrain. Rest is then needed for recovery.

If, however, the mind and the vital get the habit of opening to the Mother's Force, they are then supported by the Force and may even be fully filled with it--the Force does the work and the body feels no strain or fatigue before or after. But even then, unless the body itself is open and can absorb and keep the Force, sufficient rest in between the <[periods of]> work is absolutely necessary. Otherwise, although the body may go on for a very long time, yet in the end there can be a danger of a collapse.

The body can be sustained for a long time when there is the full influence and there is a single-minded faith and call in the mind and the vital; but if the mind or the vital is disturbed by other influences or opens itself to forces which are not the Mother's then there will be a mixed condition and there will be sometimes strength, sometimes fatigue, exhaustion or illness or a mixture of the two at the same time.

Finally, if not only the mind and the vital, but the body also is open and can absorb the Force, it can do extraordinary things in the way of work without breaking down. Still even then rest is necessary. That is why we insist on those who have the impulse of work keeping a proper balance between rest and labour.

A complete freedom from fatigue is possible, but that comes only when there is a complete transformation of the law of the body by the full descent of a supramental Force into the earth-nature.

SABCL 25: 214-215 [The Mother - With Letters on the Mother and Prayers and Meditations]

The first rule is--there must be sufficient sleep and rest, not in excess but not too little.

The body must be trained to work, but not strained beyond its utmost capacity.

The outer means without the inner is not effective. Up to a certain

point by a progressive> training the body may be made more capable of
work. But the important thing is to bring down the force for work and the
rasa [taste, enjoyment] of work in the body. The body will then do what is
asked of it without grudging or feeling fatigue.

Even so, even when the force and rasa are there, one must keep one's sense of measure.

Work is a means of self-dedication to the Divine, but it must be done with the necessary inner consciousness in which the outer vital and physical also share.

A lazy body is certainly not a proper instrument for Yoga--it must stop being lazy. But a fatigued and unwilling body also cannot receive properly or be a good instrument. The proper thing is to avoid either extreme.

Mother India 12: 3,5 (to Nagin)

Taking rest should not mean a fall into unconsciousness and tamas but an ascent into light, perfect peace, total silence; it is a rising out of the darkness.

Bulletin 38: 1,19

SLEEP AND THE RENEWAL OF ENERGY

HOW TO SLEEP WELL

If one is physically very tired, it is better not to go to sleep immediately, otherwise one falls into the inconscient. If one is very tired, one must stretch out on the bed, relax, loosen all the nerves one after another until one becomes like a rumpled cloth in one's bed, as though one had neither bones nor muscles. When one has done that, the same thing must be done in the mind. Relax, do not concentrate on any idea or try to solve a problem or ruminate on impressions, sensations or emotions you had during the day. All that must be allowed to drop off quietly: one gives oneself up, one is indeed like a rag. When you have succeeded in doing this, there is always a little flame, there - that flame never goes out and you become conscious of it when you have managed this relaxation. And all of a sudden this little flame rises slowly into an aspiration for the divine life, the truth, the consciousness of the Divine, the union with the inner being, it goes higher and higher, it rises, rises, like that, very gently. Then everything gathers there, and if at that moment you fall asleep, you have the best sleep you could possibly have. I guarantee that if you do this carefully, you are sure to sleep, and also sure that instead of falling into a dark hole you will sleep in light, and when you get up in the morning you will be fresh, fit, content, happy and full of energy for the day.

CWM 4: 351-52

Eating with moderation and abstaining from all excess greatly reduces the need to spend many hours in sleep; however, the quality of sleep is much more important than its quantity. In order to have a truly effective rest and relaxation during sleep, it is good as a rule to drink something before going to bed, a cup of milk or soup or fruit-juice, for instance. Light food brings a quiet sleep. One should, however, abstain from all copious meals, for then the sleep becomes agitated and is disturbed by nightmares, or else is dense, heavy and dulling. But the most important thing of all is to make the mind clear, to quieten the emotions and calm the effervescence of desires and the preoccupations which accompany them.

CWM 12: 52

You must lie flat on your back and relax all the muscles and all the nerves - it is an easy thing to learn - to be like what I call a rag on a bed: nothing else remains. And if you can do that with the mind also, you get rid of all those stupid dreams that make you more tired when you get up than when you went to bed. It is the cellular activity of the brain that continues without control, and that tires one much. So, a total relaxation, a sort of complete calm, without tension, in which everything is stopped. But this is only the beginning.

Afterwards, you make a self-giving as total as possible, of everything, from top to bottom, from outside to inside, and an eradication, as total as possible, of all the resistance of the ego. And you begin repeating your mantra - your mantra, if you have one, or any word which has a power for you, a word leaping forth from the heart spontaneously, like a prayer, a word which sums up your aspiration. After repeating it a certain number of times, if you are accustomed to do so, you enter into trance. And from that trance you pass into sleep. The trance lasts as long as it should and quite naturally, spontaneously, you pass into sleep. But when you come back from this sleep, you remember everything; the sleep was like a continuation of the trance.

Fundamentally, the sole purpose of sleep is to enable the body to assimilate the effect of the trance so that the effect may be received everywhere, and to enable the body to do its natural nocturnal function of eliminating toxins. And when you wake up, there is not that trace of heaviness which comes from sleep: the effect of the trance continues.

Even for those who have never been in trance, it is good to repeat a mantra, a word, a prayer before going into sleep. But there must be a life in the words; I do not mean an intellectual significance, nothing of that kind, but a vibration. And its effect on the body is extraordinary: it begins to vibrate, vibrate, vibrate... and quietly you let yourself go, as though you

wanted to go to sleep. The body vibrates more and more, more and more, more and more, and away you go. That is the cure for tamas.

CWM 15: 379-380

SLICING UPTHE SLEEP

I have noticed that if you cut your sleep into slices (it is a habit one can form), the nights become better. That is to say, you must be able to come back to your normal consciousness and normal aspiration at fixed intervals - come back at the call of the consciousness. But for that you must not use an alarm-clock! When you are in trance, it is not good to be shaken out of it.

When you are about to go to sleep, you can make a formation; say: "I shall wake up at such an hour" (you do that very well when you are a child). For the first stretch of sleep you must count at least three hours; for the last, one hour is sufficient. But the first one must be three hours at the minimum. On the whole, you have to remain in bed at least seven hours; in six hours you do not have time enough to do much (naturally I am looking at it from the point of view of sadhana) to make the nights useful.

CWM 15: 380-381



FOOD AND THE BODY FUNCTIONS

NEEDS OF THE BODY

People always have the impression that what they call the needs of the body, what the body demands, is an absolute law; that if it is not obeyed, well, one commits a great wrong against one's body which will suffer the consequences.

If one were to study the problem attentively enough, one would find out to what an extent these so-called needs of the body depend on the mental attitude. For example, the need to eat. There are people who literally die of hunger if they have not eaten for eight days. There are others who do it deliberately and observe fasting as a principle of yoga, as a necessity in yoga. And for them, at the end of eight days' fasting, the body is as healthy as when they started, and sometimes healthier!

Finally, for all these things, it is a question of proportion, of measure. It is obvious that one can't always live without eating. But it is also obvious that the idea people have about the need to eat is not true. Indeed, it is a whole subject for study: The importance of the mental attitude in relation to the body.

CWM 8: 140

It is the habit in the subconscient material that feels an artificial need created by the past and does not care whether it is harmful or disturbing to the nerves or not. That is the nature of all intoxicants (wine, tobacco, cocaine etc.), people go on even after the deleterious effects have shown themselves and even after all real pleasure in it has ceased because of this artificial need (it is not real). The will has to get hold of this subconscient persistence and dissolve it.

NOTTO THINK ABOUT FOOD

In fact, the best thing [with regard to food] is not to think about it but to regulate one's life automatically enough not to need to think of eating. You eat at fixed hours, eat reasonably, you don't even need to think of the food when you are taking it; you must eat calmly, that's all, quietly, with concentration, and when you do not eat you must never think about it. You must not eat too much, because then you will have to think about your digestion, and it will be very unpleasant for you and will make you waste much time. You must eat just... you must put an end to all desire, all attraction, all movements of the vital, because when you eat simply because the body needs to eat, the body will tell you in an absolutely precisely and exactly when it has had enough; you see when one is not moved by a vital desire or mental ideas, one grasps this with surety. "Now it is enough," says the body, "I don't want any more." So one stops. As soon as one has ideas or else desires in the vital, and there is, for instance, something that you like particularly, because you like it particularly you eat three times too much of it... In fact, this may cure you to a certain extent, because if you don't have a very strong stomach, you get indigestion, and then after that you have a disgust for the thing which has given you indigestion. Still, these are rather drastic means. One can make progress without having recourse to such means. The best is not to think about it.

CWM 7: 62-63

FOOD AS OFFERING

...... as long as our body is compelled to take in foreign matter in order to subsist, it will absorb at the same time a considerable amount of inert and unconscious forces or those having a rather undesirable consciousness, And that is why in many yogas there was the advice to offer to the Divine what one was going to eat before eating it (Mother makes a gesture of offering, hands joined, palms open). It consists in calling the Divine down into the food before eating it. One offers it to Him - that is, one puts it in contact with the Divine, so that it may be under the divine influence when one eats it. It is very useful, it is very good. If one knows how to do it, it is very useful, it

considerably reduces the work of inner transformation which has to be done. But, you see, in the world as it is, we are all interdependent. You cannot take in the air without taking in the vibrations, the countless vibrations produced by all kinds of movements and all kinds of people, and you must - if you want to remain intact - you must constantly act like a filter, as I was saying. That is to say, nothing that is undesirable should be allowed to enter, as when one goes to infected areas, one wears a mask over the face so that the air may be purified before one breathes it in. Well, something similar has to be done. One must have around oneself so intense an atmosphere in a *total* surrender to the Divine, so intensified around oneself that everything that passes through is automatically filtered.

CWM 6: 213

TYPES OF FOOD

Food is rather a question of hygiene, and many of the sanctions and prohibitions laid down in ancient religions had more a hygienic than a spiritual motive. The Gita's definitions seem to point in the same direction-tamasic food, it seems to say, is what is stale or rotten with the virtue gone out of it, rajasic food is that which is too acrid, pungent, etc., heats the blood and spoils the health, sattwic food is what is pleasing, healthy, etc. It may well be that different kinds of food nourish the action of the different gunas and so indirectly are helpful or harmful apart from their physical action. But that is as far as one can go confidently. What particular eatables are or are not sattwic is another question and more difficult to determine. Spiritually, I should say that the effect of food depends more on the occult atmosphere and influences that come with it than on anything in the food itself. Vegetarianism is another question altogether; it stands, as you say, on a will not to do harm to the more conscious forms of life for the satisfaction of the belly.

SABCL 24: 1473-1474



HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

TO LEARN TO LOVE TRULY:

....human nature is so limited, so full of contradictions and so exclusive in its movements that if one wants to reject love in its lower form, that is to say, human love as human beings experience it, if one makes an inner effort to reject it, one usually rejects the entire capacity of feeling love and becomes like a stone. And then sometimes one has to wait for years or centuries before there is a reawakening in oneself of the capacity to receive and manifest love.

Therefore, the best way when love comes, in whatever form it may be, is to try and pierce through its outer appearance and find the divine principle which is behind and which gives it existence. Naturally, it is full of snares and difficulties, but it is more effective. That is to say, instead of ceasing to love because one loves wrongly, one must cease to love wrongly and want to love well.

For instance, love between human beings, in all its forms, the love of parents for children, of children for parents, of brothers and sisters, of friends and lovers, is all tainted with ignorance, selfishness and all the other defects which are man's ordinary drawbacks; so instead of completely ceasing to love - which, besides, is very difficult as Sri Aurobindo says, which would simply dry up the heart and serve no end - one must learn how to love better: to love with devotion, with self-giving, self-abnegation, and to struggle, not against love itself, but against its distorted forms: against all forms of monopolising, of attachment, possessiveness, jealousy, and all the feelings which accompany these main movements. Not to want to possess, to dominate; and not to want to impose one's will, one's whims, one's desires; not to want to take, to receive, but to give; not to insist on the other's response, but be content with one's own love; not to seek one's personal interest and joy and the fulfilment of one's personal desire, but to be satisfied with the giving of one's love and affection; and not to ask for any

response. Simply to be happy to love, nothing more.

If you do that, you have taken a great stride forward and can, through this attitude, gradually advance farther in the feeling itself, and realise one day that love is not something personal, that love is a universal divine feeling which manifests through you more or less finely, but which in its essence is something divine.

The first step is to stop being selfish. For everyone it is the same thing, not only for those who want to do yoga but also in ordinary life: if one wants to know how to love, one must not love oneself first and above all selfishly; one must give oneself to the object of love without exacting anything in return. This discipline is elementary in order to surmount oneself and lead a life which is not altogether gross.

As for yoga we may add something else: it is as I said in the beginning, the will to pierce through this limited and human form of love and discover the principle of divine Love which is behind it. Then one is sure to get a result. This is better than drying up one's heart. It is perhaps a little more difficult but it is better in every way, for like this, instead of egoistically making others suffer, well, one may leave them quiet in their own movement and only make an effort to transform oneself without imposing one's will on others, which even in ordinary life is a step towards something higher and a little more harmonious.

CWM 8: 301-02 (19.9.1956)

SEXUAL ENERGY AND THE PRACTICE OF BRAHMACHARYA

The practice of Brahmacharya is the first and most necessary condition of increasing the force within and turning it to such uses as may benefit the possessor or mankind. All human energy has a physical basis. The mistake made by European materialism is to suppose the basis to be everything and confuse it with the source. The source of life and energy is not material but spiritual, but the basis, the foundation on which the life and energy stand and work, is physical. To raise up the physical to the spiritual is Brahmacharya, for by the meeting of the two the energy which starts from one and produces the other is enhanced and fulfils itself.

This is the metaphysical theory. The application depends on a right understanding of the physical and psychological conformation of the human receptacle of energy. The fundamental physical unit is the retas, in which the tejas, the heat and light and electricity in man, is involved and hidden. All energy is latent in the retas. This energy may be either expended physically or conserved, All passion, lust, desire wastes the energy by pouring it, either in the gross form or a sublimated subtler form, out of the body. Immorality in act throws it out in the gross form; immorality of thought in the subtle form. In either case there is waste, and unchastity is of the mind and speech as well as of the body. On the other hand, all self-control conserves the energy in the retas, and conservation always brings with it increase. But the needs of the physical body are limited and the excess of energy must create a surplus which has to turn itself to some use other than the physical. According to the ancient theory retas is jala or water, full of light and heat and electricity, in one word, of tejas. The excess of the retas turns first into heat or tapas which stimulates the whole system, and it is for this reason that all forms of self-control and austerity are called *tapas* or *tapasya* because they generate the heat, or stimulus which is a source of powerful action and success; secondly, it turns to tejas proper, light, the energy which is at the source of all knowledge; thirdly, it turns to vidyut or electricity, which is at the basis of all forceful action whether intellectual or physical. In the vidyut again is involved the ojas, or pranasakti, the primal energy which proceeds from ether. The retas refining from jala to tapas, tejas and vidyut and from vidyut to ojas, fills the system with physical strength, energy and brain-power and in its last form of ojas rises to the brain and informs it with that primal energy which is the most refined form of matter and nearest to spirit. It is ojas that creates a spiritual force or virya, by which a man attains to spiritual knowledge, spiritual love and faith, spiritual strength. It follows that the more we can by Brahmacharya increase the store of tapas, tejas, vidyut and ojas, the more we shall fill ourselves with utter energy for the works of the body, heart, mind and spirit.

SABCL 3: 334-335/Early Cultural Writings: On Education; The Brain of India; Pg 372



AGING AND DEATH

THE SECRET OF YOUTHFULNESS

Old age does not come from a great number of years but from the incapacity or the refusal to continue to grow and progress. I have known old people of twenty and young people of seventy. As soon as one wants to settle down in life and reap the benefits of one's past efforts, as soon as one thinks that one has done what one had to do and accomplished what one had to accomplish, in short, as soon as one ceases to progress, to advance along the road of perfection, one is sure to fall back and become old.

CWM 12: 257

When, on the contrary, you are convinced that what you know is nothing compared to all which remains to be known, when you feel that what you have done is just the starting-point of what remains to be done, when you see the future like an attractive sun shining with the innumerable possibilities yet to be achieved, then you are young, however many are the years you have passed upon earth, young and rich with all the realisations of tomorrow.

And if you do not want your body to fail you, avoid wasting your energies in useless agitation. Whatever you do, do it in a quiet and composed poise. In peace and silence is the greatest strength.

CWM 12: 123

DEPARTURE FROM THE PHYSICAL BODY

....., 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 4: 354-355

HELPINGTHE DEPARTED

Question: If at the time of death the vital being is attacked in the vital world by hostile forces or entities, does it not look for a shelter somewhere?

Yes, it is for this reason that in all countries and in all religions, it is recommended that for a period of at least seven days after someone's death, people should gather and think of him. Because when you think of him with affection (without any inner disorder, without weeping, without any of those distraught passions), if you can be calm, your atmosphere becomes a kind of beacon for him, and when he is attacked by hostile forces (I am speaking of the vital being of course, not the psychic being which goes to take rest),

he may feel altogether lost, not know what to do and find himself in great distress; then he sees through affinity the light of those who are thinking of him with affection and he rushes there. It happens almost constantly that a vital formation, a part of the vital being of the dead person (or at times the whole vital if it is well organised) takes shelter in the aura, the atmosphere of the people or the person who loved him. There are people who always carry with them a part of the vital of the person who is gone. That is the real utility of these so-called ceremonies, which otherwise have no sense.

It is preferable to do this without ceremonies. Ceremonies are, if anything, rather harmful, for a very simple reason: When you are busy with a ceremony, you think more about that than about the person. When you are busy with gestures, movements with the following of a ritual, you think much more of all that than of the person who is dead.

CWM 4: 204-05

..... if you had a relation of deep and sincere love with someone who has passed away, left his body, and if you are calm and strong enough yourself, this person may choose to take shelter vitally in your atmosphere - the atmosphere of the one he loves - for a more or less long period. In this case it means that the relation was very close, very intimate, and if you are not altogether materialistic to the point of not having any direct mental perception, you can remain in mental contact with this person, in communication with him. It is a rather exceptional case, for usually if your atmosphere is calm and strong enough to be able to truly serve as a protection, the person who has left his body enters into a deep rest there, and it is not at all good to disturb it; and the best thing you can do is to enfold this person with your love and leave him in peace.

CWM 9: 362-363

THE POSSIBILITY OF IMMORTALITY

THE INNER REASONS FOR DEATH

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.

SABCL 19: 822 (footnote)/The Life Divine: 854(footnote)

There is, for instance, now abroad the beginning of a knowledge among the scientists that death is not a necessity. But the whole of humanity believes firmly in death; it is, one might say, a general human suggestion based on a long unchanging experience. If this belief could be cast out first from the conscious mind, then from the vital nature and the subconscious physical layers, death would no longer be inevitable.

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. . . . 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

purity 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.

CWM 3: 36-37



SELF-HEALING THROUGH Inner Means

THE POWER OF THOUGHT:

Those who have achieved the control of their mental being can emanate at will a certain portion of their intellectual power, send it wherever they think proper, while remaining perfectly conscious of it.

These emanations, which are true messengers, will take your place wherever, physically, it is for any reason impossible for you to go yourself.

The advantages of this power will be easily apparent to you. A thought which is skilfully directed and sustained can, by affinity, awaken to consciousness a glimmer of wisdom in many minds as yet wrapt in darkness, and thus set them on their way towards progressive evolution; it can serve as an intermediary for one who is sick by drawing towards him the vital forces needed to cure him; it can watch over a dear friend and protect him from many dangers, either by warning him through mental communication and through his intuition or by acting directly on the cause of peril.

Unfortunately, the inverse is also true, and bad thoughts as well are not wanting in power of action. We cannot imagine all the harm we do by receiving and emanating bad thoughts, thoughts of hate, vengeance, jealousy, envy, malevolent thoughts, harsh judgments, sectarian valuations....

We all know how injurious it is to listen to and repeat slanderous gossip, but it is not enough to abstain from the words, we must also abstain from the thoughts. [2?]

What we constantly endeavour to achieve in our physical actions is at the same time constantly hampered or even destroyed by our mental actions.

So let us watch over our thoughts, let us strive to create for ourselves an atmosphere of beautiful and noble thoughts and we shall have done much to hasten the advent of terrestrial harmony.

POWER OF IMAGINATION

The imagination is really the power of mental formation. When this power is put at the service of the Divine, it is not only formative but also creative. There is, however, no such thing as an unreal formation, because every image is a reality on the mental plane. The plot of a novel, for instance, is all there on the mental plane existing independently of the physical. Each of us is a novelist to a certain extent and possesses the capacity to make forms on that plane; and, in fact, a good deal of our life embodies the products of our imagination. Every time you indulge your imagination in an unhealthy way, giving a form to your fears and anticipating accidents and misfortunes, you are undermining your own future. On the other hand, the more optimistic your imagination, the greater the chance of your realising your aim. Monsieur Cou'e got hold of this potent truth and cured hundreds of people by simply teaching them to imagine themselves out of misery. He once related the case of a lady whose hair was falling off. She began to suggest to herself that she was improving every day and that her hair was surely growing. By constantly imagining it her hair really began to grow and even reached an enviable length owing to still further autosuggestion. The power of mental formation is most useful in Yoga also; when the mind is put in communication with the Divine Will, the supramental Truth begins to descend through the layers intervening between the mind and the highest Light and if, on reaching the mind, it finds there the power of making forms it easily becomes embodied and stays as a creative force in you. Therefore I say to you never be dejected and disappointed but let your imagination be always hopeful and joyously plastic to the stress of the higher Truth, so that the latter may find you full of the necessary formations to hold its creative light.

The imagination is like a knife which may be used for good or evil purposes. If you always dwell in the idea and feeling that you are going to be transformed, then you will help the process of the Yoga. If, on the contrary, you give in to dejection and bewail that you are not fit or that you are incapable of realisation, you poison your own being.

THE POWER OF SUGGESTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STATE:

To whatever cause an illness may be due, material or mental, external or internal, it must, before it can affect the physical body, touch another layer of the being that surrounds and protects it. This subtler layer is called in different teachings by various names,—the etheric body, the nervous envelope. It is a subtle body and yet almost visible. In density something like the vibrations that you see around a very hot and steaming object, it emanates from the physical body and closely covers it. All communications with the exterior world are made through this medium, and it is this that must be invaded and penetrated first before the body can be affected. If this envelope is absolutely strong and intact, you can go into places infested with the worst of diseases, even plague and cholera, and remain quite immune. It is a perfect protection against all possible attacks of illness, so long as it is whole and entire, thoroughly consistent in its composition, its elements in faultless balance. This body is built up, on the one side, of a material basis, but rather of material conditions than of physical matter, on the other, of the vibrations of our psychological states. Peace and equanimity and confidence, faith in health, undisturbed repose and cheerfulness and bright gladness constitute this element in it and give it strength and substance. It is a very sensitive medium with facile and quick reactions; it readily takes in all kinds of suggestions and these can rapidly change and almost remould its condition. A bad suggestion acts very strongly upon it; a good suggestion operates in the contrary sense with the same force. Depression and discouragement have a very adverse effect; they cut out holes in it, as it were, in its very stuff, render it weak and unresisting and open to hostile attacks an easy passage.

CWM 3: 89

THE POWER OF PRAYERS:

The efficacy of prayer is often doubted and prayer itself supposed to be a thing irrational and necessarily superfluous and ineffective. It is true that the universal will executes always its aim and cannot be deflected by egoistic propitiation and entreaty, it is true of the Transcendent who expresses himself in the universal order that being omniscient his larger knowledge must foresee the thing to be done and it does not need direction or stimulation by human thought and that the individual's desires are not and cannot be in any world-order the true determining factor. But neither is that order or the execution of the will altogether effected by mechanical Law, but by powers and forces of which for human life at least human will, aspiration and faith are not among the least important. Prayer is only a particular form given to that will, aspiration and faith. Its forms are very often crude and not only childlike, which is in itself no defect, but childish; but still it has a real power and significance. Its power and sense is to put the will, aspiration and faith of man into touch with the divine Will as that of a conscious Being with whom we can enter into conscious and living relations. For our will and aspiration can act either by our own strength and endeavour, which can no doubt be made a thing great and effective whether for lower or higher purposes, there are plenty of disciplines which put it forward as the one force to be used,—or it can act in dependence upon and with subordination to the divine or the universal Will. And this latter way again may either look upon that Will as responsive indeed to our aspiration, but almost mechanically, by a sort of law of energy, or at any rate quite impersonally, or else it may look upon it as responding to the divine aspiration and faith of the human soul and consciously bringing to it the help, the guidance, the protection and fruition demanded, yogakshemam vahamyaham.

Prayer helps to prepare this relation for us at first on the lower plane even while it is there consistent with much that is mere egoism and self-delusion; but afterwards we can draw towards the spiritual truth which is behind it. It is not then the giving of the thing asked for that matters, but the relation itself, the contact of man's life with God, the conscious interchange. In spiritual matters and in the spiritual gains, this conscious relation is a great power; it is a much greater power than our own entirely self-reliant struggle and effort and it brings a fuller spiritual growth and experience. Necessarily in the end prayer either ceases in the greater thing for which it prepared us,—in fact the form we call prayer is not itself essential so long as the faith, the will, the aspiration are there,—or remains only for the joy of the relation. Also its objects, the *artha* or interest it seeks to realise, become

higher and higher until we reach the highest motiveless devotion, which is that of divine love pure and simple without any other or longing.

SABCL 20-21: 542-43/The Synthesis of Yoga; 566

THE POWER OF WIDENING:

....., when you have to face anguish, suffering, revolt, pain or a feeling of helplessness—whatever it may be, all the things that come to you on the path and which precisely are your difficulties—if physically, that is to say, in your body consciousness, you can have the feeling of widening yourself, one could say of unfolding yourself—you feel as it were all folded up, one fold on another like a piece of cloth which is folded and refolded and folded again—so if you have this feeling that what is holding and strangling you and making you suffer or paralysing your movement, is like a too closely, too tightly folded piece of cloth or like a parcel that is too well-tied, too wellpacked, and that slowly, gradually, you undo all the folds and stretch yourself out exactly as one unfolds a piece of cloth or a sheet of paper and spreads it out flat, and you lie flat and make yourself very wide, as wide as possible, spreading yourself out as far as you can, opening yourself and stretching out in an attitude of complete passivity with what I could call "the face to the light": not curling back upon your difficulty, doubling up on it, shutting it in, so to say, into yourself, but, on the contrary, unfurling yourself as much as you can, as perfectly as you can, putting the difficulty before the Light—the Light which comes from above—if you do that in all the domains, and even if mentally you don't succeed in doing it—for it is sometimes difficult—if you can imagine yourself doing this physically, almost materially, well, when you have finished unfolding yourself and stretching yourself out, you will find that more than three-quarters of the difficulty is gone. And then just a little work of receptivity to the Light and the last quarter will disappear.

CWM 8: 286-87; 29 August 1956

Question: Sweet Mother, how can we make our consciousness vast?

Vast? Ah, there are many ways of doing this.

There are lots of intellectual ways of widening the consciousness. These I have explained fully in my book. But in any case, when you are bored by something, when something is painful to you or very unpleasant, if you begin to think of the eternity of time and the immensity of space, if you think of all that has gone before and all that will come afterwards, and that this second in eternity is truly just a passing breath, and that it seems so utterly ridiculous to be upset by something which in the eternity of time is... one doesn't even have the time to become aware of it, it has no place, no importance, because, what indeed is a second in eternity? If one can manage to realise that, to... how to put it?... visualise, picture the little person one is, in the little earth where one is, and the tiny second of consciousness which for the moment is hurting you or is unpleasant for you, just this which in itself is only a second in your existence, and that you yourself have been many things before and will be many more things afterwards, that what affects you now you will have probably completely forgotten in ten years, or if you remember it you will say, "How did I happen to attach any importance to that?"... if you can realise that first and then realise your little person which is a second in eternity, not even a second, you know, imperceptible, a fragment of a second in eternity, that the whole world has unfolded before this and will unfold yet, indefinitely—before, behind—and that... well, then suddenly you sense the utter ridiculousness of the importance you attach to what happened to you.... Truly you feel... to what an extent it is absurd to attach any importance to one's life, to oneself, and to what happens to you. And in the space of three minutes, if you do this properly, all unpleasantness is swept away. Even a very deep pain can be swept away. Simply a concentration like this, and to place oneself in infinity and eternity. Everything goes away. One comes out of it cleansed. One can get rid of *all* attachments and even, I say, of the deepest sorrows—of everything, in this way —if one knows how to do it in the right way. It immediately takes you out of your little ego.

CWM 6: 344-346; 29th Sept. 1954

THE POWER OF PEACE AND OF GRACE:

Suppose that as a result of some illness or other, there is some sort of pain at a precise spot. At that moment all will depend, as I said at the beginning, on the approach most familiar to you. But we can give an example. You are in pain, in great pain; it is hurting very much, you are suffering a lot.

First point: do not stress the pain by telling yourself, "Oh, how painful! Oh, this pain is unbearable! Oh, it is becoming worse and worse, I shall never be able to bear it", etc., all this sort of thing. The more you go on thinking like this and feeling like this and the more your attention is concentrated on it, the pain increases amazingly.

So, the first point: to control yourself sufficiently not to do that.

Second point: as I said, it depends on your habits. If you know how to concentrate, to be quiet, and if you can bring into yourself a certain peace, of any kind—it may be a mental peace, it may be a vital peace, it may be a psychic peace; they have different values and qualities, this is an individual question—you try to realise within yourself a state of peace or attempt to enter into a conscious contact with a force of peace.... Suppose you succeed more or less completely. Then, if you can draw the peace into yourself and bring it down into the solar plexus— for we are not talking of inner states but of your physical body—and from there direct it very calmly, very slowly I might say, but very persistently, towards the place where the pain is more or less sharp, and fix it there, this is very good.

This is not always enough.

But if by widening this movement you can add a sort of mental formation with a little life in it—not just cold, but with a little life in it—that the only

reality is the divine Reality, and all the cells of this body are a more or less deformed expression of this divine Reality—there is only one Reality, the Divine, and our body is a more or less deformed expression of this sole Reality—if by my aspiration, my concentration, I can bring into the cells of the body the consciousness of this sole Reality, all disorder must necessarily cease.

If you can add to that a movement of complete and trusting surrender to the Grace, then I am sure that within five minutes your suffering will disappear. If you know how to do it.

You may try and yet not succeed. But you must know how to try again and again and again, until you do succeed. But if you do those three things at the same time, well, there is no pain which can resist.

CWM 8: 212-213; 4th July 1956

THE POWER OF FAITH:

To aspire is indispensable. But some people aspire with such a conflict inside them between faith and absence of faith, trust and distrust, between the optimism which is sure of victory and a pessimism which asks itself when the catastrophe will come. Now if this is in the being, you may aspire but you don't get anything. And you say, "I aspired but didn't get anything." It is because you demolish your aspiration all the time by your lack of confidence. But if you truly have trust... Children when left to themselves and not deformed by older people have such a great trust that all will be well! For example, when they have a small accident, they never think that this is going to be something serious: they are spontaneously convinced that it will soon be over, and this helps so powerfully in putting an end to it.

Well, when one aspires for the Force, when one asks the Divine for help, if one asks with the unshakable certitude that it will come, that it is impossible that it won't, then it is sure to come. It is this kind... yes, this is truly an inner opening, this trustfulness.

......... If the trust is there, spontaneous, candid, unquestioning, it works better than anything else, and the results are marvellous. It is with the contradictions and doubts of the mind that one spoils everything, with this kind of notion which comes when one is in difficulties: "Oh, it is impossible!

I shall never manage it. And if it is going to be aggravated, if this condition I am in, which I don't want, is going to grow still worse, if I continue to slide down farther and farther, if, if, if, if..." like that, and one builds a wall between oneself and the force one wants to receive. The psychic being has this trust, has it wonderfully, without a shadow, without an argument, without a contradiction. And when it is like that, there is not a prayer which does not get an answer, no aspiration which is not realised.

CWM 6: 403-404; 17th November 1954

FAITH AND THE USE OF PHYSICAL MEANS:

It is very good if one can get rid of illness entirely by faith and yogapower or the influx of the Divine Force. But very often this is not altogether possible, because the whole nature is not open or able to respond to the Force. The mind may have faith and respond, but the lower vital and the body may not follow. Or, if the mind and vital are ready, the body may not respond, or may respond only partially, because it has the habit of replying to the forces which produce a particular illness, and habit is a very obstinate force in the material part of the nature. In such cases the use of the physical means can be resorted to, - not as the main means, but as a help or material support to the action of the Force. Not strong and violent remedies, but those that are beneficial without disturbing the body.

SABCL: Letters On Yoga 3; p. 1568

REACHING OUTTO OTHERS

Note that this power of formation has a great advantage, if one knows how to use it. You can make good formations and if you make them properly, they will act in the same way as the others. You can do a lot of good to people just by sitting quietly in your room, perhaps even more good than by undergoing a lot of trouble externally. If you know how to think correctly, with force and intelligence and kindness, if you love someone and wish him well very sincerely, deeply, with all your heart, that does him much good, much more certainly than you think. I have said this often; for example, to those who are here, who learn that someone in their family is very ill and

feel that childish impulse of wanting to rush immediately to the spot to attend to the sick person. I tell you, unless it is an exceptional case and there is nobody to attend on the sick person (and at times even in such a case), if you know how to keep the right attitude and concentrate with affection and good will upon the sick person, if you know how to pray for him and make helpful formations, you will do him much more good than if you go to nurse him, feed him, help him wash himself, indeed all that everybody can do. Anybody can nurse a person. But not everybody can make good formations and send out forces that act for healing.

CWM 5: 132-133; 1st July, 1953

THE TRIPLE INWARD STAIR TO PERFECTION

THE PSYCHIC BEING: THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

Every human being carries hidden within him the possibility of a greater consciousness which goes beyond the bounds of his present life and enables him to share in a higher and a vaster life. Indeed, in all exceptional beings it is always this consciousness that governs their lives and organises both the circumstances of their existence and their individual reaction to these circumstances. What the human mental consciousness does not know and cannot do, this consciousness knows and does. It is like a light that shines at the centre of the being, radiating through the thick coverings of the external consciousness. Some have a vague intimation of its presence; a good many children are under its influence, which shows itself very distinctly at times in their spontaneous actions and even in their words.

....... It is through this psychic presence that the truth of an individual being comes into contact with him and the circumstances of his life. In most cases the presence acts, so to say, from behind the veil, unrecognised and unknown; but in some, it is perceptible and its action recognisable and even, in a very few, the presence becomes tangible and its action fully effective. These go forward in life with an assurance and a certitude all their own; they are masters of their destiny. It is for the purpose of obtaining this mastery and becoming conscious of the psychic presence that psychic education should be practised. But for that there is need of a special factor, the personal will.

......The starting-point is to seek in yourself that which is independent of the body and the circumstances of life, which is not born of the mental formation that you have been given, the language you speak, the habits and customs of the environment in which you live, the country where you are born or the age to which you belong. You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it a sense of universality, limitless expansion,

unbroken continuity. Then you decentralise, extend and widen yourself; you begin to live in all things and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down. You think in their thoughts, vibrate in their sensations, feel in their feelings, live in the life of all. What seemed inert suddenly becomes full of life, stones quicken, plants feel and will and suffer, animals speak in a language more or less inarticulate, but clear and expressive; everything is animated by a marvellous consciousness without time or limit. And this is only one aspect of the psychic realisation; there are others, many others. All help you to go beyond the barriers of your egoism, the walls of your external personality, the impotence of your reactions and the incapacity of your will.

....... A few simple words of advice may be useful to one who has resolved to undertake it.

The first and perhaps the most important point is that the mind is incapable of judging spiritual things.

...... Give up all personal seeking for comfort, satisfaction, enjoyment or happiness. Be only a burning fire for progress, take whatever comes to you as an aid to your progress and immediately make whatever progress is required.

Try to take pleasure in all you do, but never do anything for the sake of pleasure.

Never get excited, nervous or agitated. Remain perfectly calm in the face of all circumstances. And yet be always alert to discover what progress you still have to make and lose no time in making it.

Never take physical happenings at their face value. They are always a clumsy attempt to express something else, the true thing which escapes our superficial understanding.

Never complain of the behaviour of anyone, unless you have the power to change in his nature what makes him act in this way; and if you have the power, change him instead of complaining.

Whatever you do, never forget the goal which you have set before you. There is nothing great or small once you have set out on this great discovery; all things are equally important and can either hasten or delay its success. Thus before you eat, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the food you are about to eat may bring your body the substance it needs to

serve as a solid basis for your effort towards the great discovery, and give it the energy for persistence and perseverance in the effort.

Before you go to sleep, concentrate a few seconds in the aspiration that the sleep may restore your fatigued nerves, bring calm and quietness to your brain so that on waking you may, with renewed vigour, begin again your journey on the path of the great discovery.

Before you act, concentrate in the will that your action may help or at least in no way hinder your march forward towards the great discovery.

When you speak, before the words come out of your mouth, concentrate just long enough to check your words and allow only those that are absolutely necessary to pass, only those that are not in any way harmful to your progress on the path of the great discovery.

To sum up, never forget the purpose and goal of your life. The will for the great discovery should be always there above you, above what you do and what you are, like a huge bird of light dominating all the movements of your being.

Before the untiring persistence of your effort, an inner door will suddenly open and you will emerge into a dazzling splendour that will bring you the certitude of immortality, the concrete experience that you have always lived and always shall live, that external forms alone perish and that these forms are, in relation to what you are in reality, like clothes that are thrown away when worn out. Then you will stand erect, freed from all chains, and instead of advancing laboriously under the weight of circumstances imposed upon you by Nature, which you had to endure and bear if you did not want to be crushed by them, you will be able to walk on, straight and firm, conscious of your destiny, master of your life.

CWM 12: 32-35.

THE GREATER SELF: GOING BEYOND THE EGO

.....one can say that the psychic life is immortal life, endless time, limitless space, ever-progressive change, unbroken continuity in the universe of forms. The spiritual consciousness, on the other hand, means to live the infinite and the eternal, to be projected beyond all creation, beyond time and space. To become conscious of your psychic being and to live a

psychic life you must abolish all egoism; but to live a spiritual life you must no longer have an ego.

In any case, the most effective starting-point, the swiftest method is total self-giving. Besides, no joy is more perfect than the joy of a total self-giving to whatever is the summit of your conception: for some it is the notion of God, for others that of Perfection. If this self-giving is made with persistence and ardour, a moment comes when you pass beyond the concept and arrive at an experience that escapes all description, but which is almost always identical in its effects. And as your self-giving becomes more and more perfect and integral, it will be accompanied by the aspiration for identification, a total fusion with That to which you have given yourself, and little by little this aspiration will overcome all differences and all resistances, especially if with the aspiration there is an intense and spontaneous love, for then nothing can stand in the way of its victorious drive.

CWM 12: 35-36.

THE TRUE AND LASTING SOLUTION: THE SUPRAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION

From beyond the frontiers of form a new force can be evoked, a power of consciousness which is as yet unexpressed and which, by its emergence, will be able to change the course of things and give birth to a new world. For the true solution to the problem of suffering, ignorance and death is not an individual escape from earthly miseries by self-annihilation into the unmanifest, nor a problematical collective flight from universal suffering by an integral and final return of the creation to its creator, thus curing the universe by abolishing it, but a transformation, a total transfiguration of matter brought about by the logical continuation of Nature's ascending march in her progress towards perfection, by the creation of a new species that will be to man what man is to the animal and that will manifest upon earth a new force, a new consciousness and a new power. And so will begin a new education which can be called the supramental education; it will, by its all-powerful action, work not only upon the consciousness of individual beings, but upon the very substance of which they are built and upon the environment in which they live.

In contrast with the types of education we have mentioned previously, which progress from below upwards by an ascending movement of the various parts of the being, the supramental education will progress from above downwards, its influence spreading from one state of being to another until at last the physical is reached. This last transformation will only occur visibly when the inner states of being have already been considerably transformed. It is therefore quite unreasonable to try to recognise the presence of the supramental by physical appearances. For these will be the last to change and the supramental force can be at work in an individual long before anything of it becomes perceptible in his bodily life.

To sum up, one can say that the supramental education will result no longer in a progressive formation of human nature and an increasing development of its latent faculties, but in a transformation of the nature itself, a transfiguration of the being in its entirety, a new ascent of the species above and beyond man towards superman, leading in the end to the appearance of a divine race upon earth.

CWM 12: 37-38

EPILOGUE

As the century progresses mankind is likely to enter into an Age of synthesis Age of Synthesis, a synthesis of the rational and intuitive parts, a synthesis of the head and the heart, of faith and reason, and most of all a synthesis of spiritual wisdom and scientific knowledge. Long discarded secrets are likely to be retested for any human utility and integrated with the old and new understanding of man and the world around him. So also what we call today as modern scientific knowledge is itself likely to undergo much change making much of our present day understanding of life redundant or else temporarily useful. We have explored the limits of the body; we have to now explore the limits of the mind. And then, moving on from the body and the mind we explore what tracts of knowledge and power lie hidden behind the façade of this material universe in the secret spaces of our soul. This is man's progress, for the Iron Age prepares for the Gold. As man evolves so will his way of dealing with himself and the world around him evolves.

Medicine, like everything else that has the stamp of human creation upon it, evolves with the evolution of mankind. But the cycles of evolution do not move in a straight line always. As historians would tell us, humanity has moved through many a curves and spirals of development and retrogression. Of course when we speak of development we do not refer merely to the technological side but to man as a whole, - man in his totality, his self- regard and his relation with the world he inhabits. There have been spaces of Time when man saw himself and the universe as a living and conscious Reality. He was and recognised or realised that he exists not only as a physical body but also and even more importantly as a psychological and a spiritual being. Extending this self-discovery, he further discovered that not only he himself but all the elements of the cosmos, in fact the earth, the sun, the stars, the plant and animal kingdoms, the mountains and rivers, the wind and fire, nay the universe itself exists at once as a material as well as a spiritual fact. He further sought to relate his own being not only to the material but also the occult and spiritual side of the universe. He sought to understand and

master not only the forces of material nature but also those that belong to the subtle domains of thought and feelings, will and impulsion, forces occult, forces spiritual. These were hey-days of Science, a Science truly holistic, since nothing was left out of its ambit of study and the physical, occult and spiritual aspects of the Reality were seen as interwoven in a single continuum.

Things have changed hence. For various reasons that we need not discuss here, the high point of the previous spiral gravitated down towards where we stand today. Step by step the human race came down the ladder. At first there was dissociation from the spiritual side or rather it was reduced to a mass of formulas. Spiritual philosophy, religion and occultism were the natural results of this downward trend. The eclipse of the Spiritual, vast and free and infinite into fixed mental formulas further shifted one notch lower to a mass of rituals, superstitions and customary thought and formal practice. This too had to suffer a further breakdown leading to a complete veiling of this deeper side of existence so much so that we came to believe that man is nothing but matter, the earth is nothing but matter, the universe is nothing but matter, that Matter alone exists and all else is either a fantasy or imagination, a madness or romanticism, a chimera that does not exist.

This too had to go. A new curve of ascent had to start and it has just begun. The signs are obvious. The gospel of Materialism has left man only more and more disillusioned, it has created a commercial brute, a sophisticated thief, an educated barbarian. What we observe today is this terribly mixed state of humanity. On the one side we find the scattered ruins of a past cycle, too defaced to be recognised for their true value. Waiting to be discovered amidst the debris of superstitions and rituals of the primitive man are fragments of a past knowledge that still can save the world. The primitive is perhaps not an original darkness but a fall from a previous height. That is why there still lingers in his memory some remnants of a past wisdom and knowledge, however imperfectly held and misapplied by his mind and sense. However as civilisation advanced along the lines of the present cycle as determined by the Zeitgeist, the forward movement took place at the expense of this loss, this near complete blotting out of these once living truths from our active memory. No wonder modern medical text-books make us believe

5. What we mean by this is that the evolution has moved in spiral loops rather than a simple vertical line. An Intuitive Age of mankind gives way to a more Rational Age followed by a Heroic Age and last of all the Age of Material Science. At present we are going through the last bit of the curve of the industrial-scientific revolution. Having gained and learned what we must from each Age, mankind is preparing for another upward turn when the gains of each Age of the present cycle will be taken up together and uplifted to a new intuitive height.

that Medicine as a true Science started only as late as a few centuries back. Before that there was nothing much but some speculation and superstition mixed with much imagination. This may be true of the last few hundred years or so by which time all the priceless things of the past had already suffered enough disintegration to be recognised as anything worthwhile. But though the forms have been destroyed these 'things' or rather 'truths' once alive and pulsating are seeking to be reborn under new forms and names. The Zeitgeist has completed the material curve. The eye of the Time-Spirit is not turning upward and inward to find and discover the eternal Source of all things born in time. One result is a sudden up surging of interest in long lost formulas of the past, an effort to revive and restore, even reactivate the valuable elements of the past knowledge and integrate it with discoveries of the present and carry it all for a more complete future understanding of man and the cosmos.

It is here that we have to tread carefully during this transition. On the one side there are several new possibilities opening before mankind. These possibilities are not just about discovering new methods and technology to deal with the problems that vex us but also the realisation of the untold potential that lies secret and untapped within us. There is an increasing recognition that we hardly use the full potential that is given to us. The body itself has a remarkable ability to adjust and adapt, even beyond its so-called known limits. Crisis situations have often brought home the point that we have an enormous inner reserve that is hardly used in the normal operations of our life. Besides we have several examples of astounding feats that a trained and educated body can achieve. There is also an exploration into the untapped potential of the mind and its powers to help or hinder. Above all having explored the boundaries of the mind and the body, the human quest is naturally turning to 'other' dimensions and unexplored fields of Nature. We cannot surmise exactly where all this will land us. All that we can say is that a beginning has been made, the beginning of a voyage across uncharted seas of knowledge and power.

At the same time there lies the danger that in our hurry to be different we may construct hastily and on unsteady grounds. This too we see happening today. For the 'new age' gurus are multiplying by the dozens and the commercial market is quick to capitalise and sell us hopes and dreams with an evangelistic fervour. But false hopes are often as harmful as fears for they keep us tied down to the surfaces of life. We may be able to save a rare gem or two from the scattered ruins of the temples of the past but what we need is not these gems as much as the Deity that presided within its sanctumsanctorum. We need the real thing, not the imitative templates, Hanuman and not just any monkey to amuse us! This is the other difficulty, the inability of an inexperienced humanity to differentiate truth from lie, especially when it is still groping in the darkness and clinging to hopes in a state of despair. But a restless desperateness will lead us nowhere. Both extremes need to be avoided, an unchanging set of rigid laws or else a fantastic display of miracles made to order anytime anywhere. It is the same illogicality that declares that there is no God since this world is governed by law and process; mechanism and method. Of course one can simply turn around the logic and say that that is why there is God or a supreme Intelligence! Yet behind this illogicality is the human mind's crude and infantile demand for miracles that dazzle and over-ride all the processes that have evolved so far since life emerged and struggled upon earth.

We need to avoid both extremes. Instead what is necessary right now is to focus our energies upon the growth intended by Nature in us humans; the evolutionary leap that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother speak about. It means a growth towards true freedom, one that is possible only if we free ourselves within from all external dependencies, whether on drugs or on rituals, whether on allopathy or other 'pathies'. Indeed no power can free us unless we decide to be free ourselves and rather than look for help outside, substituting one crutch for another start looking for strength within us. It is towards this perennial and limitless possibility that our attention must be directed. Naturally it is not going to be easy since it means over passing millenniums of habit. Nature will not let us pass through easily. A period of conflict and a rather protracted struggle is inevitable when the old laws that have governed human beings so far will wrestle with the new possibility in the chambers of the same heart. But however long the passage, if there is a lasting way, it is this one. And if the Time-Spirit here and the gods above have sanctioned the change then it may not even take so long. Perhaps it is already round the corner and we have to just reach out to the little door that is opening and step in or pass through. In medicine too, the little door

is opening despite the resistance of the past and it is bound to open further and wider with passage of time.

The thrust is towards holism and integration, but an integration of what? What must become whole first? Most certainly man himself. It is no use comparing and contrasting systems or trying to combine them through a superficial understanding or a practical approach that is moved by fear and governed by a false view of man himself. We must first of all discover an integral view of man himself, for the approach that we shall take will depend largely upon how we look at man. Each system has looked at man through a certain angle of vision and each has come up with its own remedy of the ills that afflict mankind. Each has its place but none is secure or foolproof panacea. Once we understand this, then we can take one of the two approaches, perhaps both together. The first and pragmatic approach is that we have realistic hopes and do what best we can to alleviate suffering and help improve the human condition. The second is to keep pushing towards a better and better understanding of man himself. And this pushing must go on till we get at the last secret, not just of man as an individual organism but man as one form of life amidst many.

The problem is compounded because knowledge does not always automatically translate into power. To be aware of a possibility does not mean that one realises it just by the fact of knowing it. The mind may decide to set course in a certain direction towards a specific goal, the eyes may see it as well at some distant horizon, shining as a golden peak as the first rays of the sun fall upon it, yet our feet must walk a step at a time. The mind's conception and the eye's vision must be followed by another step, the walk towards that which is seen and conceived. Many new age therapies simply seem to ignore this simple fact. Thus it is one thing to know that positive thinking is good for health and one does not need anyone to tell this to us anymore. This is established. The problem is how to change the human mind from a negative mode of functioning to a positive mode. Again, it is now generally accepted that faith is a crucial if not a central factor in cure. But the problem is how to induce faith in someone who is habitually full of doubts. The time lapse between the eye's vision and the actual reaching is an important issue that cannot be ignored. For all things express themselves here through a continuum of Time-Space-Causality. That means brining in

a world of forces between the cup and the lip. One needs to study that and understand this vast complexity called the universe where Fate and Freedom, Chance and Order constantly play with each other and often walk arm-in-arm. While it is good to simplify but there are dangers too of an oversimplification that denies the effort of thought and observation to study this vast and complex universe of which we are a little fragment.

And yet this is the beauty of its design that this little fragment contains all its potentialities. The worlds lie concealed within us. The cosmic forces, not just the physical but subtle and occult forces of life and mind and the higher spiritual regions even as those that arise as dark fumes from our subconscious parts have admittance in our house of life. Behind the human scene lurk unknown entities, some formidable and immense, many small yet critical in the help they can provide at crucial moments or the harm they can do unknown to us. What we call as man is merely the frontage of an intricately complex design. Man is not mere matter but much more. This we can understand rather easily. Even a little introspection can reveal this to anyone who cares to reflect with some honesty. But what we do easily know for no introspection can reveal that to us is the nature of these non-material forces and powers and energies and beings that stand behind creation and influence its outcome. We may say that it does not matter, for we come under this or that influence only through a conscious choice of will. These forces can affect us only if we do chose to do so. True but do we know that what we call as our choice is hardly our own! Besides human beings are perfect in the art of self-deception and it is not easy to avoid the cosmic snare or cut through its complex design. Neither mere knowledge of the design nor the strength of the will is enough; one needs sincerity, a great sincerity to act upon these veiled parts of nature, or else a Grace, a special Grace in fact that carries some people through this maze as if sheltered. So long as we are subject to this universal ignorance, we shall also remain subject to suffering in one form or another.

This cannot be done by any system or pathy, least of all through drugs or popular paperbacks. All that may be and is useful in its own time and place. But it is not enough. It does not have the power to carry us beyond the bar and circle of Ignorance in which we find ourselves stuck or trapped. It is only through an integral Yoga that at once takes into account the complexity

of this universe as well as of man that we can arrive at a perfect control and mastery over the cosmic forces and thereby to a perfect control and mastery over the causes of disease and suffering.

But we must also accept the fact that not everyone is called upon to undertake the adventure of yoga. Besides, the entire journey of Yoga is a long one and if one has to wait for everybody to realise the Integral Truth that governs life and cosmos and us within it, we may then well expect to wait until the next millennium. And who knows whether by that time humanity with this half-knowledge and power sitting atop an animal consciousness may not well destroy itself, if not through diseases, then through wars and pollutants and environmental imbalances! The pressing need of the hour is a paradigmatic change in our view of man. It is enough if a sufficient number of human beings accepts the new paradigm and start acting upon it with faith growing into a greater and luminous experience confirming their faith. Does this sound unscientific? Not more unscientific than the present day physician prescribing drugs with faith in their action and side-effects based on what is published in the journals or standard books on the subject. What we mean by this is that always in any field there are only a handful of persons who actually gather the hard evidence or are face to face with it. Others accept it upon trust in them and in their methods. The problem therefore is not that we do not have the direct experience ourselves of the cosmic forces and spiritual consciousness. Still, it may not be an exaggeration to say that perhaps more persons have some kind of experience of contact with these forces and energies than they have with the drug molecule and the actual processes involved in relief. Most of these experiences pass away unnoticed since we do not look that way!

The problem is whether we, that is the average man, is willing to put his faith in the spiritual explorers and occult scientists and in its methods. Here it may be useful to note that the spiritual and the occult field has its own processes and methods that are perfectly comprehensible and reproducible if we understand the rationale behind them. These methods may be and in some ways are different from the way material science operates but that in itself is not a reason for disbelief. In fact it is only natural since the field that material science explores and the one that occult and spiritual sciences explore are very different and need different means of knowledge and

confirmation. Thus surrender to the Divine Consciousness as a means for arriving at Truth may sound absurd in the circle of material science since it has limited its field to matter and its faith in the power of senses to observe and reason to analyse. These are its a priori assumptions. But let's take the other case. If there is a higher and greater Divine Consciousness as mystic experience affirms, if there are subtler senses and it is within the ambit of our possibility to awaken them, then surrender, meditation, concentration all become at once comprehensible and even rational. Besides just like any other science if we accept the conditions, then we can actually experience these truths. The confirmation is not statistical (though one suspects it may well be so if one sincerely explored it that way) but experiential. It is not statistical since very few people are willing to fulfil the conditions. They just want to see an impossible miracle somehow. That may well happen but not to order. Even occult and the still higher spiritual consciousness follows certain laws of its own, especially when it deals with matter and it is not some arbitrary God doing magic with a wand. Such notions of God and spiritual are obviously rather primitive and have long delayed any serious search into the realms that are deeper and higher than what we are accustomed to acknowledge. The reproducibility is there provided you fulfil the conditions, even if the condition is of faith and receptivity, surrender and openness to a higher intervention. The idea that one must fulfill it through the conditions of another medium is a rather juvenile demand. Even in the strictly material field where the laws are fairly fixed, we see two or more set of laws depending upon whether one is observing the gross physical world of hard matter or the subtler quantum world of the atoms and the larger stellar spaces. So too the laws of the spiritual and occult world do not necessarily follow the linearity of the material world. Why should they? They belong to another Space-Time continuum if we like. Thus, for example, it is perfectly possible that in a higher spiritual world, the time lag between a cause and effect may be infinitesimally small or a large gap may intervene between the force and its action or as some have experienced the effect may precede the cause, at least to our observation since we observe things only when they have manifested far down the scale, on the gross earthly plane!

For the moment we see the winds of change blowing simultaneously in certain directions. Firstly it is pushing towards an enlargement of the

field itself beyond what we ever imagined. Secondly there is an attempt however early, or rash and premature to unify the different dimensions of exploration. Thus today we have many paradigms operating in the field of human understanding and it is left to each one to accept or reject one in favour of the other. Thus, for instance, we have the purely biological or rather bio-chemical model of man that is generally followed by the conventional medical man trained in the modern scientific way. Whatever his merits, it will however be foolish to believe, as some self-deluded practitioners do, that nothing else exists beyond the scope of their text-books. There are ways of looking at the human enigma and each has its merits and its fault-lines. None may give us the full picture and it falls by that, but each touches some portion or aspect of the human complexity and thereby helps alleviate the human condition through the understanding that it brings. Man is matter to the physicist; he is living matter to the biologist; he is a thinking matter to the psychologist; he is matter in which where all the energies and forces of the hidden dimensions and other worlds meet and have their play to the occultist; he is matter awaiting its spiritual deliverance to the mystic. Man is all this and much more.

The hour is fast approaching when all these different ways of understanding and helping the human condition would come closer in a rich and varied synthesis. For man is the bridge thrown across the gulfs of life whose one end is in the dark labouring nescience of matter while the other strives to mate with the skies of the luminous beyond. His feet placed firmly upon the ground of earthly realities, yet he stares at and dreams of crossing distant horizons. This is at once the reason and the resolution of his unease that often precipitates in him a state of disequilibrium leads to diseases and quarrels within his organs and with the world around him. He has lost the natural harmony of the plant and the animal kingdom, yet negotiating through a narrow and perilous gorge he strives to arrive by this loss to the greater harmony of a divine spontaneity in us. Indeed this passage seems difficult and to some even impossible. It is full of seen and unseen obstructions of which disease and pathologies of various kinds are just a small visible fraction. Yet it is our faith that there is behind all this a diviner leading, an ascent of man to something greater than man that is being prepared behind the scene through the various challenges and problems that

we face today. The breakdown of many man-made systems and institutions, the collapse of our neat world-views and paradigms limited by reason are not the end but the beginning of a new construction and on a new basis. It is a new dawn that is being prepared behind the dark veil of Night. Yet after the night and behind it there awaits for the human soul the Light of a greater day. It is in that which is yet to be fully understood, believed, hoped, dared and arrived that we repose our faith and not in the shadows that prolong during the dusk of our present civilisation. It is not in this or that man-made system that we place our trust, great and effective that they may be and are. They yet move within the human limits and do not cross a certain boundary imposed upon us by Nature. This boundary is the limit of our sense-bound mind, the limit of our thought and feeling and imagination, the limit to which we can dream and dare, in one word the limit to which we are hypnotised by our past and present possibilities. But greater powers than any we have dreamed so far stand beside the shadows waiting for their hour to emerge out of the mighty soul of man. Beyond the arc of our present horizon, there waits a greater kingdom of the spirit, a vast and mighty Spirit broods over our earthly days, governs our destiny sheds Light and shows us the sunlit path out of the present towards a glorious and inevitable future foreseen and worked out, prepared and achieved through the tapasya of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

"O Force-compelled, Fate-driven earth-born race, O petty adventurers in an infinite world And prisoners of a dwarf humanity, How long will you tread the circling tracks of mind Around your little self and petty things? But not for a changeless littleness were you meant, Not for vain repetition were you built; Out of the Immortal's substance you were made; Your actions can be swift revealing steps, Your life a changeful mould for growing gods. A Seer, a strong Creator, is within, The immaculate Grandeur broods upon your days, Almighty powers are shut in Nature's cells.

A greater destiny waits you in your front: This transient earthly being if he wills Can fit his acts to a transcendent scheme. He who now stares at the world with ignorant eyes Hardly from the Inconscient's night aroused, That look at images and not at Truth, Can fill those orbs with an immortal's sight. Yet shall the godhead grow within your hearts, You shall awake into the spirit's air And feel the breaking walls of mortal mind And hear the message which left life's heart dumb And look through Nature with sun-gazing lids And blow your conch-shells at the Eternal's gate. Authors of earth's high change, to you it is given To cross the dangerous spaces of the soul And touch the mighty Mother stark awake And meet the Omnipotent in this house of flesh And make of life the million-bodied One. The earth you tread is a border screened from heaven; The life you lead conceals the light you are."

- Sri Aurobindo, Savitri

