

# Psychic Education

## a workbook

*based on the writings of*  
*Sri Aurobindo and The Mother*

First edition 2001

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*The author expresses her gratitude to Lynn Crawford and Matthijs Cornelissen for all their help and continuous support.*

*To Mirambika, on her twentieth birthday*

*N.*



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## Preface

So often the question has been asked: “I want to live a true spiritual life, but how do I combine this with my work?” Indeed, it is not easy to stay focused on one’s aim while living an active life in society with all its demands, entertainment and distractions. It seems almost as if the society does everything to make us forget our deeper aims in life. How can one help oneself not to forget? This book could provide some answers and exercises to those who would like to pursue their spiritual quest more actively in every area of their lives.

The content of this book is based on the writings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Sri Aurobindo wrote thousands of letters to those who asked for his advice. In one of his letters he writes that one of the aims of his Yoga is, “to live in the inner consciousness more and more while acting from it on the external life...” This implies that the deepest layers of our existence have to come to the foreground and guide every aspect of our daily life.

The Mother, for several years, answered questions orally in her Questions and Answers sessions. These letters and Playground sessions are available to us in book form and make an

incredibly rich resource of thousands of pages. Besides this, Sri Aurobindo in his earlier years, and *The Mother* from the forties onwards, have given advice that relates specifically to education, and emphasised the integral and psychic aspects of it.

If all this is available, why then still bring out a book like this? This book came about in answer to a need often expressed in Mirambika, an integral education school with a teachers training in New Delhi. Over the last 20 years, Mirambika's Teacher Education Centre has been training teachers in Integral Education. During these years certain questions have been asked over and over again: "What is the psychic being?", "What does Integral Education really mean?", "How to put it into practice?" Of course, the answers to these questions can be found in the works of Sri Aurobindo and *The Mother*, but teachers of integral schools and trainee-teachers during their courses have expressed frequently the wish that this information should be made available in a more easily accessible form.

In the original writings of Sri Aurobindo and *The Mother* there is a richness that can never be obtained in a simpler workbook like this. I am fully aware of the fact that any compilation lifts their words out of context and takes away some of their original depth and meaning. This has been the main reason for me to hesitate so long to bring out this book. But if this book can serve as a stepping stone to these original writings its purpose would be fulfilled.

The first part of this book has been written to help all those who want to take the first steps in integrating spirituality in every day life. It may also have something for those who are already on the path.

Part 2 of this book deals more specifically with education. Integral Education, as envisaged by Sri Aurobindo and *The*



Mother, is centred around the soul. In the ideal situation it is the psychic being of the teacher which creates a psychic learning environment for the students. Of course, finding one's psychic being is dependent on Grace and one cannot demand an immediate result the moment one begins intensifying this search. It may take years, it may take more than one lifetime to find the soul. But, it is also true that one cannot implement Integral Education if one has not at least started the search for the soul in oneself.

To be able to help students to discover their innermost self, teachers have to provide an environment in the classroom conducive to psychic growth. For this it is important to have a conscious experience of what it is like to be on this quest. Living the search ourselves, gives us the strength and the wisdom needed for implementing Integral Education. It helps us to provide an atmosphere where students and colleagues feel invited to look within themselves and explore the deeper meaning of life.

The second part of this workbook is primarily meant for those who want to prepare themselves in an *active* manner to facilitate Integral Education in the classroom. But it may be of interest also to parents and to those who guide others in their workplace. It mentions some of the signposts and landmarks of the inner journey as given by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. It offers guidelines that have been found helpful by the trainees of the Mirambika teachers training and by people who attended Mirambika workshops.

The exercises in this book are based on exercises The Mother gave during her Questions and Answers sessions in the Playground in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. Many of these provide a wonderful support once we are on the way. The introspective questions, worksheets and checklists have been prepared over the last twenty years in Mirambika. These worksheets

and checklists are meant to help you in clarifying and strengthening your effort.

Since the educational world has not yet recognised the significance and potential of Integral Education, one of the challenges of an integral teacher is to stay focused on its true aim and not let the work be diluted too much by forces that oppose change. Many teachers have found the exercises and introspections in this book helpful to remain focused. Hopefully these exercises will also work for you. But above all, may you be guided more and more by Their Presence.

Many wonderful people, young and old, have helped to make this book possible. Without their commitment and support this book would not have obtained its final form. I owe so much to you all and feel a deep gratitude radiating to each one of you from the depth of my being.

Neeltje Huppes  
February, 2001

*“Before Thee we bow down and implore that we may never forget,  
even for a moment, all we owe to Thee.”* —THE MOTHER

# How To Use This Book

This book was written with teachers and trainee-teachers in mind. However, the first ten chapters forming Part 1, Self-Preparation, can be used by anyone who would like to intensify the search for the psychic being. Part 2, The Integral Classroom, is specifically for teachers. It gives practical information for creating a psychic environment in integral schools. We mean by “integral” centred around the soul, as distinct from holistic education where the soul is just one of the areas of concentration.

The actual finding of one’s soul happens by an act of Grace. What we can do is to prepare ourselves for this marvellous moment so that we are ready to receive it. The Mother gave many exercises which were meant to help us to turn inward, become aware, prepare and purify the being and so make it ready.

This book is a workbook. Besides giving information and The Mother’s exercises, it intends to help you to assimilate the information through introspections, worksheets, checklists and so on. The checklists and tips are especially meant to help you to stay focused on your aim in the midst of daily life. Each human being is unique, so the worksheets can be taken as guidelines to which you may like to give a personal touch. They aim at providing you

with an experience on which you can build yourself. They are meant to create self-awareness, so that you can find out what works best for you. A book is a medium that presents a linear approach, whereas human growth is miraculously complicated, so you may want to change here and there the sequence, skip certain portions, dwell on some chapters for a long time or turn back to them later.

The chapters and exercises in this book have been arranged in such a way that they will take you deeper and deeper into yourself. During this inner journey you may want to stay with some of the chapters for a long time, till you feel ready to carry on. In case you are already a seeker and have found a way inward that satisfies you, you could still use the first part of this book to increase the strength of your own path.

Part 2, *The Integral Classroom*, is set up for individual teachers working with students, but it would be helpful to have, side by side, a weekly or fortnightly get together with a group of teachers, or the whole staff and principal of your school. This teamwork would create a stronger base for a successful implementation of psychic education in your classroom and in your school. As yet, Integral Education is implemented in isolated pockets, so an essential part of the work is to remain concentrated on the aim and strengthen the team. The innovations envisaged in Part 2 will reach a greater depth and bring about a more integral environment for the psychic to blossom, if they are carried out with active participation of all involved: management, principal, teachers, office staff, parents and students. In this way a school may radiate its presence beyond the borders of its campus.

We hope that the content of this book facilitates a process that, once started, will continue and gain in depth over the years. May this book be a close companion to you on your journey.

Part 1

Self-Preparation

*“There is an ascending evolution in nature which goes from the stone to the plant, from the plant to the animal, from the animal to man. Because man is, for the moment, the last rung at the summit of the ascending evolution, he considers himself as the final stage in this ascension and believes there can be nothing on earth superior to him. In that he is mistaken....Sri Aurobindo came upon earth to teach this truth to men. He told them that man is only a transitional being living in a mental consciousness, but with the possibility of acquiring a new consciousness, the Truth-consciousness, and capable of living a life perfectly harmonious, good and beautiful, happy and fully conscious.”<sup>1</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

# Introduction

In one of her classes at the Ashram Playground The Mother said,

*“Essentially there is but one single true reason for living: it is to know oneself. We are here to learn—to learn what we are, why we are here, and what we have to do. And if we don’t know that, our life is altogether empty—for ourselves and for others.”*<sup>1</sup>

— THE MOTHER

These powerful words of The Mother say it all. But what does she really mean when she says that the reason for living is “to know oneself”? Does it mean that one knows oneself when one has found out that one has a beautiful voice and likes to sing or that one dislikes mathematics? These things are knowledge about our surface nature, but the true knowledge about ourselves is an inner knowledge of our true eternal self. What The Mother means is that, if we really want to know ourselves and learn why we are here, we have to come in conscious contact with our soul.

Why? The soul is a spark of the Divine himself. It is our inmost self. Only the soul in us knows the truth and can help us to take decisions that are based on truth.

Our outer being (which is made up of our mind, our emotions and personality, and our body) is meant to give expression not only to the qualities of the soul but also to the decisions made by the soul.

The outer being should not be the decision taker, because it cannot see the truth. That is so because of the process of evolution. In the evolution God first created out of himself matter. But in matter his consciousness is hidden so completely that it appears to be without consciousness; it is called inconscient. Rocks belong to this most inconscient layer of the creation. Since it was God's wish to reveal himself more, plants evolved. This process went on and he unveiled himself even more in the form of animals. And then man, the thinking animal was created. Though man is the highest form of evolution till now, his body, vital and mental have still a lot of the original ignorance of matter in them. That is why these parts of ourselves cannot take the best decisions. It is only when we learn to listen to our divine centre, our psychic, that we can take decisions in harmony with our highest aim.

When we are in contact with our psychic centre we experience the world in a different way: everything becomes more beautiful, we stop making judgements, we see the deep harmony that exists in spite of outer appearances and we spread loving goodwill and harmony ourselves. We realise that it is important to make our body, vital and mind strong and pure, supple and open, so that they can express the psychic element in us as perfectly as possible, without distortions.

But one does not find the soul just like that. Usually a long preparation is necessary. To prepare ourselves for the discovery of the psychic being is a beautiful journey, but it does need effort and determination on our part. We have to make a repeated effort to start living within and to create inside ourselves an environment where the psychic can come to the front. We need determination because our mind, our vital and our body have formed habits and preferences that they will not give up easily. God does not impose himself, but is ever present and ever ready to help us. Similarly the psychic, our divine centre, does not impose itself. It has to be invited constantly. We



invite it by sincerely wanting to know its truth, by becoming quiet and pure enough to hear its silent voice and by choosing to follow it.

Besides the fact that only the soul in us can know the truth and guide us, there is one more good reason to start our inner journey. "We are on earth to progress," says The Mother. This is the reason for taking birth after birth, because our psychic can only make progress here on earth when it takes on a human body. Today the importance of making progress has a new dimension thanks to the marvelous work done by The Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo has said that in the next step of the evolution the Supramental consciousness will reign on earth. The Supramental consciousness is also called the Truth consciousness. To be able to be part of the Supramental creation our psychic being will have to be continuously in front. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo devoted their whole life to bring this new consciousness down in the earth atmosphere. On 29th February 1956 it came down. Years later The Mother declared that the Supramental consciousness was sufficiently established on earth and that the New World that would be able to express this consciousness was born. She invited everybody who wanted to become part of this new creation to prepare themselves for it in all sincerity. Knowing this, you can understand how important it is for students who have a whole new life in front of them, that teachers are able to make them aware of the existence of the world within themselves and that we help them to discover and remain in contact with their psychic being. Is this not giving an added meaning and a new urgency for going on an inner quest ourselves? We can only help our students, our children well, if we ourselves have consciously begun and experienced the search for our psychic centre.

This search and discovery will give true meaning to our lives. It is the task of teachers in integral schools to create an environment that helps students to find the deeper aim of their lives.

When we have started ourselves to look and live within we discover a new dimension in our life that extends itself to our work and makes it more beautiful. Real integral education is to create a classroom environment where concern for the deepest, truest part in the students is consciously integrated in every aspect of the teaching-learning process that we facilitate.

### THE GREAT OPPORTUNITY

*“In the whole manifestation there is an infinite Grace constantly at work to bring the world out of the misery, the obscurity and the stupidity in which it lies. From all time this Grace has been at work, unremitting in its effort, and how many thousands of years were necessary for this world to awaken to the need for something greater, more true, more beautiful.”*<sup>2</sup> — THE MOTHER

*“People sleep, they forget, they take life easy—they forget, forget all the time....But if we could remember...that we are at an exceptional hour, a unique time, that we have this immense good fortune, this invaluable privilege of being present at the birth of a new world, we could easily get rid of everything that impedes and hinders our progress.*

*So, the most important thing, it seems, is to remember this fact; even when one doesn't have the tangible experience, to have the certainty of it and faith in it; to remember always, to recall it constantly, to go to sleep with this idea, to wake up with this perception; to do all that one does with this great truth as the background, as a constant support, this great truth that we are witnessing the birth of a new world.*

*We can participate in it, we can become this new world. And truly, when one has such a marvellous opportunity, one should be ready to give up everything for its sake.”*<sup>3</sup> — THE MOTHER

Are you ready for an inner discovery? Let's get to work!

# The Great Discovery

The first work to be done is to have a closer look at ourselves. We live day in and day out, but how well do we know who we are? Does this seem to be a strange question to you? Probably yes, at least if you define yourself only by the body you live in, the relationships you have, the work you do. But what is meant here is your real, inner self—your psychic being, the divine in you. We talked about “the ignorance” in the previous chapter. It is due to this ignorance in our surface awareness that the psychic is hidden from us. So it takes effort to become really aware of the psychic being, it takes effort to regularly look for it inside ourselves, it takes effort to live within constantly. This chapter is written to help you decide if you really want to start this effort of preparing yourself for the psychic discovery .

“Is it then really so important to go in search of my psychic?” you may ask. Here is, in short, a description of the different parts of our being. It may help you to look at yourself with more clarity.

There are three main parts: each human being has an outer nature, an inner nature and an innermost core. The outer nature is made up of the physical, the vital and the mental nature. It is everything in you that is visible on the surface for others. Through your outer nature you deal with your surroundings. All that you

see, hear, taste, smell, touch comes to you through the outer nature. All your actions, your interactions and communications with others belong to it. Reading this book, cooking a nice dish, having a good conversation with a few friends, it all belongs to, is done by your outer nature.

Next comes the inner nature. It is everything in you that is going on behind the scene, that is not visible to others and often not even to yourself. Here also there are three main parts. There is an inner mental, inner vital and inner physical. For example, a noble character typically comes from special qualities in the inner vital. Some people are afraid of dogs, others love them. The outer vital being notices and expresses the fear or love for dogs, but this fear has its origin in the inner nature; you do not exactly know why it is so that you love or fear them.

Lastly, there is our core, our central being. This has two main parts: the Self and the soul. The Self, also called Atman, is immortal and remains the same through all our lives. You can contact it just above the head. Then there is the psychic which you can find behind the heart. The Mother mentions in one of her *Playground* talks that each human being is unique and that each one has a role to fulfil. The uniqueness is in our psychic being and it can express itself in the world through some special qualities of our inner and outer nature. These qualities may change or may be perfected from birth to birth, but our essence remains always the same.

The psychic is often called the soul; it is your divine centre. The psychic is constantly in touch with the Divine. It is the portion in you that remains permanent and comes down again and again in a human body. From life to life the psychic can grow from a small presence behind the veil into a fully developed psychic being. You can help it grow. It does so every time *you* put in the effort to allow it to develop and manifest itself. This effort

has many facets but we can give it the common name “self-preparation”.

### **The psychic being**

Because this book is about psychic education here follows a more detailed description of the psychic being. Each one of us has at the centre of our being a spark of the Divine Consciousness; this is what is called the soul. This core is permanent, it generally enters the body at birth. After it has entered the body it gathers around itself elements for the development of a psychic consciousness. In this way, slowly, around the soul, grows a psychic presence. This presence is the beginning of a psychic individuality. Over many lives this psychic presence can grow into a psychic being. There comes a moment when the psychic being is so well formed that it expresses an individual and independent Divine Consciousness. Thus each psychic being is unique and expresses a unique part of the individual Divine. Another way to put this is to say, that the psychic being is the part in you that expresses the Divine Truth in a unique way.

The role of the psychic being is to support the evolution or the unveiling of the Divine Consciousness on earth, so that one day there will be a Divine Life possible right here on earth. The psychic being is the link between your outer nature, (mind, vital and physical) and your highest Self or Atman. The psychic aspires that the inner and outer nature may open themselves to the Divine so that they can express the divine will here on earth. The outer nature which is full of ignorance has to be prepared for this, and this process is called purification. Sri Aurobindo in his letters to sadhaks and The Mother in her Playground Talks have often spoken about purification. You will read more about it in the two chapters about Purification .

The psychic aspires to feel the presence and power of the Divine within the heart, it really wills that your whole being becomes one with the Divine. It aspires for contact with the higher consciousness so that this may penetrate your outer and inner nature. This process is called unification, and this is discussed in the chapter called Unification .

Then there is what Sri Aurobindo calls the transformation of your mind, life and body. This individual psychic being is able to make a beginning with the transformation of your outer mental, outer vital and outer physical nature into divine mental, divine vital and divine physical nature. This divine nature will become an instrument for expression in the world. The full transformation can happen only after the psychic being is fully developed.

### **The psychic influence**

When the psychic is in the foreground you will always act from your highest truth, the divine truth. This will not make you unconcerned about the miseries of human life, but you will not be effected by them. So, if you feel that life is often painful and hurtful, because of the surface ignorance, there is a noble way to come to terms with this: to go in search of your psychic being. If you yearn to become (more) perfect in all your actions, if you want to grow in divine consciousness, the mind and the vital will not take you far. It is the psychic influence that creates perfection.

There is still more: if there is an urge in you to help in establishing a divine life on earth—the new world of which The Mother speaks—then the best and most effective way to help is to start living within, to aspire to find your psychic and to aspire for its development, so that it becomes a full being. Remember: the innermost centre, the soul, remains the same through all your lives, but the psychic being grows around this from a small presence to a real

being over many lives. A fully developed psychic being is a conscious instrument of the Divine Will, says The Mother. It is in direct touch with the Divine Truth. Naturally, this is needed to live a divine life on earth.

For parents and teachers there is another important reason to go in search of the soul. Very young children often have a natural contact with their soul. If you want to help growing children remain in contact with their psychic being or to find it back when they have lost it, it will be of great help if you have gone through this process consciously yourself. This conscious experience will enable you to be a true helper and guide: only if you have had contact with your psychic consciousness can you be sensitive to it in others. Psychic education and psychic parenting have to start with yourself.

### **Time for reflection**

The first step is to intensely want to find your true self.


To come to know your true self asks for effort and perseverance on your part. It needs a strong motivation to keep up this commitment, because in the inner worlds you will have to travel all by yourself. Before starting, it may be good to ask yourself if you are ready to make daily an effort to set time apart for this self-discovery and self-preparation, so that the psychic presence can become stronger in you. If the answer is “yes” the rest of the book is there to support you in this process.

#### WORKSHEET

In this book you will find a number of worksheets. They are meant to make you more conscious of your inner processes and so help you in your self-preparation.



## WORKSHEET: REFLECTION



You may like to go through the following questions before you take a decision. You can find your answers in various ways: you may like to try to hear the answers from within. Another way is to answer some of these questions with the help of your reasoning mind. A third way is to ignore these questions and just to sit quietly with yourself in a place where you feel safe and comfortable and see what comes up from within when you ask yourself: "Am I ready to devote myself to a new adventure of self-discovery?"

- When, where or from what do I find maximum guidance in my life?
- A moment or a situation in my life of great learning was...
- A most valuable moment in my life was...
- The feeling associated with that moment is...
- What brings me closer to my inner nature?
- The best present I can give to myself is...
- Something I would like to develop in myself is...
- What is it in me that wants a deeper consciousness?

Some more practical questions:

- How much effort am I willing to put into this journey of self-discovery?



- Am I ready to spend time on it every day?
- Where can I find a quiet place all by myself?
- How do I make sure that during this time I will not be disturbed by others?



You may think it is difficult, you may wonder if you can keep up the effort. Remember that each long journey starts with the first step. If you remain static, your progress will be slow. Sri Aurobindo writes in *The Human Cycle*: "...a declaration of impossibility is a sign of ignorance and weakness." A beginning can always be made: "For by the doing the difficulty will be solved."

### OUR GREATER POSSIBILITIES

*"Man lives mostly in his surface mind, life and body, but there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he has to awake.... He has to learn to live in his soul and purify and orientate by its drive towards the Truth the rest of the nature."*<sup>1</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

*"Follow your soul and not your mind, your soul that answers to the Truth, not your mind that leaps at appearances. Trust the Divine Power and she will free the godlike elements in you and shape all into an expression of Divine Nature."*<sup>2</sup>

—SRI AUROBINDO

## Self-Observation

Now that you have some idea of what it is all about, the first question is how you will strengthen your decision. Each human being is a learner throughout life, learning from mistakes and achievements. Each one of us is born with weaknesses and strengths. Most likely in your life you have experienced that you sometimes took a decision but later did not keep it up. Say, you decided that you would do some exercises every day to keep your body fit. You really wanted to do it and yet, after some days, you started missing once and after a few weeks you stopped more or less completely. How is that possible? Here is The Mother's answer:

*“If you look sincerely, you will see that you have decided that it will be like this, and then, beneath there is something which has not decided at all and is waiting for the second of hesitation in order to rush forward.... But if you really want it, nothing in the world can prevent you from doing what you want. It is because one doesn't know how to will it. It is because one is divided in one's will. If you are not divided in your will, I say that nothing, nobody in the world can make you change your will.”<sup>1</sup>*

If you want to strengthen your will right now, turn to page 70.

— THE MOTHER

In this passage The Mother points out two movements: the process of self-observation of the different parts of the being and the role of the will for self control.

This chapter is about self-observation. You may wonder what self-observation has to do with the psychic and whether it is really so important for psychic progress. The answer lies in the previous quotation: none of us is made of one piece. In fact, the mental, vital and physical are made of many layers that are often not in harmony with each other. Time and again the outer layers do not co-operate with the inner layers. It gives you the feeling of being divided inside yourself: one part decides this, another part does something else. Through self-observation you will become more aware of your inner layers and open the way for the psychic discovery. Through self-observation you can begin to bring harmony inside yourself.

Self-observation is a journey in the inner worlds. It is similar to travelling by train. When you travel you look out through the window and observe the landscape, the people and their habits. When you go on an inner journey you look within, you observe yourself, your thoughts, your feelings, your habits and slowly you journey deeper and deeper inside yourself. Gradually you become familiar with your inner landscape; you come to know yourself and through this self-knowledge it is within your reach to change the quality of your life.

One of the beautiful essays The Mother wrote, is “The Science of Living”. What does she mean with “the science of living”? She has given this essay a sub-title: “To know oneself and to control oneself.” Once, during one of her classes in the Playground, a student asked The Mother to explain in more detail what she meant by “to know oneself and to control oneself”. Here is her answer:

*“This means to be conscious of one’s inner truth, conscious of the*

*different parts of one's being and their respective functions. You must know why you do this, why you do that; you must know your thoughts, know your feelings, all your activities, all your movements, of what you are capable, etc. And to know oneself is not enough: this knowledge must bring a conscious control.”<sup>2</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

In this quotation the journey of self-observation starts from the inner world, from the goal you want to reach, that is: becoming conscious of your inner truth, your psychic being. It continues by saying that self-observation can lead you to self-knowledge. This self-knowledge of the different parts of your being enables you to control yourself, if you are willing to make the effort.

Why self-control? Self-control is one of processes that makes you confidently go ahead and can help in removing obstacles that prevent the psychic to come to the front. Do you see how self-observation leads to self-preparation and self-control? Let self-observation become one of your daily habits. Let it become as natural and self-evident to you as eating. Here is a small and humorous exercise to become more familiar with it.

#### WORKSHEET: SELF-OBSERVATION

Find out how much you are aware of your own nature.

Just enjoy yourself answering the following questions.

Are you

- More a leader or a follower?
- More like the past, the present or the future?



- More like a clothes line or the string of a kite?
- More physical, vital or mental?
- More a giver or a receiver?
- More like a table tennis ball or a bat?
- More like a mountain or a valley?
- More like the packing or the content of the parcel?
- More like a cloud or the earth?



Was it easy for you to answer these questions? Did some of these questions made you see something new about yourself? You may like to make more of such questions for yourself or make new ones together with your friends.

## NEW HABIT OF SELF-OBSERVATION

This book will show you some new habits that are good to develop if you are serious about preparing yourself for contact with your psychic being. Just now you have started the first one: the habit of self-observation.

A habit is something that you do often and routinely. If you want to make something a habit you must start to practice regularly. In the beginning that takes effort. Once it has become a habit you start doing it more or less automatically. A new habit needs about 40 days to really become a regular habit. So if you do it for 40 days *without fail* you should have no difficulty in keeping it up.

Here are some tips to help you to become regular in the habit of self observation.

- Make a routine that enables you to practice daily.
- Set at least 20 minutes apart for this every day.
- Fix a certain time for your daily practice.
- Choose a quiet place for your practice.
- If you know beforehand that on a particular day you cannot do your exercise at the fixed time, schedule another time for that day.
- If a day was so full of unexpected happenings that you could not do it, still do not go to sleep before practising your self-observation.
- Give yourself reminders for keeping it up. For example: put a message on your mirror saying something like “All well in the inner worlds today?” You can also attach a note to your key chain. Be creative and find out how you can remind yourself best.

### EXERCISE FOR SELF-OBSERVATION

Self-observation is done in all the parts of the being. The Mother says that for a good self-awareness it is important to know where the “I” is located. What does she mean by that? Here is an example. When you say to a friend, “I love to go for long walks in a beautiful surrounding”, your “I” is most likely located in your vital. In this sentence there is enthusiasm, energy and eagerness, and these all belong to the vital.

Now say to yourself, “I think that taking long walks is good for health.” Here your “I” is located in the mind. This sentence has no enthusiasm, there is only the abstract idea in you that knows that walking is good for you. But you may do the walk

more out of duty, without pleasure; you do it because you know it is good for you. It is the mind that makes you go for a walk.

Your consciousness can connect itself with your outer or your inner body, your outer or inner vital, your outer or inner mental, with your psychic or with the Atman. If you want to observe yourself properly it is good to know where your “I” consciousness is located. For getting familiar with this The Mother recommends an exercise that makes you conscious of how you can shift around the location of the “I” in your being. She talks about this in one of her Playground talks:

*“...one succeeds in entering into contact with something, something which gives you the impression of being—”Yes, that’s ‘myself’”. And this something I can move around, I can move it from my body to my vital, to my mind, I can even, if I am very... how to put it?... very practised in moving it, I can move it into other people, and it’s in this way that I can identify myself with things and people.”<sup>3</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

#### WORKSHEET: “I”-Location

The following exercise will make you aware that in daily life you are all the time shifting the “I” around in your being.

Here are some sentences. Read them slowly one by one. Then observe for each sentence in which part of your being your “I” is located, while you are saying this to yourself.

- My feet are paining, let’s stop walking.
- I love roses, they are my favourite flowers.





- I remember a lot about this subject.
- That stupid remark makes me angry.
- I inhale the fresh morning air.
- Feeling The Mother's presence fills me with gratitude.
- I think this is the right answer.
- This wonderful music transports me into another world.

Once you are regular and familiar with observing yourself at a particular time of the day, you can begin doing the self-observation at any time of the day. There will come a time when you will be able to do it throughout the day, no matter if you are alone or with others, working or eating. When you do this during the day, you can first concentrate just on one aspect; for instance observe what you say during a day. Observe the tone of your voice and the words you are using. This is an excellent exercise in self-observation. Does your voice sound friendly or irritated? Are the remarks you make inviting or closed? Observe if you really try to understand and answer the one you are talking with or are you pushing your own ideas. All this will give you a lot of information about yourself. If you are a teacher this is even more important, because children are very sensitive to the words and tone a teacher is using. Many of us may still remember a very hurtful remark that a teacher made and that left a deep scar. In the same way, a teacher who said something comforting in a warm tone just at the time we needed it, makes us still grateful.



Before we go to the next exercise here is some more information on the “I”.

Your “I” is not always in contact with just one part of you. One part can be in the foreground, while another part may cooperate or rebel from behind.

If you are somewhat conscious you have most likely experienced that the different parts of your being are not always wanting to do the same thing; one part wants this, another part that. Here is an example: it is early morning and you would like to sleep longer, because you went to bed late the night before. But if you stay in bed, you know that you won’t finish a written assignment that you have to submit that same day. Then inside yourself a small discussion starts. If you are aware, you can follow the argument. The part that wants to sleep tries to think up reasons for not submitting the work. The part that knows you have to get up tells you it is better to get up. Which part will win? When you become more aware of yourself, you start recognising that such situations and dialogues happen all the time in you, throughout the day. If the self-observation has made you aware of the dialogues of these different parts, you can make a conscious choice about which part will win. This will give you progressively the feeling that it is possible to be in charge and that you can influence your life to grow more in harmony with your highest aim.

### EXERCISE FOR SELF-OBSERVATION

Here are some suggestions that may help you to do your self-observation. Try them out. When you are more familiar with observing yourself you may find new variations that suit you better. Experiment a little, so that you find out what works best for you. Only do not experiment with skipping your practice!

Do this exercise when you have at least 20 to 30 minutes for yourself.



- Sit alone in a quiet place where you can feel relaxed.
- Make yourself comfortable.
- You may close your eyes, or you can let them rest on an object in front of you.
- To shift your concentration inside you may like to watch your breathing. Feel how you can go deeper within by sinking into the space left by the outgoing breath.
- Start observing what is going on inside yourself.
- Observe your thoughts. Observe your feelings. Does your body give any signals? Watch this as on a screen.
- Try not to interfere. Just allow everything to come and go.

After some time you may like to do the worksheet.

#### WORKSHEET: SELF-OBSERVATION

- What is going on inside you?
  - Is it easy to observe?
  - If not, what makes it difficult?
  - Do you get so involved that you stop observing?
- If so, only at certain moments or constantly?
- Does something get in the way and block your observation? If so, what causes the block?
- Are you able to prompt yourself to become an observer again?



Now start with locating your consciousness in your **head**.

- Observe your thoughts.
- Are certain thoughts coming back more often than others?
- Are these positive or negative thoughts?
- Are they about you, or about others?
- Are they about things or happenings?
- Are they about the past, the present or the future?
- Do you start talking with your thoughts?
- Do feelings come up with certain thoughts?



Now locate your consciousness in your **heart**.

- Observe your feelings.
- Are most of these feelings about yourself?
- Are most of these feelings about others?
- What kind of feelings are in the foreground: irritation, happiness, jealousy, gratitude, etc?
- Do some of these feelings give rise to certain thoughts in you?
- Do you start a dialogue with some of your feelings?
- Do your thoughts have an influence on your feelings?

- Do certain feelings bring back certain memories?



Now locate the consciousness in your **body**.

- Become aware of how your body feels.
- Often your body is roped in by the mind or the vital, which make your body do certain things, like tensing muscles, making unconscious movements, etc. Can you spot any of these?
- Observe your muscles.
- Are they all relaxed?
- Are your shoulders relaxed?
- How relaxed are your arms and hands?
- Are the muscles of your neck, your jaws relaxed?
- What about the muscles in your abdomen?
- How relaxed are your legs?
- Do certain words or thoughts make you tense some muscles? Where?
- Do certain feelings make you tense some muscles? Where?
- Does your heartbeat change with certain words or feelings?
- Does your breathing change with certain words or feelings?

Self-observation leads to self-awareness. This will help you to grow consciously in the direction of your highest aim. After some weeks you will experience that your observation becomes more detailed. You will observe that very often more than one part is involved, and how especially the vital tries to take the mind along for its own purposes.

Let's take one more time the sentence, "Taking long walks is good for health". You can say this also with a lot of enthusiasm! In that case it is not just the mind, but the mind supported by the vital. You will say this with enthusiasm when you and a few friends are planning an outing and you are full of energy. There can also be a situation where you can say, "Talking long walks is good for health" with a deep sigh. The sigh is caused by the vital that wants to see a video and is not at all supporting the idea of going for a healthy walk.

### TIPS

- Be careful not to put yourself in a knot, such as "I will never come out of this." Or, "Poor me, nobody understands me." You can *notice* such thoughts or feelings, but do not *believe* them. When this happens try to locate your consciousness in another part of yourself. Try to experience how you can *choose* to connect with a dark or with a light part in yourself.
- Do not start plainly criticising or judging yourself, like "Oh, again I became angry, I am really a most stupid person." If you find a fault with yourself, do not stop there but look straightaway for a solution. Just judging yourself is not helpful, it hardens the situation. Only observe that criticism is happening but

do not give importance to it. Remember that encouragement is much more effective in making you progress.

- It is best to observe yourself as you would observe a child playing in a park, in an open and relaxed manner.

With self-observation you have started the **Science of Living**. It is an inner exploration. It is an adventure that will make you more aware of your outer nature. It will also lead you to the discovery of your inner worlds. It is the beginning of a long journey. But this journey has a very beautiful goal: discovering the living truth of your psychic being.

There is a lot of work to do. You will observe your outer nature and help it to be purified, so that it can be at the service of your psychic even if this is still behind the veil. You will discover your inner and innermost being and allow it to actively participate in your daily life. Then, in a later stage, there is the work of unification. The first stage of unification is the centering of the mind, vital and physical around your psychic being.

The next chapter will tell you more about the search for the psychic being.

## THE FIRST STEPS IN THE SCIENCE OF LIVING

- Give yourself the luxury of spending at least 20 minutes a day all by yourself for self-observation.
- Help yourself to keep up your effort by posting reminders on your mirror or any other place that you are likely to see during the day.
- Look for other ways to encourage yourself to keep it up.

- Begin observing yourself also during daily activities.
- Don't judge or criticise yourself whenever some weaknesses in you show up. Do not suppress them. Live with them while trying to overcome them. Remember, nobody is without them.
- Try to be understanding to yourself, but be understanding to others as well. They have their difficulties and may be working hard to overcome them.
- When you become more aware of your strengths and your qualities, nurture them to greater perfection. Remember, everyone has something unique to share.

#### THE INSTRUMENTS OF MANIFESTATION

*“There are two things to be considered: consciousness and the instruments through which consciousness manifests. Let us take the instruments: there is the mental being which produces thoughts, the emotional being which produces feeling, the vital being which produces the power of action and the physical being that acts.”<sup>4</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

*“If you want a more swift and visible progress, it can only be by bringing your psychic to the front through a constant self-offering.”<sup>5</sup>*

— SRI AUROBINDO

The Mother talking to a small group of teachers:

*“And if you could find, each one of you, your psychic and unite with it, all the problems would be solved. The psychic being is the representative of the Divine in the human being. That's it, you see—the Divine is not something remote and inaccessible. The Divine is in you but you are not fully conscious of it.... it acts now as an influ-*

*ence rather than as a Presence. It should be a conscious Presence, you should be able at each moment to ask yourself what is... how... how the Divine sees. It is like that: first how the Divine sees, and then how the Divine wills, and then how the Divine acts. And you need not go into inaccessible regions, it is right here. Only, for the moment, all the old habits and the general unconsciousness put a kind of covering which prevents us from seeing and feeling. You must... you must lift, you must lift that up.”<sup>6</sup> — THE MOTHER*



## In Search of the Soul

How to start the search for the psychic being? We caution you beforehand, it may take years to have the experience of a complete discovery. But each time you go in search and open yourself to the innermost reality, you will receive something from there. Something that is so precious that it will slowly change the quality of your life. In addition to this, the innermost reality becomes more and more concrete to you and becomes a living fact. Gradually the inner life becomes such a concrete reality, that it provides you with a solid base on which you can build your whole life. Every time you contact this base you feel enveloped with something precious, something that gives a beautiful and truly new meaning to your life.

The goal may not be easy to reach. There are many interesting stories of the ups and downs of those who started out in quest of a precious object. Your journey is in the inner worlds and there too you may sometimes meet hardships. But, The Mother says that every sincere call for help is answered! If you start with sincerity, you may trust that on the way you will be given enough drops of the Truth to feel protected and uplifted.

Here are two quotations of The Mother. In the first one she expresses why it is important to go in search of the psychic being. In the second one she explains why it will be a long journey.

*“[The psychic being] is in each of you the deep inner being which you have to find in order that you may come in contact with the Divine in you. It is the intermediary between the Divine Consciousness and your external consciousness; it is the builder of the inner life, it is that which manifests in the outer nature the order and rule of the Divine Will.”*<sup>1</sup>

—THE MOTHER

*“The outer being is like a crust. In ordinary people the crust is so hard and thick that they are not conscious of the Divine within them. If once, even for a moment only, the inner being has said, “I am here and I am yours”, then it is as though a bridge has been built and little by little the crust becomes thinner and thinner until the two parts are wholly joined and the inner and the outer become one.”*<sup>2</sup>

— THE MOTHER

By now you must have experienced the crust and found out that, while observing yourself, you meet very regularly your mental, vital and physical nature, but hardly at all your psychic being. Why is it so difficult to experience the psychic? You most likely know the answer already, because we talked about it in one of the previous chapters, when we explained how the outer being is still full of ignorance. It is this ignorance that makes the outer being ‘like a crust’. There is another reason why it is difficult to discover the psychic: the psychic being has no demands, it has no desires, it is quiet, whereas the mental and the vital nature are constantly pressing their demands. They ask for attention all the time. Especially the vital is almost never satisfied. It always makes you crave for more possessions, for more attention from friends;

in short for more outer contentment. The psychic has no demands and is patient. What the psychic does, though, is to put, behind the surface, a gentle pressure on the outer nature to open itself to the Divine, but it does that without any show, without asking for any conditions. That is why you must make an effort to find it and why you must really *want* to find it.

### **Introspective exercises**

The Mother has given several introspective exercises to help the process of discovering the psychic being. They are contemplative and inward-looking; they are exercises in the sense that they should be repeated regularly. This repetition is needed to open the way and clear the path to the psychic being. It is like the hard work needed when you would try to enter a virgin forest.

Before starting any introspection, prepare yourself. Gather all the strands of your being; centre yourself and shift your focus inwards. Concentration on your breath may help you to turn within.

### INTROSPECTIVE EXERCISE

Here is a preparatory exercise for finding the psychic.

A question was put to The Mother: “How to have the experience of the psychic?” The Mother’s answer:

*“To go within yourself, that is the first step.*

*And then, once you have succeeded in going within yourself deeply enough to feel the reality of that which is within,*



*to widen yourself progressively, systematically, to become as vast as the universe and lose the sense of limitation. These are the first two preparatory movements. And these two things must be done in the greatest possible calm, peace and tranquillity. This tranquillity brings about silence in the mind and stillness in the vital.*"<sup>3</sup>

— THE MOTHER

This silence in the mind and stillness in the vital are needed to discover the psychic because it is quietly present deep within.

If you want straight away some exercises that will help you to quieten the mind and the vital, you can turn to these exercises in the next chapter. In this chapter we continue to concentrate on the discovery of the psychic presence.

Besides doing these introspective exercises as calmly and peacefully as possible, the effect will be more beneficial if you do them regularly. Do not give up! It is best when this search for the psychic becomes a daily habit. Here is The Mother's advice:

*"This effort, this attempt must be renewed very regularly, persistently. And after a certain lapse of time, which may be longer or shorter, you begin to perceive a reality that is different from the reality perceived in the ordinary, external consciousness.*

*By the action of the Grace, the veil may suddenly be rent from within, and at once you can enter the true truth; but even when that happens, in order to obtain the full value and full effect of the experience, you must maintain yourself in a state of inner receptivity, and to do that, it is indispensable for you to go within each day.*"<sup>4</sup>

— THE MOTHER

Because it is not easy to find the psychic, the question of how to find it was asked several times to The Mother. Here are two of

her answers; one of 1955 and one of 1956.

Question: “How to find the psychic?”

*“To sit in meditation before a closed door, as though it were a heavy door of bronze—and one sits in front of it with the will that it may open—and so the whole concentration, the whole aspiration is gathered into a beam and pushes, pushes, pushes against this door, and pushes more and more with an increasing energy until all of a sudden it bursts open, and one enters... And this is a very concrete and very powerful way of entering into contact with one’s psychic being.”<sup>5</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

The Mother suggests that you may like to use a ‘key’.

Question: “How to find the light within?”


*“You must find the key... It is not a joke, it is very serious. You must sit down in front of the door and then concentrate until you have found the key or the word or the power to open it.*

*If one doesn’t try, it doesn’t open by itself. Perhaps after thousands of years, but you want to do it immediately—so? To do it immediately, you must sit down obstinately before the door until you have found the means. It may be a key, it may be a word, it may be a force, it may be anything at all, and you remain there before the door until it opens. And you do not think of anything else. Only of the door.”<sup>6</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

## INTROSPECTIVE WORKSHEET

Some helpful suggestions for finding your personal key

- 
- When you close your eyes and go within, do you often spontaneously see an image? Or do you hear something? Or do you see a movement, like clouds sailing in the sky?
  - Whatever comes spontaneously and often could be your key.

It may help to know your natural observation mode. Here is a way to find that out:

- When you walk in a street what do you notice spontaneously:
  - the things you see
  - the sounds you hear
  - the movement of the cars, cycles, people, trees etc.
- In case you normally notice things by seeing, your inner key is most likely an image.
- If, in daily life, you notice things by hearing, your inner key is most likely a sound.
- If you notice things through movement, your inner key is most likely a movement.
- If none of these is dominant in you, your key may change from time to time.

The Mother has also given a more mental road to the discovery of the psychic. Reflection on the following passage may be helpful:

*“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.”<sup>7</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

It may take time to find your personal key. It may be the visualisation of a beam of light, a diamond, the imagery of the movement of a drop of water that slowly hollows the hard rock of the outer being, repeating a mantra inside yourself, etc.

After you have found your key it still may take time before you receive a first glimmer of the psychic, and you may have to repeat the exercise many times, but The Mother says, that each time your search will bring you closer to the truth of your being.

If, after a length of time, you do not have some result, you may sometimes wonder if you are on the right path.

Here is a passage that may give you encouragement and inspiration when such a moment occurs.

*“The Divine Presence is in you. It is in you. The Presence is there. You want the appreciation of others to get strength—you will never get it. The strength is in you. If you want, you can aspire for what seems to you the supreme goal, supreme light, supreme knowledge, supreme love. But it is in you—otherwise you would never be able to contact it. If you go deep enough inside you, you will find it there, like a flame that is always burning straight up.”<sup>8</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

You must have experienced that for the discovery of the psychic you have to go deep, really deep within. After you have perceived the gentle beauty of the psychic presence, the next step is to remain aware of this presence while going through your daily actions. After this comes the stage of learning to obey the innermost presence, so that more and more of your daily actions are guided by the psychic and have the psychic touch. Do not expect quick results, because it always takes time to acquire new habits, but if you are open and trust that a new way of life can blossom in you, you may be in for beautiful experiences.

### NEW HABIT

It is part of psychic living to be receptive to the Divine presence and to remain in contact with the inner world while living in the outer world.

This asks for living in a concentrated way. It means that you must be concentrated and connected within, while you observe yourself going through your daily actions. In the beginning you feel yourself living on two planes at the same time. Later the inner one becomes the leading one and directs the actions of the outer plane.

A time comes when you feel uncomfortable whenever you lose your inner connection. As soon as you feel this, you must try to re-open the inner connection. Sometimes this is difficult because you are in the midst of an action that takes all your attention. Try, as soon as this action is finished, to give yourself a few minutes to go within and re-establish the contact.



## TIPS

When you learn something new it will become only a habit when you practise it regularly:

- In the beginning it is best to give yourself humorous reminders to keep up the practice.
- You could put a tiny sticker on your watch to remind yourself.
- You could place this workbook right on your desk or in the centre on your bed before leaving your room, so that you have to notice it when you come home.
- You can also give yourself inner reminders. For example, many people are able to wake up exactly at the time they decide to wake up before going to sleep. In the same way you can tell yourself to be reminded to concentrate within exactly at say 10 am. It helps, when deciding the time, if you also visualise the place where you will be at that time.
- If you go through this book with a few colleagues decide on ways to remind each other.

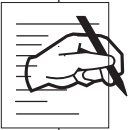
### **Keep up the work on the outer being**

You may ask, once I concentrate on the psychic discovery, can I forget the outer being and leave it as it is?

You cannot just forget about your outer being once you have started the search of your psychic being. Your outer and inner mind, vital and body still need a lot of attention. It is your outer nature that creates obstacles and stands in the way when you want to be in contact with the psychic. In your outer nature there are many things that contradict the truth of your innermost nature. So you have to continue to observe yourself constantly, so

that you recognise what stands in the way. You have not only to observe the outer nature but also teach it not to go against your psychic being, not to stand in the way, so that your psychic can come to the foreground. That is the first work. The next work is to become master of the obstacles. That is the self-control The Mother talks about when she says that the science of living is “to know oneself and control oneself”. There is more about removing obstacles and self-control in the next chapter.

#### WORKSHEET: INSPIRATION



- What fans your aspiration?
- In a difficult situation, how do you get back again to a deeper level of consciousness?
  - How do you overcome feelings of hurt?
  - What makes you calm and open to the inner silence? Repeating a mantra, looking at a photograph, listening to meditative music, anything else?
  - What gives you (inner) joy?
  - How do you keep in touch with THAT?
  - What is your telephone number of the Divine?

#### THE FIRST STEPS IN THE PSYCHIC DISCOVERY

- Daily set time apart for yourself in a peaceful place.
- During this time go within as deep as you can, gradually going deeper and deeper.

- Look for the inner peace in a state of inner receptivity.
- Try to find your personal key that may open the door to the psychic, the Divine in you.
- Give yourself reminders to keep up the effort steadily.
- Be on the outlook for small positive changes in the quality of your life.
- Pay extra attention to such changes and let these help you to advance with greater trust and enthusiasm.

### THE URGENCY

*"...this harmonisation and organisation of the being around the divine Centre can only be done in a physical body and on earth. That is truly the essential and original reason for physical life. For, as soon as you are no longer in a physical body, you can no longer do it at all.... And yet, human beings come into a physical body without knowing why, most of them go through life without knowing why, they leave their body without knowing why, and they have to begin the same thing all over again, indefinitely, until one day, someone comes along and tells them, "Be careful! you know, there is a purpose to this. You are here for this work, don't miss your opportunity!"<sup>9</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

The result of contact with the psychic being:

*"...it brings with it such happiness, such confidence, such security as nothing else can give... The psychic is a steady flame that burns in you, soaring towards the Divine and carrying with it a sense of strength which breaks down all oppositions."<sup>10</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

# Purification I

## **From the outer to the inner layers of the being**

While searching for the psychic, the work on the outer layers of the being will have to go on. If you want to become conscious of yourself, if you want to know your inmost or true self, you will have to continue your self-observation. It takes effort but there will come a time that you are observant throughout the day and able to do it always and everywhere.

The self-observation that you have done till now, will have given you more clarity about ideas and habits that belong to your outer nature. You will have become more familiar with feelings and thoughts that often come up and that play an important part in your daily life. Maybe you have already understood how some of these either help or hinder the psychic discovery.

To make the path wider for the psychic you can take the next step. This next step is to combine self-observation with vigilance. What is it to be vigilant? The Mother defines it for us:

*“To be vigilant is not merely to resist what pulls you downward, but above all to be alert in order not to lose any opportunity to progress,*

*any opportunity to overcome a weakness, to resist a temptation, any opportunity to learn something, to correct something, to master something.”<sup>1</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

So to be vigilant means two things: it does mean to prevent yourself from going to a lower level of consciousness. It also means not to miss a chance for progress, by overcoming or correcting the things that can lower the consciousness.

What do these two movements imply actually? Here is an example from daily life. Many of us are teachers. There is a widespread idea among teachers that a teacher of standard V is regarded as a better teacher than a teacher of standard II. This is really a mental construction and it does not contain any truth. A teacher of standard II needs different qualities than a teacher of standard V. For instance, a teacher in standard II, who works with small children needs to be more sensitive than a teacher in standard V. This makes some of us unable to teach in standard II, whereas a teacher who has greater sensitivity for younger children can help them to open fully and express themselves! This is a gift for which the young ones will be grateful throughout life. Yet most of us never think about it in this way and go by what people generally say and want to teach in the higher classes. The Mother calls such ideas ‘preconceived ideas’ and says we must overcome them.

Think of the following situation: you have been asked to teach three classes lower than you wanted. The inner fight starts. Do you fight the feeling of wanting to seem more important? Is it right that you feel hurt by what the principal did? What do you do with the feeling of jealousy towards the person who has been asked to teach the class you wanted to teach? This creates a lot of tension in yourself. It creates tensions in your relationships with others. The inner conflict goes on: will you be able or not be able

to see that this is an opportunity for making inner progress? That this situation is an opportunity “to overcome the weakness”? That here is a chance for you to recognise your preconceived idea and see how you can build a positive concept? Will you be able “to resist a temptation” of going to complain in the principal’s office, the temptation of showing your anger to the teacher who is now teaching the class you wanted to teach?

If you decide you want to overcome a weakness (and resist a temptation) what are you to do? You make an effort to change it. The effort to change it is in the Science of Living called *purification*. This purification can be done starting from the outer layers of our being, with changing the outer nature, so that it can receive the psychic influence. You find more about this in this chapter. Purification can also be done starting from the inner layers: you go to the highest or deepest part in yourself to let the light from there influence your outer nature. This we will discuss in the next chapter.

### **Purification from the outer to the inner being**

We start with an exercise from the outer layers to the inner layers. The aim is to prepare yourself and remove the obstacles caused by the ignorance, so that the psychic can come to the foreground.

First some advice from The Mother:

*“You must never say: “I shall first purify my thought, purify my body, purify my vital and then later I shall purify my action.” That is the normal order, but it never succeeds. The effective order is to begin from the outside: “The very first thing is that I do not do it,*

*and afterwards, I desire it no longer and next I close my doors completely....” This is the true order, the order that is effective. First, not to do it. And then you will no longer desire and after that it will go out of your consciousness completely.”<sup>2</sup> — THE MOTHER*

## EXERCISE

### PURIFICATION FROM THE OUTER TO THE INNER LAYERS

We make use of the strength of the positive parts of the outer being to help us.

Here are three examples to help you to understand the process of purification.

**1.** Take a small, really small weakness in yourself.

It could be a weakness of the physical nature, like leaving your cupboard in a mess.

Next think and feel if you could change this with an action:

- When and how to clean up the cupboard.
- Decide on some (regular) action that would make sure that the cupboard does not become a mess again.

**2.** Take a weakness of the vital nature, like ignoring a person with whom you have difficulties. A starting action could be:

- Say regularly something positive or at least smile once a day to the most difficult child in your class, or the most difficult colleague in your school.
- Observe your feelings while doing this. What is needed to make your smile a true smile?
- Try to implement this.

**3.** Take a weakness of the mental nature, like thinking that you are




inferior if you don't have something, say a motorbike.

- Think of the persons you respect most and why you respect them. Is it for what they do, or is it for what they have that you respect them?
- Observe yourself. Where does this preconceived idea come from?
- What can you do to change it?

Now that you have read the examples, do a similar exercise for yourself with a small personal weakness of the physical, the vital and/or the mental nature.

For weaknesses that play an important role in your life, like losing your temper, it may help to fill up the following worksheet. Filling it up can help you to be more vigilant, so that you are not taken by surprise and do not fly into a temper so easily. This worksheet is also meant to help you to reflect on positive solutions for overcoming the weakness.

WORKSHEET: FROM WEAKNESS TO STRENGTH

- 
- What is the nature of the weakness? Describe it.
  - When and where does it occur most often?
  - How does it show itself?
  - What happens in you when you notice it?
  - Describe the main reason why you want to change it.



- Now describe the ideal situation that you want in its place.
- Decide *how* you will work on this change.
- *When and where* will you have to be extra alert so that it does not occur again.
- *What* has to change in you to bring the change about?
- What are you going to do in the moments when keeping it up seems tough?
- Sometimes being victorious may take a long time. *How long* will you continue your effort?



At the end of each day take a few minutes to review your progress. Another good way to help you to keep up your effort is to start writing a diary.

If you have succeeded in doing this so completely that the old habit does not come back, you have purified a part of yourself.

## **The negative and positive side of purification**

For changing more difficult things in yourself, you have to understand that there is always a negative and a positive side to purification. The negative side is to try, through self-observation, to first detect your weakness and then to not allow it to express itself, but at the same time make sure that you do not suppress it.

We started with this on the previous pages. The positive side is to build up in yourself the quality that is the opposite of the weakness. Building up this positive quality will help prevent the negative side from expressing itself.

Here is an example that The Mother gave in one of her talks:

*“You have a defect, for example, a tendency not to speak the truth. Now this habit of falsehood, of not seeing or not speaking the truth, you fight against it by rejecting falsehood from your consciousness and to eliminate that habit of not speaking the truth. [the negative side]... For the thing to be done, you must build in yourself the habit of perceiving and always telling the truth. [the positive side] One is negative: you reject the fault. The other is positive: you build the quality.”<sup>3</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

A good tool for eliminating the negative side and building up the positive side is ‘active inner dialogue’. Your self-observations must have shown you that a lot of talking is going on inside your head. Many people are not aware that this is so, because it goes on automatically. Active inner dialogue is very different, it is done consciously. In active inner dialogue you talk consciously to yourself or to a part of yourself, more in the way you talk to a friend. This conversation is meant to *prevent* the part you are talking to from doing something negative, or, to *encourage* a certain part of yourself to do something beneficial or noteworthy.

### NEW HABIT: ACTIVE INNER DIALOGUE

The habit of active inner dialogue will help you to keep up the work of purification. Talking consciously to the different parts in you can

help a lot to build up the positive side and eliminate the negative side. Here is more detail about how to do that.

The first step is to admit inside yourself that you did make a mistake. Most of us have learnt so well to hide mistakes that we do not even dare to admit the mistake to ourselves and often suppress it quickly. The Mother says you have first to admit your defects and then talk to them with patience, as if you talked to a child that is often naughty. The next step is to be kind, but firm to yourself about not repeating your weakness. So you have to talk to yourself in a respectful, non-criticising way, but be firm in your decision to change the defect. At the same time you must learn to talk in an encouraging way to the positive quality that is just starting to appear in you. Invite it to show itself. And lastly it is very helpful to call the Divine or The Mother and talk to her!

An example from one of the Playground talks may give you still more clarity:

*“If, by an effort of will you manage to make even a very tiny part of the being admit that “Ah, well, yes, I am mistaken, I should not be like that, and I should not do that and should not feel that, yes, it is a fault”, if you manage to make it admit this, at first, it begins by hurting you very much, but when you hold on firmly, until this is admitted, immediately it is open—it is open and strangely a flood of light enters, and then you feel so glad afterwards, so happy that you ask yourself, “Why, from what foolishness did I resist so long?”<sup>4</sup> — THE MOTHER*

Another of The Mother’s examples of active inner dialogue:

*“...thoughts cross one’s mind, violent, bad, hateful things, like that... Usually one pays no attention to it. But this is what must be caught!*

*As soon as it manifests, you must catch it like this (Mother makes a movement) with a very firm grip, and then hold it, hold it up to the light and say, “No! I don’t want you! I—don’t—want—you! I have nothing to do with this! You are going to get out of here, and you won’t return!”<sup>5</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

These examples show, firstly, how you can prevent yourself from manifesting a weakness and, secondly, how to eliminate it. The movement The Mother describes is: You notice it; you catch it; you hold it up to the Light. It is also helpful to use active inner dialogue to talk to yourself in an encouraging way to build up the positive side. In this case you could tell yourself something like this: “Come on, be kind, be gentle. You will feel better if you don’t get angry any more. Getting angry hurts yourself as much as the other. Learn to act positively, there is something good in everyone.”

#### WORKSHEET: ACTIVE AND INNER DIALOGUE

You can use active inner dialogue throughout the day.

You can use it in many ways: to prevent and eliminate a part in yourself, to encourage yourself, to convince a part in yourself to change or to manifest and so on. Go within and ask:

- What part in yourself do you need to talk to?
- What do you want to say?
- Instead of just talking, you can also write it down and put the sheet in a place where you see it often.



- Repeat it inside yourself for greater effect.
- Use humour to talk to a negative part; smilingly say something like, "Oh, is it you again. No visitors today!"
- Be firm now and then and tell the part something like, "I don't want you any more!"
- Be encouraging to any new quality that is beginning to come out. Tell it, "Don't be afraid, The Mother is always there to help and protect you."



## How to stay calm and peaceful

The work of purification sometimes brings feelings of disgust, because you never knew that there was so much that needs to be changed. Don't feel discouraged, this is common to all of us; most of us have to purify more than we expected! There are many ways in which you can make yourself harmonious and peaceful again. And peace is purity itself. Here is a variety of exercises to quieten yourself. See which one works best for you.

### EXERCISES TO BECOME CALM AND QUIET

These exercise may help you during moments when the journey of self-discovery makes you restless with all the rubbish that comes up. These exercises were all given by The Mother in her Playground talks.

Peace, come!

*“You sit quietly, to begin with; and then, instead of thinking of fifty things, you begin saying to yourself, “Peace, peace, peace, peace; peace, calm, peace.” You imagine peace and calm. You aspire, ask that it may come: “Peace, peace, calm.” And then, when something comes and touches you and acts, say quietly, like this, “Peace, peace, peace.”*<sup>6</sup> — THE MOTHER



*“You must be very simple in these things. It is as though you were learning how to call a friend: by dint of being called he comes. Well, make peace and calm your friends and call them: “Come, peace, peace, peace, peace, come!”*<sup>7</sup> — THE MOTHER

Sometimes you are shut up in a problem and find it difficult to come out of it. In such a situation the following exercise can be a great help.

Become as limitless as the ocean.

This is an exercise for widening yourself again.

*“... when you feel that you are shut up in a completely narrow and limited thought, will, consciousness, when you feel as though you were in a shell, then if you begin thinking about something very vast, as for example, the immensity of the waters of an ocean, and if really you can think of this ocean and how it stretches out far, far, far, far, in all directions, like this (Mother stretches out her arms), how, compared with you, it is so far, so far that you cannot see the other shore, you cannot reach its end anywhere, neither behind or in front, nor to the right or left... it is wide, wide, wide, wide... you think of this and then you feel that you are floating on this sea, like that, and that there are no limits....”*<sup>8</sup> — THE MOTHER

Quieten yourself through meditation

Then there is the possibility to quieten yourself through meditation. Meditation can be thinking about the Divine, it can be watching what goes on in your nature, it can be asking yourself a deep question and trying to find a deep answer. There are various forms of meditation. Find out for yourself what suits you best. Here we mention a few forms through the words of The Mother.

## MEDITATION

In the beginning it is good to set a certain time in the day apart for meditation.

A general meditation helps you to become silent. It calms a noisy outer nature that is a hindrance for reaching the deeper layers of yourself. It quietens the inner noise that stands in the way each time you want to open yourself and be receptive to the Divine.



How to meditate

Concentrate in the heart, listen attentively and be very receptive.

*“It is always better, for meditation,... to try to concentrate in a centre, the centre of aspiration, one may say, the place where the flame of aspiration burns, to gather in all the energies there, and, if possible, to obtain an attentive silence as though one wanted to listen to something extremely subtle, something that demands a complete attention, a complete concentration and total silence. And then not to move at all. Not to think, not to stir, and make that movement of opening so as to receive all that can be received....”<sup>9</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

*“If one succeeds in this, then, when everything is over, when one comes out of meditation, some time later—usually not immediately—from within the being something new emerges in the consciousness: a new understanding, a new appreciation of things, a new attitude in life—in short, a new way of being.”*<sup>10</sup> — THE MOTHER

*“For some people it is more difficult [to concentrate in the heart], it depends on one’s nature. But it is better because if you concentrate there, deeply enough, it is there that you enter into contact with the psychic for the first time; while if you concentrate in the head you have to pass later from the head to the heart to be able to identify yourself with the psychic being.”*<sup>11</sup> — THE MOTHER

The Mother explains here that for contact with the psychic being it is better to concentrate in the heart, though some find it easier to concentrate in the head. If concentrating in the heart is very unnatural for you, you may concentrate in the head, but then you will have to find later your way to the psychic being. Maybe you like to alternate your concentration according to how it feels best at that moment. Sri Aurobindo says that you can also try to do both at the same time, but that is possible only if you have a great power of concentration and are able to focus with full concentration on more than one thing at the same time.

### Meditation with a special purpose

Before you start meditating you give a purpose to your meditation. Here are a few examples:

#### Meditation that helps to create more self-awareness

*“...sit down quietly before the sky, before the sea or under the trees, whatever is possible... to understand why you live, to learn how*



*you must live, to ponder over what you want to do and what should be done, what is the best way of escaping from the ignorance and falsehood and pain in which you live.*"<sup>12</sup> — THE MOTHER

To know why one meditates gives quality to the meditation

*"I think the most important thing is to know why one meditates; this is what gives the quality of the meditation and makes it of one order or another.*

*You may meditate to open yourself to the divine Force, you may meditate to reject the ordinary consciousness, you may meditate to enter the depth of your being, you may meditate to learn how to give yourself integrally; you may meditate for all kinds of things.*"<sup>13</sup>

— THE MOTHER

Dynamic meditation

Dynamic meditation is not for making yourself quiet and peaceful. It is a meditation that is meant for making progress in a certain area of your consciousness or a part of your being.

*"I think everyone has his own mode of meditation. But if one wants the meditation to be dynamic, one must have an aspiration for progress and the meditation must be done to help and fulfil this aspiration for progress. Then it becomes dynamic.*"<sup>14</sup>

— THE MOTHER

How dynamic meditation works

You concentrate on the highest aim that you want to reach. Or on a detailed area or on a certain part in which you want to make progress. During your meditation you intensify your aspiration to make this progress. Dynamic meditation is a meditation for maximum progress; it is a transforming meditation.

After you have practised meditation in a quiet surrounding, you may take the next step, that is being concentrated within throughout the day:

*“Do not fall into the very common error of believing that you must sit in an absolutely quiet corner... in order to be able to meditate — it is not true. What is needed is to succeed in meditating under all circumstances, and I call “meditating” not emptying your head but concentrating yourself in a contemplation of the Divine....”*<sup>15</sup>

— THE MOTHER

### **What is in a toolbox?**

A tool is an instrument that helps in doing a particular work. A carpenter needs tools like hammers, chisels, saws, screwdrivers to do his carpentry work. A furniture carpenter does more specialised work and needs more tools than a carpenter who works on a building site. Similarly the work of an integral education teacher asks for a special self-preparation, so that you are able to build a psychic atmosphere in the classroom as well as in your personal life. This is not an easy task and some extra tools can help you to realise that.

The tools you are looking for are meant to help you to stay connected with your deeper inner layers, possibly your psychic being, while doing your daily activities. Such tools are meant to help you to live within. Anything can be a tool: a sound, a song, a favourite sentence of your inner dialogue, a mantra, a picture or photograph, a small object that you carry with you, an image like the rising sun, a short activity like going to see your favourite tree in the garden, clasping a key ring with The Mother’s symbol, everything that does the job for living more within.

## PREPARE YOUR TOOLBOX

- Think of an image, a sound, an object that usually helps you to feel uplifted. This could become one of the tools that helps you to live from within more constantly. A tool can be anything. The idea is that you look for the tools that will work best for you as a reminder to stay within. Once you are aware of your favourite tools that can help you at work and at home, you can start using them more consciously.
- List here your favourite tools. Example: your favourite quotation that you will paste in a corner of your mirror, so that, after waking up, you will be reminded to go within consciously.
- What would help you to stay connected while doing your work?
- You may want to have a special tool to meet a special situation, like giving a speech to a large audience. Example: put a small photograph of The Mother on the desk. For having to discuss a painful matter with a friend maybe something 'friendly' in your pocket will help you to remain connected to your deepest level.
- Find out and write down how in your daily life you will manage to have always at least one tool at hand.
- Make provisions for implementing this.



## THE FIRST STEPS IN PURIFICATION FROM THE OUTER LAYERS TO THE INNER LAYERS

- Combine self-observation with vigilance so that you don't slide down unconsciously.
- Work on strengthening in yourself the positive side of something negative you want to get rid of.
- Start using active inner dialogue.
- Find ways to quieten yourself.
- Start using tool(s) that help you to stay within.
- Find regularly some time alone with yourself.

Don't forget to regularly take time out to go deeper and deeper inside.

### WIN YOUR VICTORIES

*“If you call for the Truth and yet something in you chooses what is false, ignorant and undivine or even simply is unwilling to reject it altogether, then always you will be open to attack and the Grace will recede from you. Detect first what is false or obscure in you and persistently reject it, then alone can you rightly call for the divine Power to transform you.”*<sup>16</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

*“The victory you win in your character, however small it be, is one which can be gained in the whole world... If you really want to do something good, the best thing you can do is to win your small victories in all sincerity, one after another, and thus you will do for the world the maximum you are able to.”*<sup>17</sup>

— THE MOTHER

## Purification II

### **From the inner layers to the outer layers of the being**

Through self-observation, exercises and meditation you have become more familiar with your inner world. Most likely you have experienced that you can go deeper and deeper within. This paves the way for a more profound purification, that is a purification that starts from the most inner layer you can reach and, from there, purifies the outer layers. Remember the aim of all this work is to clear the passage so that the psychic can come more and more into the foreground. In this way you gradually prepare yourself to shift from identification with your outer nature to identification with the innermost part you can reach. If you always identify with, and act from your innermost part, self-control will come spontaneously, because you will act from the truth of your being. When the psychic is in the foreground you live from the truth consciousness which makes life very beautiful. So let us have a look at purification starting from the inner layers where the “I” is located in the innermost part you can reach.

Someone asked the Mother the question: “How can it be done?” Her answer:

The Mother mentions here the will to progress. More about the will in the next chapter.

*“How should you do it? You must want it, then aspire; and then each time you do something which is contrary to this ideal, you must put it before yourself and put the light upon it and the will for change. Each time one makes an egoistic movement or does those things which should not be done, one must immediately catch it as though by its tail and then put it in the presence of one’s ideal and one’s will to progress, and put the light and consciousness upon it so that it may change.”<sup>1</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

The difference with purification from outside is, that as soon as you have spotted something that needs purification, you go within, as deep as you can. The Mother says that you have to put that which is to be purified in *the presence of your ideal*. To do this you must have a lot of clarity about your highest ideal or deepest aim. Depending on the quality of the ideal that you have before you, you will go deeper within. While being within, you hold the part that needs to be purified up to the light or the force.

### **Attitude for purification from within**

This purification from within requires therefore a different attitude and a different focusing of the consciousness. It requires that you live focused within and try to be always conscious of your highest ideal while living life and doing your work.

You may ask, “Can you do this purification from within when you have not yet found your psychic?”

The answer is “Yes.” As long as the psychic is not yet discovered there is another place to start from.

*“...to make you progress, you must find something within you in*

*whose light you can be yourself your own judge, something which represents for you the best part of yourself, which has some light, some goodwill and which precisely is in love with progress.”<sup>2</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

You start the purification from what you perceive as the best part in you, inspired by what is at this moment your highest ideal or highest aim. This part may, as long as the psychic presence is not discovered, be a part of the inner nature instead of your innermost nature. Yet, this part will do its work in the purification process: this inner layer will illumine the part that you want to change, and slowly lead you deeper and deeper to your innermost truth or psychic being.

### **The inner movements**

Let us go through these movements one more time. You have come across some weakness or negative feelings and something inside tells you that this should change.

You try to go within; sometimes the negative part fights back and is not allowing you to do so. In that case you first use your inner dialogue, and talk patiently but strongly to the resisting part. According to what the not yet purified part represents, you can ask it to change, convince it to change, command a change. Remember and use the power of your highest aim to oppose the negative part.

Then you go inside as deep as you can. This deepest place then becomes like the screen of a cinema hall, where a film is projected. What do you project on it? The weakness, thoughts, feelings or actions that pull your consciousness down or outwards.

While being aware of the weakness you invite the light or the force to come and change the imperfection that you see projected there. At the same time you open yourself as much as you can to receive light or force. This Light or Force can come from the psychic, the Divine who is in you; from the truth of your being; the innermost and deepest place.

The Light or Force can also come by invoking the Cosmic Divine or The Shakti, the highest, whom you then feel entering from around or above you. (It is like with meditation: the deepest comes from behind the heart; the highest from above the head).

You can also invite the light to strengthen the positive side in you that can help fight this negative part. Often the struggle against the negativity asks at first all your attention. It is so overpowering that you are not able to call the Light. But even a little later you can invite the Light to strengthen a positive part in you, so that it can help to fight the negative part more effectively. At any time you can hold up your positive parts and ask the Light to make them stronger.

In another passage The Mother describes the thing on which you project your weakness not as a screen, but as a kind of signpost or a special mirror “in which all things are reflected and show themselves as they truly are.”

You can see which image works better for you: the cinema screen, the signpost or the mirror. Maybe there even is another image that suits you best.

Similarly you may have found a different way to purify yourself from within. This chapter follows a method described by The Mother, but there can always be individual differences.



## EXERCISE: PURIFICATION FROM WITHIN

Practice from the inner layers to the outer layers with your 'best' part as screen, signpost, mirror or whatever is your own image.

- You start with making yourself as quiet as possible.
- Watch your breathing.
- While breathing in go within, as deep as you can.
- With every breath try to go deeper.
- When you breath out try to stay deep within or even sink deeper in the open space left by the outgoing breath.
- You may like to say Mother's name while going deeper and deeper.
- While going deeper you may want to look for a treasure, like a diamond.
- You may want to imagine that however deep you go, there is something still much deeper that is very intimate to you. (This often helps one to go deeper.)
- When you have gone very deeply, without changing the depth of your consciousness, you let some of the events of the day roll by, as if you are watching them on the screen that is there in the depth of your being or straightaway go back to a difficult moment of the day.
- When something unpleasant comes up, hold on and keep watching as if you were looking at a photograph. Try not to judge, try not to suppress, try not to justify what comes up; just watch it.
- At the same time offer this negative part or movement to the Divine in you and/or call the Light or the Force.



- Invoke the Light or the Force to change or perfect the part.
- In case a negative part is strong and does not want to change, it will be difficult to really hold it up. Then use your inner dialogue to convince the part to give itself up. Often the part does not give itself up completely to the Divine all at once, but every time you offer it, a little bit is purified by the Light or the Force.
- After you have practised this exercise for some time, start doing it throughout the day: whenever you make a wrong movement, go deeper within and call the light or the force.
- Whenever you feel something positive in you that has to be strengthened, you hold up this fragile part to the light and ask that it may be perfected and strengthened.
- You can also call on the Divine and then offer your nature for *transformation*, but that is the movement we will work on in the chapter called “Choice and Change”.

Here is the first part of the exercise you did just now in The Mother’s words:

*“...certain things pass by well, without throwing a shadow; [on the screen or the mirror] others yet cast a shadow altogether black and disagreeable. You must do this very sincerely, [ask yourself] was this act in keeping with my ideal or not? If it was, it would not leave any shadow on the screen... Why has it left this shadow? What was there in this act that was contrary to the will to self-knowledge and self-mastery? You will see that it often was unconsciousness that caused you to act like that.*

*But in other cases you will see that it was a nasty little egoism, quite black, which had come to distort your action or your thought. Then you place this egoism before your “light” and ask yourself: “Why has it the right to make me act like that, think like that?”<sup>3</sup> — THE MOTHER*

More about egoism in the chapter Choice and Change.

While preparing yourself for the psychic opening you will have to do this purification from within very often. Don't give up easily, because if you persevere, you will begin to experience the positive effect more and more.

## **Integrity and depth**

What is integrity?

The psychic in you is a spark or portion of the Divine. Therefore it knows the truth, and is able to see things as they truly are. It is the most essential part in you. The more parts of your mental, vital and physical nature are turned towards the truth of your being, the more effective the purification. Do you remember from one of your schoolbooks the picture of a magnet that attracts iron filings? The further the filings are away from the magnet the less they 'listen' to it. It is like that with the psychic being and the other parts in you: the magnet stands for the psychic being and the iron filings are all the other parts in you. The stronger the parts are attracted to the inner truth and the greater the number of parts that have been attracted, the more integrally we live.

Purification helps to make the mental, vital and physical parts in you turn towards the Divine within you. Through this process you become more whole, centred around the Divine in you. In other words: you become more integral.

The depth from which you live is also important. This can be compared with the strength of the magnet. When you are calling for the light, the depth from where you are calling matters a lot. There are many layers between your outermost and your innermost nature. Your deepest or innermost depth is the psychic being, a portion of the Divine. Every time you reach deeper and call from a deeper level, it will influence the other parts of the being more effectively.

## EXERCISE: DYNAMIC ACTIVITY

To make faster progress, you can become more dynamic in your self-preparation by strengthening the positive parts in yourself:



- Sit down in a quiet place and make yourself calm.
- Turn within.
- Look for a positive part in yourself that can help to fight the negative one that is bothering you.
- Use inner dialogue to talk to this positive part in an encouraging way, the way you would talk to your best friend. Hold this part up to the Light regularly, while asking for a greater strength and perfection in this part. You may feel that this Light or Force is from the Divine or The Mother, and you may experience something infinitely precious.
- In case you do not feel this, your offering is still mixed with lower stuff; this happens quite often. At that time, if you concentrate well, you may want to repeat the sequence and make a separate offering of this mixed part, while asking the Light to purify it.
- Try to enlist as many positive parts as possible to co-operate in removing the shadows of your personality. Active inner dialogue works well here.
- Try to deepen more and more. From the depth ask the negative parts that trouble you to open themselves to the Light or the Force of the psychic within you.
- Go inside, in search of something that is much further inside than you ever thought possible, and much sweeter and more intimate than anything you ever imagined. This can help you to go deeper.

## New attitude

As said in the beginning of this chapter, purification from the inner layers asks for a new attitude, a new focus of concentration. Here are two passages from The Mother's talks that may help you to get a deeper understanding of how this works in daily life.

*“There is but one remedy: that signpost must always be there, a [psychic] mirror well placed in one's feelings, impulses, all one's sensations. One sees them in this mirror. There are some which are not very beautiful or pleasant to look at; there are others which are beautiful, pleasant and must be kept. This one does a hundred times a day if necessary. And it is very interesting... If there is something that is not all right, it casts a sort of grey shadow upon the mirror: this element must be shifted, organised. It must be spoken to, made to understand, one must come out of that darkness.”<sup>4</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

She ends this talk with saying that, if you do this exercise for three, four years you will be surprised to see how much you have changed!

Take all that is happening in your life as a mirror for your own progress:

*“Take all the things which irritate you as a lesson for yourself and your life will be more peaceful and more effective as well, for a great percentage of your energy certainly goes waste in the irritation that you feel when you do not find in others the perfection that you would like to realise in yourself...”*

*If you are conscious of it, well then, begin with the work which is given to you, that is to say, realise what you have to do... And the best way to the true attitude is simply to say, ‘All those around me,*

*all the circumstances of my life, all the people near me, are a mirror held up to me by the Divine Consciousness to show me the progress I must make. Everything that shocks me in others means a work I have to do in myself.*"<sup>5</sup>

— THE MOTHER

## THE FIRST STEPS IN PURIFICATION FROM THE INNER LAYERS

- Review your aim in life.
- Start observing yourself from as deep within as you can throughout the day.
- Hold your 'shadows' up to the light or force while being as deep inside as possible.
- Through self-observation check how integral you are.
- Use your toolbox for giving yourself reminders to go deeper within.
- Strengthen your positive parts as well by holding them up to the Light.

### CHECKLIST



A checklist helps you to keep track of your progress. It lists situations and areas that are connected with the work you have taken up. In this way you can remain more alert in the domains that need your attention. It also can give you a lot of encouragement, when, through a checklist, you become aware of the progress you have been making.

Tick the box only when you can answer the question with "Yes".

- Do I observe myself regularly?
- Have I stopped the negative thoughts or feelings about myself?
- When I have negative thoughts or feelings about others am I able to stop these negative thoughts or feelings at will?
- Do I work on strengthening my positive side?
- Do I consciously work on purifying myself?
- Can I see something positive even in people whom I experience as very difficult?
- Do I use consciously the habit of 'active inner dialogue'?
- Am I able to go to a deep layer inside myself at will?
- Before leaving home in the morning do I prepare myself consciously for the day?



After completing the checklist go through the questions that you could not tick.

Decide how you will work more consciously on these areas; keep faith that you will succeed.

Promise yourself to keep up the effort for the questions that you could tick successfully.

## HAVE A LOOK INSIDE YOUR TOOLBOX



- Check the tools you have been using.
- Are all the tools you listed in the previous chapter effective?
  - Do you have them available regularly?
  - Are there some tools you didn't use?
  - If so, what do you want to do with these? Can you make them more effective?
- Would you like to add some new tools? Remember, anything can be a tool as long as it works for you!

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICE

*“If you are vigilant, you can do in a few days what would otherwise take years.”<sup>6</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

*“Don't ever take lightly all the circumstances of each day, all the tiny little things of life, all the small events... Never react with your lower being,... with what is most commonplace in you. Enter within yourself, try to find the best in yourself and with this you must react. It is very important, it is very important.”<sup>7</sup>*— THE MOTHER

*“In each heart, the Divine's Presence is the promise of future and possible perfections.”<sup>8</sup>*

— THE MOTHER



# Effort

The journey in search of the soul leads us often to unknown landscapes. Sometimes big boulders block the way and cast their weird shadows, sometimes we are flooded by a light so beautiful that we wonder how something so radiant could exist in us.

But when the difficulties seem to mount we need a lot of effort and determination to plod on. In this chapter we talk about some inner movements that can help to steady our progress. These movements were often mentioned by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. Here we will discuss the will, rejection and receptivity or opening.

First let us focus for a while on effort. Anything we want to do well requires effort. Changing ourselves requires a lot of effort. The Mother once very forcefully expressed what it means *not* to make an effort: *“to go on making the same mistake, knowing that it must not be made, is an act of cowardice which we must not permit ourselves.”*

Hopefully you have had the experience of feeling very good after you had achieved something that needed a lot of effort. In the

next passage The Mother explains why this is so:

*“It is the effort which gives joy; a human being who does not know how to make an effort will never find joy. Those who are essentially lazy will never find joy—they do not have the strength to be joyful! It is effort which gives joy. Effort makes the being vibrate at a certain degree of tension which makes it possible for you to feel the joy.”*<sup>1</sup>

— THE MOTHER

So there is no need to shrink from things that require a lot of effort, for effort will bring you a lot of joy! Working on the will demands a lot of effort from you. But, once your will is supporting your deepest longing, progress will be very fast.

## Will

Normally the process of conscious purification will continue for years. If the right will is at your disposal, things can move faster. For an effective use of the will, self-awareness is needed, because each part of you has its own will. Through self-observation you will discover that you have a higher will, based on the truth of your innermost being. Then you have a lower will, the will of the lower or outer vital. This lower will is generally the main supporting power for the choices of the outer nature and that is why the outer nature is often full of desires and rather egoistic. The mental will stands in between these two wills and it can follow after the lower vital will or after the higher or spiritual will.

It is important that the mental will comes under your conscious control. Why? Because the mental will stands in between, it can either co-operate with the outer vital will or it can co-operate with the inner higher will. If the mental will is under the in-

fluence of the vital, it will give favourable reasons for obeying the vital; if it is under the influence of the higher will, it will start giving reasons in favour of the truth of your being. So it is important that the mental will starts obeying the higher will. That takes effort. If we ‘teach’ it to be under the higher influence, then after some time, also the vital will can gradually come under the influence of the higher will. When that has happened, the vital can be used to oppose any influence that stands in the way of psychic progress. It can also help you to build up the positive side of your being. This is what Mother in the *Science of Living* calls “conscious control”.

Besides the *right* will we also need to have a *strong* will. Some people have already developed a strong will power, others may need quite some time to make it strong. How to make the will strong? This question was asked to The Mother and here is her answer:

*“Oh, as one strengthens muscles, by methodical exercise. You take one little thing, something you want to do or don’t want to do. Begin with a small thing... And then, if, for instance, it is something you are in the habit of doing [and shouldn’t do] or not doing, [and should start doing] you insist on it with the same regularity, you see, either not to do it or to do it—you insist on it and compel yourself to do it as you compel yourself to lift a weight—it’s the same thing. You make the same kind of effort, but is more of an inner effort... And gradually, if you do this regularly, you will end up by acquiring an independent and very strong will.”<sup>2</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

She advises to begin with a small thing to train the will. It requires vigilant self-observation at every moment so that we de-

tect the 'small thing' or mistake, and make it not renew itself. The vigilance is needed because there is a short moment where you have the choice to give in or to resist repeating the same mistake. The Mother says that once you have decided to stop with a wrong movement in yourself,

*“there is always a moment when one can decide... And it is a choice between weak submission and a controlling will. And if the will is clear, if it is based on truth, if truly it obeys the truth and is clear, it always has the power to refuse the wrong movement. It is an excuse you give yourself when you say, “I could not.” It is not true. It is that you truly have not wanted it in the right way. For there is always the choice between saying “yes” and saying “no”. But one chooses to be weak and later gives oneself this excuse, saying, “It is not my fault; it was stronger than I.” It is your fault if the thing was stronger than you. Because you are not these impulses, you are a conscious soul and an intelligent will, and your duty is to see that this is what governs you and not the impulses from below.”<sup>3</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

These words of The Mother are very straightforward, they may even sound a little challenging. But why should you not be demanding on yourself? What is important though, is to be patient with yourself at the same time. Try to be loving and understanding with yourself, but to be loving does not mean that you should allow weaknesses to persist.

*“To learn how to will is a very important thing. And to will truly, you must unify your being. In fact, to be a being, one must first unify oneself. If one is pulled by absolutely opposite tendencies, if one spends three-fourths of his life without being conscious of himself and the reasons why he does things, is one a real being? One*

*does not exist. One is a mass of influences, movements, forces, actions, reactions, but one is not a being. One begins to become a being when one begins to have a will. And one can't have a will unless one is unified.*"<sup>4</sup>

— THE MOTHER

WORKSHEET: TO LEARN HOW TO WILL

- Read again the last three quotations of The Mother about the will.
- Start filling them in with your personal experiences related to the absence or the presence of your will in situations from your daily life.



Here is an example *related to the first quotation*: You decided that for at least one month you would not come late to your class. With the help of the will you kept it up and resisted the temptation to keep chatting with some colleagues in between classes. Yesterday, however, you came late because you felt low and the chatting was cheering you up.

- Do you feel this was a valid reason for being late? What do you think: can there be valid reasons for being late or do they not exist?
- This was just an example. Now list an experience related to the will from your own life. Maybe it is best to write it down. Writing may help you in gaining more clarity. Try to go back to the situation and list as many factors as you can remember that stood in the way of being strong. Then make a second list of factors

that helped your will to be strong.



- If some of your friends are also working on the will you could discuss such incidents with them, with the idea that you would help each other to keep up your commitments. If your will was present, celebrate your victories consciously—not by relaxing the will, but by thanking it for having come so far and asking for more strength.
- If your will was absent, find out what caused it. (There could be many reasons, like the need for contact, self-pity, laziness and so on.)
- Do not ignore these signals but try to be more aware and deal with them. Could you offer them for purification?
- Decide on a course of action. Try to list as many tools as you can that will help you next time to listen to your will.
- Write down an example from your own experience *related to the second quotation* about the will.
- Are you aware of these moments of choice? If not, observe yourself for one day with the aim to catch such moments consciously. Such moments of choice can make you feel sometimes as if you are the centre point of the rope of a tug-of-war where one side is pulled by the lower forces and the other side by the higher forces. Find out: what do you have to do to make the higher forces win?

- Decide on a course of action for this. If necessary, list the steps you have to take.
- List an experience *related to the third quotation*, when you felt pulled by 'a mass of influences'.
- Friends with other aims than yours, a group of people, they all can pull you in a direction where another part in you does not want to go.
- What is the main force or feeling that makes you do such things?
- How will you prevent this from happening again?
- What can you do to unify yourself around a higher aim?
- List the steps you will take to achieve this.
- What are the tools that could help you in this process?



We hope you don't feel discouraged after completing this worksheet. The aim is to become more effective in strengthening your will. Filling up a sheet like this is a little like cleaning a cupboard: when you are in the middle of the work the mess looks larger than before, but if you continue and finish the work, the result is very rewarding. The following passage is very beautiful and hopefully a source of inspiration to you:

*“Correcting an ignorance is like eliminating darkness: you light a lamp, the darkness disappears.... The divine Grace is always there to help those who have decided to correct themselves, and they cannot say, “I am too weak to correct myself.” They can say that they still haven’t taken the resolution to correct themselves, that there is something that has not decided to do it.... The argument of weakness is an excuse. The Grace is there to give the supreme strength to whoever takes the resolution.”*<sup>5</sup> — THE MOTHER

The true victory is when the day comes that you can contact the psychic presence at will. It may take long, the time may be short, but if you manage to enlist your will, this day will surely come. The Mother made an encouraging remark about this:

*“And then comes a moment, which is not very far off, when as soon as one concentrates and aspires, one gets a contact. [with the psychic] One may not have the power of keeping it all the time, but can get it at will. Then, from that moment things become very easy.”*<sup>6</sup> — THE MOTHER

## INTROSPECTION ON WILL

- What weakens your will?
  - What strengthens your will?
  - What is one of the greatest helpers inside yourself?
  - What is one of the greatest helpers outside yourself?
  - Read again the three plans you made on your work sheet.
- Is there anything you would like to change?
- Is there anything you would like to add?





## Rejection

The will helps us avoid making the same mistakes again. When we talk about mistakes, we mean the ones that hinder the discovery of and contact with the psychic. There are other inner movements that are a great help for allowing the psychic to manifest itself. Rejection is a powerful movement. You reject something when you refuse its influence by detaching yourself from it. You do not judge this influence that took you away from your inner self, but you also do not justify yourself by putting the blame on something or someone. You simply stand apart from it without getting emotionally involved. You detach yourself, you do not accept it and you do not allow it to express itself.

*“If you refuse to express everything that is of a lower kind, little by little the very thing disappears, and the consciousness is emptied of lower things. It is by refusing to give expression—I mean not only in action but also in thought, in feeling. When impulses, thoughts, emotions come, if you refuse to express them, if you push them aside and remain in a state of inner aspiration and calm, then gradually they lose their force and stop coming. So the consciousness is emptied of the lower movements.”*<sup>7</sup>

— THE MOTHER

In this passage The Mother explains the movement of rejection. The whole movement is done without getting upset. When you reject, you *recognise* that a lower thought or feeling is showing itself in you, but then you *choose* not to allow it to express itself further in you. You remain calm: you look at it without getting involved and then you leave it aside. If you want something positive to come in its place, you aspire at the same time for change and open yourself to the Divine so that the Light can descend and change the lower thought or feeling.

There is a significant difference between suppression and rejection and it is important to know the difference.

*“It is no use at all hiding things and pushing them behind, like this, and imagining they are not there because one has put a veil in front.” [this is suppression] The Mother continues to explain that first “the bad movements [have] to rise to the surface, to show themselves...”<sup>8</sup>* —THE MOTHER

In one of the letters to a sadhak Sri Aurobindo explains the difference between suppression and rejection. He says,

*“The difference between suppression and an inward rejection is the difference between mental or moral control and a spiritual purification.”<sup>9</sup>* — SRI AUROBINDO

Rejection must go together with an acknowledgement of the mistake or the weakness, and at the same time not wanting it to continue. Then you decide that you don’t want to give expression to this mistake or weakness, and while being detached from it, you ask the Divine that it be changed. In The Mother’s words:

*“...you offer them, if you say, “Well, this is how I am,” and if at the same time you have the aspiration to be different, then this second of presence is extremely useful; you can, yes, in a few seconds receive the help you need to get rid of them...”<sup>10</sup>* — THE MOTHER

Sri Aurobindo said that true rejection is the process of spiritual purification. Rejection you do from the deepest or highest part in you that you can contact, while, at the same time, you open yourself to the Divine. It is best if the rejection is directly followed by the inward or upward look of opening yourself to the Divine, because if you reject a mistake without offering it, the Divine can-

not do much. Then there hardly will be any purification.

If you do not do it in this way, it most likely becomes suppression. Suppression is done with the mind or the vital, often suppression comes out of fear, when you are afraid to face the negative things in yourself.

Sometimes you need active inner dialogue to be able to face a very dark movement. Talk firmly but calmly:

*“As soon as it manifests, you must catch it like this (Mother makes a movement) with a very firm grip, and then hold it, hold it up to the light and say, “No! I don’t want you! I-don’t-want-you! I have nothing to do with this! You are going to get out of here, and you won’t return!”<sup>11</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

Try not to get so involved in the talking, that you forget to make the movement of offering and opening yourself to the light or the force. Let it be an openness as quiet as possible while you wait for the force to descend. Sometimes it is difficult to feel quiet, especially if it is a strong emotion that you are rejecting. It is then as if you are living in two layers at the same time; there is the stormy feeling inside you and at the same time you live in another part where it is always peaceful.

#### WORKSHEET: REJECTION

Do a self-observation related to Rejection:

- Do I reject or do I try to quickly suppress a negative feeling?
- When I reject, am I able to stay calm?





- If I reject, do I also open myself to the light or the force?
- Instead of rejecting do I pretend as if the weakness does not exist? (This is ignoring.)
- Instead of rejecting, do I shout my weakness down? (This is suppression.)
- When I suppress a weakness, why do I suppress it?
- What do I have to do to stop the habit of suppression?
- The best tool to help me to change suppression into rejection is .....

You have to become so alert that you catch this habit of ignoring or suppressing weaknesses immediately. In the beginning you will often realise, just after a weakness showed itself, that you forgot to reject. Right at that moment it is not yet too late! Right then you can still start a short dialogue with yourself or with The Mother and say that you truly want to stop ignoring or suppressing a weakness. You express to yourself or to Her that you really want to learn the habit of true rejection. Right then you ask Her for help and open yourself to Her.

If you become aware of a weakness in yourself don't judge, but also don't find excuses. Try to remember that the Divine is full of love; just watch it silently, aspire for change while holding it up to the Light.

You could meditate on the following questions:

- What do I need to do for true rejection?
- How can I best achieve this?
- What is the best tool to help me to achieve this?



## Opening and Receptivity

A movement that makes rejection easier is aspiration. Aspiration is the urge for finding the Truth. The highest or true aspiration comes from the psychic being. The purer the aspiration, the more effective it will be. We discuss in this chapter Opening, which often is the beginning of aspiration. Opening is needed because an effective change in the part that is rejected can come only when the rejection goes together with Opening. What is opening?

You can read more on aspiration in the chapter called Choice and Change.

Sri Aurobindo explains it like this:

*"...openness is a state of consciousness which keeps it turned to the Mother, free from other movements, expecting and able to receive what may come from the Divine."*<sup>12</sup> — SRI AUROBINDO

Here is an image that may help you to understand and experience opening more easily. Nowadays almost every town has cable television. A big dish antenna is needed to receive the waves that bring the pictures to your TV screen. Similarly, to receive the 'waves' of the Divine you have to open yourself. Imagine that you have a dish antenna around your head and shoulders in

which you can receive the Light or the Force. To receive the force you have to attune yourself and open yourself constantly. In this way you will be always aware of this force. The dish antenna image works for some, others prefer to think of a flower that opens itself to the sun. You may like to find your own image or your own tool that helps you to make the movement of Opening.

Why be open to the Divine?

When you open yourself to the personal Divine or to the cosmic Divine you open yourself to the Truth. The Force of Truth can change things and set them right in a perfect manner, far more perfectly than we humans can ever achieve. It is far more effective. Most of us have the experience that, as we progress, we rely more and more on the Divine. This does not mean that you can remain passive. On the contrary. You have to will to open yourself and to make the opening more and more free from distorting ‘shadows’ of any kind.

Question: What does “an exclusive self-opening to the divine Power” mean?

*Answer: Instead of self-opening we could put receptivity, something that opens in order to receive. Now, instead of opening and receiving from all sides and from everyone, ...one opens only to the Divine to receive only the divine force.*<sup>13</sup> — THE MOTHER

#### CHECKLIST: OPENING



- Even when I am very busy I regularly take a few minutes to re-establish the deeper or higher contact.

- ..... brings me in contact with the Divine.
- Do I use this tool regularly enough?
- ..... leads me away from the Divine.
- Do I try enough to prevent this from happening?
- Do I start the day with consciously invoking the Divine?
- Do I start a new activity with consciously asking for Divine guidance?
- Do I use my "dish antenna" enough?



You may like to add here a few checks that are specially relevant for you.

## **Nurturing and Strengthening**

Besides rejecting your weaknesses and opening yourself to the Divine there is the constructive movement of nurturing your being and strengthening your positive qualities.

It is good to make time for nurturing yourself. Sometimes purification takes so much of your attention that you forget to care for your good qualities and you forget or neglect that God gave each one of us some special gifts. Nurturing yourself means that if you love singing, you do set time apart to sing your heart out. Even better: to organise now and then a little concert so that you can share this gift with your relatives and friends. This will give fulfilment and is a good antidote for the darkness that you see now and then inside yourself.

We all have some capacities that make us unique. Some of our best qualities may not have received any attention during the years we were in school. An excellent quality like knowing how to diffuse a tense situation with a humorous remark, and so avoiding a major quarrel, may hardly have been noticed in the regular classroom. And yet such a capacity is of great value in the society. Others can create marvels with bits and pieces of cloth and warm the hearts of friends with such decorations. Each one of us has special gifts that are worth nurturing.

### **Time for reflection**

Give yourself some time for reflection. Do you nurture yourself enough? If not, make a plan.

What are some of your best qualities? When and how would you like to express them? What do you need for it? Use your creativity; try to improvise. If you feel shy, you can do something all by yourself. You could also try to share it with others.

Here are two examples. Do you love flowers and have an artistic eye? Start making flower arrangements with simple flowers from your surroundings! You could put these in the school office, in your classroom or some other place.

Do you have a talent for organisation? There are so many opportunities in a school to utilise this talent, like organising available resources in a better way, so that they are used more and better. You could also use such a gift for a school-fair of self-made handicrafts to acquire money, so that some new and costly equipment can be bought by the school.

In short, look for activities that make you concentrate on capacities and gifts that would bring you a sense of true fulfilment.



## HAVE A LOOK INSIDE YOUR TOOLBOX

- Are all your tools still in use?
- Do you have to revitalise some of them?
- Could you make some of them more effective?
- Do you want to add new tools?
- Could some of your gifts, qualities and capacities become part of your toolbox?



## PSYCHIC LIVING

*“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 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 persevere 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.*"<sup>14</sup>

— THE MOTHER

*"What you should do is to throw the doors of your being wide open to the Divine. The moment you conceal something, you step straight into Falsehood. The least suppression on your part pulls you immediately down into unconsciousness. If you want to be fully conscious, be always in front of the Truth—completely open yourself and try your utmost to let it see deep inside you, into every corner of your being. That alone will bring into you light and consciousness and all that is most true.*"<sup>15</sup>

— THE MOTHER

*"You can be at once in the state of aspiration, of willing, which calls down something—exactly the will to open oneself and receive, and the aspiration which calls down the force you want to receive—and at the same time be in that state of complete inner stillness which allows full penetration, for it is in this immobility that one can be penetrated.... One can be like that, like a great flame of aspiration, and at the same time as though this flame formed a vase, a large vase, opening and receiving all that comes down.... [One] becomes aware of the flame first and then of the vase of receptivity—of what seeks to be filled and the flame that rises to call down what must fill the vase..."<sup>16</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

# Choice and Change

In this chapter we continue to explore and develop some of the inner movements. Some may come quite easily to you and with others you may have to struggle for a long time. You may like to start to work on the ones that appeal most to you.

## Choice

We start with 'choice'. To choose is an act of will. How to make the right choice? Hundreds of times during the day you have the choice to live from your deeper consciousness or to follow your surface nature; to make a step forward to your aim or a step backward, away from your goal. During a regular day you have many opportunities for making the choice that is in line with your deepest yearning or your highest aim. *If you always choose to align your will with what is deepest or highest, you will progress swiftly.*

Here is an example from daily life: you have half an hour extra before you have to go to a difficult meeting. During that half an hour will you glance through a newspaper to relax yourself and take the attention away from the meeting, or, will you

read a few pages of a book with noble thoughts that brings you in contact with your inner being?

The Mother expresses the possibility of choice very forcefully:

*“...at every minute of your life you must make a choice between what drags you down and what draws you up, between what makes you progress and what makes you go backwards.... At every minute one has to choose, this is indispensable.... The choice: at every second the choice is before you, and you may take a step downward or a step upward, take a step backward or a step forward; and this state of choice must be constant, perpetual, you must never fall asleep.”*<sup>1</sup>

—THE MOTHER

Never to fall asleep is not easy! It is a capacity that grows as you progress. What helps you to stay awake is to be clear about your highest ideal. Maybe you know already your highest aim in life, maybe you have to go within deeply, with the idea of wanting to find that out. Is it to discover the psychic being? Is it something else? You may like to formulate it in words, you may want to cherish it inside yourself as something precious you will return to regularly. Find out what works best for you. The more your aim is *real and alive* for you, the easier it becomes to choose for the highest. When your aim is alive, even though lower parts in you want to push you in the opposite direction, you are less inclined to listen to them. They don't bother you, because your concentration is on something else.

Do not mix up choice with preference. When you have a preference, you usually do not even try to activate your inner truth. One could say that a preference is a dressed up desire. It may look good but does not relate to your inner truth. The Mother says that a preference is *“something blind, an impulse, an attachment, an unconscious movement which is usually terribly obstinate.”*

She gives an example to clarify what she means:

*“You are placed in certain circumstances; one thing or another may happen, and you yourself have an aspiration, you ask to be guided, but within you there is something [else] which prefers the answer to be of a certain kind, or the event to come about in one way rather than another; but this is not a question of choice, it is a preference.”*<sup>2</sup>

—THE MOTHER

## Egoism

Egoism can very well take you away from your aim in life.

A well known sentence of Sri Aurobindo is: *“Ego was the helper; Ego is the bar.”*

How can the ego be the helper? This has to do with the evolution. Man, the mental being, first needs his ego to become a separate individual. After this process of individualisation is completed, he has to give up the ego to become one with the Divine. So egoism is a necessary stage of human development and therefore widespread among human beings. Giving it up too early is not wise, holding on too long isn't either. There are many shades of egoism, and it is better to give up the darker ones immediately.

Here The Mother mentions one of the nasty ones, and how to get rid of it:

To want to pay back those who have hurt you:

*“[There are people who say], “I have been made to suffer, I shall make them suffer.” This indeed becomes nasty enough for people to notice that it should not exist.... You can make use of the reason and can tell yourself something which is very true: that in our being it*

*is only egoism which always suffers, and that if there was no egoism there would be no suffering.... So the first thing to do is to look straight at this suffering, perceive to what extent it is the expression of a petty egoism and then sweep the place clean... ”<sup>3</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

Remind yourself that something in you is stronger than this egoism and that the Divine is omnipotent. Don't get shocked by seeing something ugly in yourself. Calmly offer the thing by holding it up to the Divine. If you are able to project it completely into the light, the light can fully shine on it. Do not follow the impulse of wanting not to see it and throw it out of sight so that it can hide. Do not suppress it. You read about this in the chapters on Purification. Pushing something negative out of your sight or suppressing it, always creates an imbalance in the being and often blocks you from functioning well. If you calmly acknowledge the negative thing as part of yourself, while, at the same time, you hold it up to the light, the light will make you progress. Every time you do this, you will experience that the (frightening) part loses a little of its power. Try to live always from the trust that the light and the force act from true knowledge, will take care and will do the best possible for you. In fact, because light and force act from the truth, they will do the work much better than your outer being could ever do this. That is why it is worthwhile to make an effort to choose for the highest and call for change from the depth of your being.

## WORKSHEET: CHOICE

Choose for the deepest truth in you, choose for your highest ideal. It takes effort to choose always for the deepest or highest in yourself, because often the lower parts with their old habits are more in the foreground. Let your highest aim or ideal become so concrete that it is vibrantly alive in you.



- Formulate your deepest yearning or highest ideal.
- What helps you to keep it alive?
- How will you remind yourself to live from the deepest part of your being?
- Is there any tool that can help you to do this more effectively?
- How will you remind yourself to choose according to your inner truth?
- Is there anything else that can help you to do this more and more often?
- How can you make your decisions more definite?
- Do you need to do more work to strengthen your will-power?
- Do you need to build in extra reminders, take more time out to go within, etc?
- Formulate short-term goals, say for 14 days, that can help you to go in the right direction.

If you regularly make the choice for "what draws you up", you will notice a change in yourself!

## Receptivity and aspiration

There are other inner movements that help your outer being to come under the influence of your psychic centre. We talked about “opening” in the previous chapter. The Mother talked often about “receptivity”, and maybe we could say that receptivity is the more psychic form of opening.

Another inner movement is aspiration. Receptivity and aspiration are close companions.

*“I know many people of this kind: they say, “Oh! but I aspire all the time and still I receive nothing.” It is impossible that they should receive nothing, in the sense that the answer is sure to come. But it is they who do not receive. The answer comes but they are not receptive, so they receive nothing....*

*When you have an aspiration, a very active aspiration, your aspiration is going to do its work. It is going to call down the answer to what you aspire for. But, if later, you begin to think of something else or are not attentive or receptive, you do not even notice that your aspiration has received an answer.”<sup>4</sup> —THE MOTHER*

## Various forms of aspiration

What is aspiration?

*“The first movement of aspiration is this: you have a kind of vague sensation that behind the universe there is something which is worth knowing, which is probably the only thing worth living for... The next thing you have to do is to tend this aspiration, to keep it always alert and awake and living....*

*And for that what is required is concentration—concentration upon the Divine...”<sup>5</sup> —THE MOTHER*



The Mother explained that there are different kinds of aspiration.

Question: “What is the difference between mental aspiration, vital aspiration and spiritual aspiration?”

*“A mental aspiration means that the thought-power aspires to have knowledge, for instance, or else to have the power to express itself in clear ideas, a logical reasoning. One may aspire for many things; that all the faculties and capacities of the mind may be developed and placed at the service of the Divine. This is a mental aspiration.*

*Or you may have an aspiration in the vital; if you have desires or troubles, storms, inner difficulties, you may aspire for peace, to be quite impartial, without desire or preference, to be a good docile instrument without any personal whims, always at the Divine’s disposal. This is a vital aspiration.*

*You may have a physical aspiration also; that the body may feel the need to acquire a kind of equipoise in which all the parts of the being will be well balanced, and that you may have the power to hold off illness at a distance or overcome it fast when it enters trickily, and that the body may always function normally, harmoniously, in perfect health. That is a physical aspiration.*

*A spiritual aspiration means having an intense need to unite with the Divine, to give oneself totally to the Divine, not to live outside the divine Consciousness so that the Divine may be all in all for you in your integral being, and you feel the need of a constant communion with Him, of the sense of his presence, of his guidance in all that you do, and of his harmonising all the movements of the being. This is a spiritual aspiration.”<sup>6</sup> —THE MOTHER*

## Difference between aspiration and desire

In the next chapter we will talk more about the spiritual aspiration.

There is a whole ladder between a strong desire and a pure aspiration. Aspiration in itself, especially psychic aspiration, is very pure, but mental, vital or physical aspirations are easily mixed with desire. In a human being there is a whole range of feelings and impulses which can be grouped under the term “desire”. Most desires come from the outer nature and ask for a lot of attention, so they are often in the foreground. A desire is a deformed or a dark shadow of an aspiration. In the beginning your aspiration is often a mixture of desire and aspiration. It is important to learn to detect your desires, so that your aspiration becomes more pure.

*“Demand or desire comes from the mental or the vital but a psychic or spiritual need is a different thing. The psychic does not demand or desire—it aspires; it does not make conditions...”*<sup>7</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

*“Aspiration should not be a form of desire, but the feeling of an inner soul’s need, and a quiet settled will to turn towards the Divine.... It is certainly not easy to get rid of this mixture of desire entirely—not easy for anyone; but when one has the will to do it, this also can be effected by the help of the sustaining Force.”*<sup>8</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

Question: “What is the difference between aspiration and a demand?”

*“When you have experienced both, you can easily make the distinction. In aspiration there is what I might call an unselfish flame which is not present in desire. Your aspiration is not a turning back upon self—desire is always a turning back upon oneself. From the purely*

*psychological point of view, aspiration is a self-giving, always, while desire is always something which one draws to oneself....”<sup>9</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

How to detect a desire? Here is a good test.

*“...how to know if things are really necessary, not desired?... For that you must observe yourself very, very attentively, and if there is anything in you something like a small intense vibration, then you may be sure that there lies a desire. For example, you say, “This food is necessary for me”... To know if it is a need or a desire, you must look at yourself very closely and ask yourself, “What will happen if I cannot get the thing?” Then if the immediate answer is, “Oh, it will be very bad”, you may be sure that it is a matter of desire. It is the same for everything.”<sup>10</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

You can check this for yourself; anything that leaves a reaction in you is a desire. If there is no excitement, it is most likely a need and you can go for it. A need is still directed to the outer life. How does this relate to aspiration? True aspiration has in it a form of consecration. If you re-read just now the beginning of this section “Various forms of aspiration”, the difference between a desire, a demand, a need and an aspiration will become clearer.

## INTROSPECTION

replacing desire by aspiration

The moment you want something, ask yourself if it is a need or a desire by doing the ‘test’ mentioned in the quotation right above.



Do you get restless, excited or disappointed if you would not get what you wanted to get? If so, desire must have slipped in.

If it is a desire, you could tell yourself “I have again gone too much to the surface, I am not really focused on the highest aim of my life.”



Then as soon as you can, sit down and meditate or concentrate on what you want to become or how you want to be. With every breath go deeper and deeper inside. Till you feel the light, the force. Then awaken the aspiration for the higher thing again. Feel the joy when you succeed!

The driving force for intensifying your aspiration:

*“...aspiration is a thing to be developed, educated, like all activities of the being. One may be born with a very slight aspiration and develop it so much that it becomes very great.... It is you who decide whether to seek the Light or not, whether to be the servitor of the Truth or not—it is you. Or whether to have an aspiration or not, it is you who choose.”<sup>11</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

## Living within

We already talked about living within in some of the previous chapters. Most of the time human beings are living on the surface. We use our senses to take in what is happening around us and according to our level of involvement we react to that. Because the outer world is so overwhelmingly present, we forget that there is an inner world, we forget that this inner world holds the key to the truth. Since the psychic being is not demanding attention, we can only be in contact with it by going inside and learning to live within.

Living within requires a very special attitude. Sri Aurobindo expresses it like this:

*“The individual being has to find himself, his true existence; he can only do this by going inward, by living within and from within... This movement of going inward and living inward is a difficult task to lay upon the normal consciousness of the human being; yet there is no other way of self-finding.”*<sup>12</sup> — SRI AUROBINDO

Especially the outer nature is tough in wanting its say and will not so easily listen to the psychic. One way to get the outer mind, vital and physical under the psychic influence is to hold them up to your highest ideal or to the inner light.

The Mother explains this process in the following passage:

*“You must do this [holding up to the light] very sincerely, as though you were playing a game: under such circumstances I did such and such a thing, feeling like this and thinking in this way; I have before me my ideal of knowledge and self-mastery, well, was this act in keeping with my ideal or not?”*<sup>13</sup> —THE MOTHER

How will you know if something was in harmony with your highest ideal? If it was not, it leaves a feeling of uneasiness. Or in The Mother’s words: *“If it is not in conformity, it casts a shadow. Why has it left a shadow? What was there in the act that was contrary to the will to self-knowledge and self-mastery?”*<sup>14</sup> —THE MOTHER

Since our outer being is not used to living within, we have to practise this movement over and over again. We have to learn to watch from a viewpoint deep within our thoughts, feelings, the circumstances, and notice how the body reacts to these by observing the changes in our muscles, heartbeat and breathing. Re-

member what it is that makes you want to live within? Let your yearning for the psychic discovery, or the highest ideal that you hold dear, motivate you to call on your will, your vigilance and your aspiration to go deeper and deeper.

### NEW HABIT: STEPPING BACK

When you started practising purification from the inner layers to the outer, you made a beginning to acquire the habit of stepping back. In stepping back the movement is related to constantly living within. Your aim here is to be always in contact with the Divine, wherever you are, whatever you do.

Stepping back is actively and consciously going within, whenever you find yourself too much in the surface consciousness. Though stepping back is meant as an inner movement to deepen the consciousness, for some people it helps to physically step back one or two steps, while they consciously go deeper within. For others it is enough to make the inner movement of going deeper inside. If the movement is done correctly you feel detached from the situation on the surface.

Stepping back is not to be mixed up with indifference or with avoiding or looking away. Here is what The Mother says about stepping back inside yourself:

*“You must always step back into yourself—learn to go deep within—step back and you will be safe. Do not lend yourself to superficial forces which move the outside world.... If someone is angry with you, do not be caught in his vibrations but simply step back [into yourself] and his anger, finding no support or response, will vanish. Always keep your peace, resist all temptation to lose it. Never*

*decide anything without stepping back, never speak a word without stepping back, never throw yourself into action without stepping back.*"<sup>15</sup>  
—THE MOTHER

WORKSHEET: STEPPING BACK

The first steps are: To want to step back, to choose to step back

To make a list of all your reasons for wanting to step back helps in practising it. Here are two examples for such a list:



- When I am in my surface consciousness I easily do something that hurts others.
- At present the psychic discovery is the most important aim in my life.

List here your own reasons for wanting to step back:

- .....
- .....
- .....

Another helpful habit is to learn to utilise your time well:

How do you want to use the short free moments that you have, such as when you wait in a queue or when you have half an hour extra between two activities?

## Remember and Offer

*“When you have a little time, whether it is one hour or a few minutes, tell yourself, “At last, I have some time to concentrate, to collect myself, to relive the purpose of my life, to offer myself to the True and the Eternal.” If you took care to do this each time you are not harassed by outer circumstances, you would find out that you were advancing very quickly on the path. Instead of wasting your time in chattering, in doing useless things, reading things that lower the consciousness... it is better... never to lose an opportunity that is given to you, that is to say, to utilise for the true purpose the unoccupied moment before you.”<sup>16</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

## Change

This book is a constant invitation to change yourself. Gradually you prepare yourself for the full psychic discovery. Till this is a fact, there is a long period of personal effort in which you seek to go deeper and deeper into yourself, and are, at the same time, constantly busy with the purification of the outer nature. You are unceasingly making progress and are changing little by little. Because of the deepening, the personal effort becomes more and more spiritually-oriented. Your aspiration becomes more intense and more frequent and you become ready to place yourself more and more in the hands of the Divine. You feel the urge to surrender yourself more completely. Slowly you begin to consecrate all that you think, feel and do to the Truth, to the Divine.

One day, such a change may lead to transformation; the transformation of the consciousness necessary for a Divine Life on earth. This transformation will happen in a much later stage, but all the small changes in yourself are a helpful preparation



for this transformation.

The Mother explains that transformation takes place in stages; first there is a partial change of consciousness. Later a true reversal may take place. In the following passage The Mother explains the process:

*“There is a partial change of consciousness which makes you lose all interest in things that you once found desirable; but it is only a change of consciousness and not what we call the transformation. For the transformation is fundamental and absolute; it is not merely a change, but a reversal of consciousness: the being turns inside out, as it were, and takes a completely different position. In this reversed consciousness the being stands above life and things and deals with them from there; it is at the centre of everything and directs its action outwards from there....*

*I repeat, this reversal is sudden. Something opens within you and all at once you find yourself in a new world. The change may not be final and definite to begin with; it sometimes requires time to settle permanently and become your normal nature.”<sup>17</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother devoted their whole life to make the next step in the evolution possible. For this they had to bring down the Supramental Light and Force into the earth consciousness.

Said Sri Aurobindo,

*“I know with absolute certitude that the supramental is a truth and that its event is in the nature of things inevitable.”*

The human consciousness will be succeeded by a new consciousness—no longer mental but supramental. This is the deeper meaning of the transformation of consciousness. It is a big step from a

change in consciousness to a transformation of the consciousness, where the psychic being is always in front, but if you choose for it with sincerity and continue your efforts, the Grace is there to help you.

CHECKLIST: CHANGE



It is good to start making your own checklists. Human beings have a lot in common, but also some unique differences in the way they view the world. We all have some special characteristics in our learning style. That is why a checklist is best when it has your personal touch. You can refer to previous checklists to find your way. The aim of a checklist is to help you to keep up your effort and to provide you with insight on the progress you are making.

You can make your own checklist. First fill in the sentences, then tickmark the ones you can answer with "yes".

- My choices are less and less guided by my senses.
- I have started making choices guided by .....
- Something new in my life is .....
- Earlier I ....., but now.....
- .....

- .....
- .....



Check your list again after 14 days and notice new changes in yourself.

### THE CHOICE IS YOURS

*“Whenever you find that you can do something without feeling the presence of the Divine and yet be perfectly comfortable, you must understand that you are not consecrated in that part of your being. That is the way of ordinary humanity which does not feel any need of the Divine. But for a seeker of the Divine Life it is very different.”*<sup>18</sup>

—THE MOTHER

*“...you see, one has to choose among two or three or four possible decisions and doesn’t know which is the right one, then one must put himself as far as possible in contact with his psychic being and the divine Presence in him, present the problem to this psychic consciousness and ask for the true light, the true decision, the one most in accordance with the divine Will, and try to listen and receive the inspiration.”*<sup>19</sup>

—THE MOTHER

*“Aspiration should not be a form of desire, but the feeling of an inner soul’s need, and a quiet settled will to turn towards the Divine and seek the Divine.”*<sup>20</sup>

—SRI AUROBINDO

*“Aspiration is like an arrow. So you aspire, want very earnestly to*

*understand, know, enter into the truth. Yes? Your aspiration rises, rises, rises, rises straight up, very strong and then it strikes against a kind of... how to put it?... lid which is there, hard like iron and extremely thick, and it does not pass through. And then you say, "See, what's the use of aspiring?" It brings nothing at all. I meet with something hard and cannot pass!" But you know about the drop of water which falls on the rock, it ends up by making a chasm: it cuts the rock from top to bottom. Your aspiration is a drop of water which instead of falling, rises, it beats, beats, beats, and one day it makes a hole;... and when it makes the hole suddenly it springs out from this lid and enters an immensity of light, and you say, "Ah, now I understand."*<sup>21</sup>

—THE MOTHER

# Surrender

Since surrender is such an important inner movement in the ‘science of living’, we devote a separate chapter to it. This chapter consists mainly of quotations of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother. This is done on purpose. Surrender is an inner movement by which you give yourself and your life to the Divine. This means that true surrender is from your inner being, when you have felt the inner presence of The Mother or the Divine. For this reason we felt it is best to let only the Divine speak.

We advise you to read these quotations with a very silent mind, read them while being concentrated within, so that the force contained in these writings can enter deeply.

*“Surrender means to consecrate everything in oneself to the Divine, to offer all one is and has, not to insist on one’s ideas, desires, habits, etc., but to allow the divine Truth to replace them by its knowledge, will and action everywhere.”*<sup>1</sup> — SRI AUROBINDO

*“Surrender is giving oneself to the Divine—to give everything one is or has to the Divine and regard nothing as one’s own, to obey only the Divine will and no other, to live for the Divine and not for the ego.”*<sup>2</sup> — SRI AUROBINDO

*“Give all you are, all you have; nothing more is asked of you but also nothing less.”*<sup>3</sup> —THE MOTHER

*“...if one gives oneself to the Divine with trust and confidence and even if one cannot do so fully at once, yet the more one does so, the more the inner help and guidance come and the experience of the Divine grows within.”*<sup>4</sup> —SRI AUROBINDO

*“Surrender is from within, opening and giving the mind, vital and physical, all to the Mother for her to take them as her own and re-create them in their true being which is a portion of the Divine.”*<sup>5</sup> —SRI AUROBINDO

*“Your surrender must be self-made and free; it must be the surrender of a living being, not of an inert automaton or mechanical tool.”*<sup>6</sup> —SRI AUROBINDO

*“It (surrender) is not merely a passive submission, but an active self-giving.”* —SRI AUROBINDO

*“Surrender comes when the inner being has been contacted, when the inner presence has been felt.”* —THE MOTHER

### Stages of surrender

First one offers oneself in general:

*“But that is only the first step; for this is not sufficient. When the resolution has been taken, when you have decided that your whole life shall be given to the Divine, you have still at every moment to remember it and carry it out in all the details of your existence.... Live constantly in the presence of the Divine; live in the feeling that it is this presence which moves you and is doing everything you do.”*<sup>7</sup> —THE MOTHER

*“The most important surrender is the surrender of your character, your way of being, so that it may change. If you do not surrender your very own nature, never will this nature change.”<sup>8</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

Detailed surrender:

Remembering the divine presence, you can

*“Offer all your movements to it, not only every mental action, every thought and feeling but even the most ordinary and external actions such as eating; when you eat, you must feel that it is the Divine who is eating through you. When you can thus gather all your movements into the One Life, then you have in you unity instead of division.”<sup>9</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

Remember that the Divine has the power to change anything and everything:

*“...if you give all you are, all you do in order to acquire perfection, you will feel that the support is there, always guiding, showing the way. And if there is a difficulty, then instead of wanting to fight, you hand it over, hand it over to the supreme wisdom to deal with it...”<sup>10</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

The quality of surrender

Surrender only to the highest:

*“...the surrender is to the Divine.... If one feels the call, one follows it—if there is no call, then there is no need to seek the Divine.”<sup>11</sup>*

—SRI AUROBINDO

*“The surrender to the Divine must not be turned into an excuse, a*

*cloak or an occasion for surrender to one's own desires and lower movements or to one's ego or to some Force of the ignorance and darkness that puts on a false appearance of the Divine.*"<sup>12</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

### Integral surrender:

*"In the integral Yoga, the integral life down even to the smallest detail has to be transformed, to be divinised. There is nothing here that is insignificant, nothing that is indifferent. You cannot say, "When I am meditating, reading philosophy or listening to these conversations [with disciples of the Ashram] I will be in this condition of an opening towards the Light and call for it, but when I go out to walk or see friends I can allow myself to forget all about it."*"<sup>13</sup>

— THE MOTHER

*"They [faith, surrender and samata] have to be put into every part and atom of the being so that there may be no possibility of a contrary vibration anywhere."*<sup>14</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

*"If part of your being surrenders, but another part reserves itself, follows its own way or makes its own conditions, then each time that that happens, you are yourself pushing the divine Grace away from you."*<sup>15</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

Question: How to persuade the recalcitrant parts of our nature to surrender?

*"Try to make them understand, as one does with a child who does not understand, by all kinds of means: pictures, explanations, symbols. Make them understand the necessity of union and harmony with the other parts of the being; reason with them, try to make*



*them conscious of their acts and the consequences of these. Above all, be very patient, do not tire of repeating the same things.”<sup>16</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

True surrender is alive  
Passivity is not surrender:

*“An inert passivity is constantly confused with real surrender, but out of an inert passivity nothing true and powerful can come. It is the inert passivity of physical Nature that leaves it at the mercy of every obscure or undivine influence.”<sup>17</sup>*

— SRI AUROBINDO

Active surrender:

*“Active surrender is when you associate your will with the Divine Will, reject what is not the Divine, assent to what is the Divine.”<sup>18</sup>*

— SRI AUROBINDO

Surrender does not mean to abandon your will:

*“...you can hasten the realisation by lending your will to the Divine Will. That too is surrender in another form. What is required of you is not a passive surrender, in which you become like a block, but to put your will at the disposal of the Divine Will.”<sup>19</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

The Mother explains in more detail what she means by this:

*“You have a will and you can offer that will. Take the example of becoming conscious of your nights. If you take the attitude of passive surrender, you would say, “When it is the Divine Will that I should be conscious, then I shall be conscious.” On the other hand,*

*if you offer your will to the Divine, you begin to will, you say, 'I will become conscious of my nights.' You have the will that it should be done; you do not sit down idle and wait. The surrender comes in when you take the attitude that says, 'I give my will to the Divine. I intensely want to become conscious of my nights, I have not the knowledge, let the Divine Will work it out for me.' Your will must continue to act steadily, not in the way of choosing a particular action or demanding a particular object, but as an ardent aspiration concentrated upon the end to be achieved."*<sup>20</sup> —THE MOTHER

So when you ask for conscious nights you surrender actively, you aspire, you *will* for a successful end, but you do not decide how the success will be manifested. In other words you cannot decide beforehand that when your nights have become conscious, you will be seeing The Mother in your dreams. It is for the Divine to decide on how 'conscious nights' will manifest in you. What you can do is daily to put your will behind the aspiration to reach the goal: conscious nights. You leave the result to the Divine.

Perfect surrender:

*"Three typical modes of total self-giving to the Divine:*

- 1) To prostrate oneself at His feet, giving up all pride in perfect humility.*
- 2) To unfold one's being before Him, open one's whole body from head to foot, as one opens a book, exposing one's centres so as to make all movements visible in a complete sincerity that allows nothing to remain hidden.*
- 3) To nestle in His arms, to merge in Him in a loving and absolute trust.*

*These movements may be accompanied by three formulas or any*

*one of them according to the case:*

1) *Let Thy Will be done and not mine.*

2) *As Thou willest, as Thou willest.*

3) *I am Thine for eternity.*"<sup>21</sup>

—THE MOTHER

Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have mentioned the Sunlit Path and have opened the possibility for us to follow the “sunlit path”:

*“It is because of our experience won at a tremendous price that we can urge upon you and others. Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you—if secretly, he will yet show himself in good time,—do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey.”*<sup>22</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

What is needed to follow the “sunlit path”:

*“The sunlit path can be followed by those who are able to practise surrender, first a central surrender and afterwards a more complete self-giving in all the parts of the being.”*<sup>23</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

It is very difficult to live in full surrender while leading an active life in the society. You will have to have the courage to choose for the highest and the deepest, whatever the consequences. You have to be able to trust; to feel protected because you live trusting that the Divine knows what is best for you.

It is always possible to make a start. Introspection can be a great help in remaining true to this your highest aim.

## INTROSPECTION on surrender



First go deep within.

- Ask yourself: what does true surrender mean for me?
- Try to “hear” an answer while you keep your mind as quiet as possible.

After this you could reflect on:

- What were the moments in my life when I came the closest to true surrender?
- What can I do to make my surrender more true?
- How will I remind myself to live this more actively?

### FROM PERSONAL EFFORT TO DIVINE FORCE

*“It is not possible to get rid of the stress on personal effort at once—and not always desirable; for personal effort is better than tamasic inertia.*

*The personal effort has to be transformed progressively into a movement of the Divine Force. If you feel conscious of the Divine Force, then call it in more and more to govern your effort, to take it up, to transform it into something not yours, but the Mother’s. There will be a sort of transfer, a taking up of the forces at work in the personal Adhar—a transfer not suddenly complete but progressive.”<sup>24</sup>*

— SRI AUROBINDO

# Unification

Unification is the work of bringing all the parts of your being under control of your psychic centre. To do this you must make the union with the Divine the most important aim in your life. To prepare for the union you will have to gather all your thoughts, feelings and actions around the psychic being. As long as there is no contact with the psychic being, this can not be done. But once you are in contact with your psychic centre you can start the process of unification. In this chapter we focus on this process. Side by side we pay attention to some other inner movements that aid the process of unification.

The main steps in the process of unification are:

*“...to develop one’s consciousness, unify one’s being, to go within in order to enter more and more into contact with one’s psychic being; to take up all the parts, all the movements, all the activities of one’s being and put them before this psychic consciousness so that they fall into their true place in relation to this centre; finally, to organise all one’s aspiration towards the Divine and one’s progress towards the Divine.”<sup>1</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

*“And by union we mean, first, contact constant and increasing*

*with the consciousness of the Divine or Infinite, then to assimilate it or assimilate ourselves to it, then to become not only like to it and full of it, but to enter into it and dwell in it, to become that divine consciousness and being, that essence of its essence and so abolish all division that separates us from the Divinity from whom we came.”<sup>2</sup>*

— SRI AUROBINDO

*“In the depths of your consciousness is the psychic being, the temple of the Divine within you. This is the centre round which should come about the unification of all these divergent parts, all these contradictory movements of your being. Once you have got the consciousness of the psychic being and its aspiration, these doubts and difficulties can be destroyed. It takes more or less time, but you will surely succeed in the end.”<sup>3</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

The process of unification asks from us to make the relationship with the Divine the most important aim in our lives in constant remembrance:

*“For if we truly want to progress and acquire the capacity of knowing the truth of our being, that is to say, what we are truly created for, what we can call our mission upon earth, then we must, in a very regular and constant manner, reject from us or eliminate in us whatever contradicts the truth of our existence, whatever is opposed to it. In this way, little by little, all the parts, all the elements of our being, can be organised into a homogeneous whole around our psychic centre. This work of unification requires much time to be brought to some degree of perfection. Therefore, in order to accomplish it, we must arm ourselves with patience and endurance, with a determination to prolong our life as long as necessary for the success of our endeavour.”<sup>4</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

In the following passage The Mother explains how we normally live, which is to live without being unified:

*“We are formed of all kinds of different pieces. They become active one after another. According to the part that is active, one is quite another person, becomes almost another personality. For instance, one had an aspiration at first, felt that everything existed only for the Divine, then something happens, somebody comes along, one has to do something, and everything disappears. One tries to recall the experience, not even the memory remains.”*<sup>5</sup> — THE MOTHER

Striving for unification will definitely give purpose and meaning to your life. Though this may take long, life will have a very different quality when you start the process of unification:

*“If you organise everything—your feelings, your thoughts, your impulses, etc.—around the psychic centre which is the inner light, you will see that all inner disorder will change into a luminous order.”*<sup>6</sup> — THE MOTHER

*“You may be five years old or twenty, fifty or sixty and yet transform yourself in this way by putting everything before this inner light.”*<sup>7</sup> — THE MOTHER

It is never too late to start the process of unification, but it takes courage to start this journey, because you will have to leave the beaten track and will have to be willing to change a lot. However, in difficult times there is solace: you can safely admit your weaknesses in front of The Mother and ask for help and strength. The Divine does not judge and does not punish like human beings often do. You can be totally honest before the Divine. If you call the Divine sincerely, help will always be there. The courage to rely only on the Divine gives actually the most marvelous protection.

The Mother invites us to be brave:

*“Every time you are afraid to face yourself and hide carefully from yourself what prevents you from advancing, well, it is as though you were building a wall on the way; later you must demolish it to pass on. It is better to do your task immediately, look yourself straight in the face....”*<sup>8</sup>

— THE MOTHER

In the previous chapters you have learnt to observe yourself regularly and so become conscious of what you do, feel and think. You have learnt to step back whenever you were living too much in your surface nature. For the process of unification you must try to shift your consciousness permanently inside and live within constantly. In this way you can always observe yourself from the highest or innermost position inside yourself. If you start observing yourself while being connected to your innermost being, you will start to distinguish what is in harmony with the innermost truth and what is not. In this way you can learn to take your decisions consciously from the highest or deepest level. If you are fully connected with your psychic being it is not you, but the Divine in you who takes the decisions. This connectedness brings with it the power of conscious control: you check the things that are not in harmony with the inner truth of your being. You start having control over thoughts, feelings and impulses that are not in harmony with the Truth. You can offer them more and more completely, so that the Light or the Force of the Divine can change them fully. Finally it will be the Divine in you who decides and who will guide all your thoughts, feelings, impulses and physical movements. When this is so the process of unification has been completed.



## Psychic aspiration

Aspiration is an important tool for unification and spiritual progress. Like a carpenter who takes the help of his saw to make a piece of furniture, aspiration will help you to lift the veils from the psychic being.

In the previous chapter we talked about aspiration in general. We continue here to highlight psychic aspiration:

*“It is the call of the being for higher things—for the Divine, for all that belongs to the higher or Divine Consciousness,”* says Sri Aurobindo.

The psychic being gives the true spiritual aspiration. This aspiration is often called the psychic fire.

How to light the psychic fire?

*“By the will for progress, by the urge towards perfection. Above all, it is the will for progress and self-purification which lights the fire. The will for progress. Those who have a strong will, when they turn it towards spiritual progress and purification, automatically light the fire within themselves.”*<sup>9</sup>

— THE MOTHER

*“A constant fire can be there only when a certain stage has been reached, that is when one is always inside consciously living in the psychic being, but for that all this preparation of the mind, vital, physical is necessary.”*<sup>10</sup>

— SRI AUROBINDO

When in the beginning the psychic fire does not burn constantly and the psychic presence is not felt, do not get discouraged. Here is Sri Aurobindo’s advice:

*“Even if the aspiration were there, the interval periods [when the*

*psychic is not felt] would come. If even in them one can aspire, so much the better—but the main thing is to meet them with quietude and not become restless, depressed or despondent.”<sup>11</sup>*

— SRI AUROBINDO

Question: “Mother, what must I do so that the fire of aspiration never goes out?”

*“One keeps this fire lit by throwing into it all one’s difficulties, all one’s desires, all one’s imperfections. In the morning and evening when you come to me, you should ask me in your heart to keep the fire lit and offer me all these things as fuel.”<sup>12</sup>* — THE MOTHER

*“The next thing you have to do is to tend it (the fire), to keep it always alert and awake and living. And for that what is required is concentration—concentration upon the Divine...”*

*Concentrate in the heart. Enter into it; go within and deep and far, as far as you can. Gather all the strings of your consciousness that are spread abroad, roll them up and take a plunge and sink down. A fire is burning there, in the deep quietude of your heart.”<sup>13</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

*“And each defect one wants to cure or each progress one wants to make—if all that is thrown into the fire, it burns with a new intensity. And this is not an image, it is a fact in the subtle physical. One can feel the warmth of the flame, one can see in the subtle physical the light of the flame.”<sup>14</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

The Mother makes a distinction between prayer and aspiration:

*“Prayer is a much more external thing, generally about a precise fact, and always formulated for it is the formula that makes the*

*prayer. One may have an aspiration and transcribe it as a prayer, but aspiration goes beyond prayer in every way. It is much closer and much more, as it were self-forgetful...*<sup>15</sup> — THE MOTHER

Sometimes it feels that the aspiration is mixed with anguish. Here is the explanation:

*“As soon as the presence of the psychic consciousness is united with the aspiration [it is] as if it were filled with the very essence of an inexpressible joy..., this joy is there as though it filled up everything, and it carries you in spite of everything...*

*When that is not there, the aspiration may come from different parts of the being; it may come mainly from the mind or mainly from the vital or even from the physical....It is the vital which gives the intensity [to the aspiration] and as the vital is at the same time the seat of most of the difficulties, obstacles, contradictions, it is the friction between the intensity of the aspiration and the intensity of the difficulty which creates this anguish.”*<sup>16</sup> — THE MOTHER

Once you have understood the reason for this anguish you can take the next step:

*“...you must understand the reason for this anguish. And then, if you can introduce just one more element in your aspiration, that is, your trust in the divine Grace, trust in the divine Response, it counterbalances all possible anguish and you can aspire without any disturbance or fear.”*<sup>17</sup> — THE MOTHER

For unification you have to practise conscious control so that your thoughts, feelings and actions are under the influence of your psychic centre. Why is that “conscious control” needed? Maybe

you have read The Mother's essay "The Science of Living", and you may remember that it has the subtitle "To know oneself and to control oneself". This self-knowledge will help you to find the truth of your being and your true mission here on earth. The self-control and vigilance is needed to make your aspiration for union with the Divine intense and constant.

### INTROSPECTION on unification



Take some time out and go within as deep as you can. Reflect on this chapter, on the passages that touched you most. You may also want to get an answer from within on some of the points given below. It may give you deeper insight about your inner progress or reveal something that your innermost being knew always but that till now never came to the surface.

Reflect on:

- The quality of your aim or ideal  
Would you like to formulate your aim or ideal anew?
- From where comes your urge for living within; what forms the base for living within?
- The quality, the intensity of your aspiration
- The completeness of your surrender
- The presence of the psychic consciousness in you

Try to have a quiet mind so that you can 'hear' the answers.

## Faith

We end with a small section on faith, because faith is a great helper on the path.

What is faith?

*“Faith is a certitude without any proof.”* — THE MOTHER

*“Faith is a thing that precedes knowledge, not comes after knowledge. It is a glimpse of a truth which the mind has not yet seized as knowledge.”<sup>18</sup>* — SRI AUROBINDO

*“Faith is the confidence in the Divine and the unshakable certitude of the Divine’s victory.”* — THE MOTHER

*“...faith—that kind of unshakable certitude in the very existence of God—faith is something that seizes the whole being. It is not only mental, psychic or vital: it is the whole being, entirely, which has faith. Faith leads straight to experience.”<sup>19</sup>* — THE MOTHER

Role of faith:

*“All the circumstances of life are arranged to teach us that, beyond mind, faith in the Divine Grace gives us the strength to go through all trials, to overcome all weaknesses and find the contact with the Divine Consciousness which gives us not only peace and joy but also physical balance and good health.”<sup>20</sup>* — THE MOTHER

The different forms of faith:

*“Mental faith combats doubts and helps to open to the true knowledge; vital faith prevents the attacks of the hostile forces or defeats*

*them and helps to open to the true spiritual will and action; physical faith keeps one firm through all physical obscurity, inertia or suffering and helps to open to the foundation of the true consciousness; psychic faith opens to the direct touch of the Divine and helps to bring union and surrender.”<sup>21</sup>* — SRI AUROBINDO

### Faith must be pure to be effective

*“A pure faith is something all-powerful and irresistible. One doesn't often find a faith that is all-powerful... each one of us has a faith, for example, a faith in something, say a faith in the divine Presence within us.... This example is very easy to understand. You have faith, it is there, but you don't have the experience. Why? Because the faith is not pure. If the faith were quite pure, immediately, the thing would be done.”<sup>22</sup>* — THE MOTHER

### How to nurture faith

*“One must hold on to one's faith, will one's faith; one must seek it, cultivate it, protect it.”<sup>23</sup>* — THE MOTHER

*“One must watch over one's faith as one watches over the birth of something infinitely precious, and protect it very carefully from everything that can impair it.”<sup>24</sup>* — THE MOTHER

### Faith must go together with trust:

*“... if your faith is not made of a complete trust in the Divine, well, you may very easily remain under the impression that you have faith and yet be losing all trust in the divine Power or divine Goodness, or the Trust the Divine has in you.... So, unless one adds to faith a total and complete trust in the Divine Grace, there will be difficulties. So both are necessary...”<sup>25</sup>* — THE MOTHER

*“Faith in the Grace always brings about its intervention.”*

— THE MOTHER

It is the Divine Grace who does it all. Rely on it, for

*“With the Divine’s help nothing is impossible.”*

—THE MOTHER

### TO BE ON THE PATH...

*“What I call “being on the path” is being in a state of consciousness in which only union with the Divine has any value—this union is the only thing worth living, the sole object of aspiration. Everything else has lost all value and is not worth seeking, so there is no longer any question of renouncing it because it is no longer an object of desire. As long as union with the Divine is not the thing for which one lives, one is not yet on the path.”<sup>26</sup>*

— THE MOTHER

*“What happens most often when one makes the inner effort that’s needed to discover one’s soul, to unite with it and allow it to govern one’s life, is a kind of marvellous enchantment with this discovery, as a result of which the first instinct is to tell oneself, “Now I have what I need, I have found infinite delight!” and no longer to be concerned with anything else....*

*Indeed a great courage is needed to go farther; this soul one discovers must be an intrepid warrior soul which does not at all rest satisfied with its own inner joy while comforting itself for the unhappiness of others with the idea that sooner or later everybody will reach that state...”<sup>27</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

## Part 2

# The Integral Classroom



Question asked by a teacher to The Mother:

*“What is the best way of preparing ourselves, until we can establish a new system [of education]?”*

Her answer:

*“Naturally, it is to widen and illumine your consciousness—but how to do it? Your own consciousness, to widen and illumine it. And if you could find, each one of you, your psychic and unite with it, all the problems would be solved. The psychic being is the representative of the Divine in the human being. That’s it, you see—the Divine is not something remote and inaccessible. The Divine is in you but you are not fully conscious of it.”<sup>1</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

# Psychic Education in the Classroom

## Introduction

### The importance of Integral Education

We are living in a significant time. Below the surface the Supramental is already at work, on the surface there is a play of clashing forces; India as a nation is at the crossroads. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have said that as long as India does not acknowledge her soul, India will not blossom fully. They saw Integral Education, which is centred around the psychic being, as a tool to bring India back to her true self. Around 1906 Sri Aurobindo wrote that a new system of education can play a significant role in the building of a nation. Unfortunately, about fifty years after Independence, Indian education is still burdened by the British heritage.

The Mother has given a strong warning that for India's growth the psychic must come to the foreground:

*“India is the country where the psychic law can and must rule*

*and the time has come for that here. Besides, it is the only possible salvation for this country whose consciousness has unfortunately been warped by the influence and domination of a foreign nation... ”*<sup>1</sup>

—THE MOTHER

It follows that for the individual student as well as for the nation a shift to Integral Education is the need of the hour. Moreover, a shift to Integral Education would not only be beneficial for India; it would help the whole world to come closer to its spiritual destiny. The Mother says:

*“An integral education which could, with some variations, be adapted to all the nations of the world, must bring back the legitimate authority of the Spirit over a matter fully developed and utilised.”*<sup>2</sup>

—THE MOTHER

There is a great beauty, urgency and relevance in pursuing psychic education. And it can be done: through a gradual and more complete implementation of Integral Education.

Those of us who are working in education know that there is a constant tension between the ideal of Integral Education and that what society expects us to do. This tension mounts in the higher classes as the Board Examination comes closer, because we do not want to cut off the careers of the students. Yet we know how important it is that children become conscious of their *inner* being and the meaning of life, and that they get the freedom to make conscious choices about the way they want to live their life. The true aim of an integral school is to nurture the inner development of its students and to develop the mental, vital and physical instruments of the students as well. This development is considered important because through these instruments a human being can give expression to the qualities of the soul.

It is against the principles of Integral Education to sacrifice the inner growth of the students in order to produce the maximum numbers of toppers. Though it is known that inner balance and fulfilment are very important in life, even in integral schools depth and integrality are often made secondary to the demands of present day society. Time and again we should step back and check if our daily practice is still in harmony with our aim.

### **Mission statement and daily practice**

Creation has given us an enormous diversity. Truth can be expressed on many levels and each level has its own value. Like every individual is unique and must obey his own dharma, every school has to find its own way in implementing Integral Education. In an integral school one of the regular tasks of staff and management is to review if the shift to Integral Education continues to be deep and comprehensive enough. If the team decides to renew its effort, a plan for a more thorough implementation has to be made. Care has to be taken that it will not become an isolated movement of a few teachers, but that the principal, staff and administration work together for the concrete realisation of the mission statement. For keeping up the commitment it is essential to have regular feed back sessions, not only for keeping track of the progress made, but also for keeping the inspiration alive.

You and your colleagues can handle a deepening of Integral Education to the extent that you live it yourself. The most important shift that has to take place is to develop more sensitivity for the psychic unfolding, in yourself and in the students. The following chapters are an attempt to help you to live and implement that. But let us first look at Integral Education in general.

### **A closer look at Integral Education**

Integral Education has two components. The first is that it aims at allowing the psychic being of each student to come to the foreground. The second component aims at perfecting and developing the mental, vital and physical nature of the students into good instruments for the psychic to express itself in the world.

To start with the first component—to help students to become aware of the psychic consciousness—it is important to create in your class an atmosphere that facilitates psychic living. Part 1 of this book was meant to help you to set out on a conscious journey for discovering your inner nature and innermost self. Your own experiences will be of great help when you try to build up an atmosphere that enables the children in your class to experience the psychic presence in themselves. Through constant self-observation you will become more aware of your own possibilities and difficulties while at work. This will help you to be more open and sensitive to the possibilities and difficulties of your students in the different parts of their being.

Openness and sensitivity for psychic unfolding can only develop when the right atmosphere is created in the classroom. A classroom is not an isolated unit, so it is best when the climate of the whole school is favourable for psychic learning. Simple beauty in the school premises, a shift from competition to sharing, each one giving one's best to all, all such things make a tremendous difference. The absence of fear is another important element: for the psychic to come forward, students need an environment that allows them to open themselves without fear. Students have also to be given time and space for self-observation—to look at their own actions and reactions—so that they learn to understand and know themselves.

The second component of Integral Education is the develop-

ment of the faculties of the students. All the parts of the human being, the mental, the vital, the physical, are to be developed and perfected around the psychic being, so that it has a good instrument to express itself. In the following chapters the emphasis will be on creating a school environment that invites this psychic unfolding.

Of course psychic education should never be made into a compulsory subject, since that would bring in a wrong attitude; we cannot demand the divine presence. What has to be attempted is that the atmosphere, every detail of the school environment gets a psychic touch. Let a school become a place where teachers and students can develop talents and perfect capacities that are hidden within, where students are welcomed to overcome limitations. Let a school help students to find their aim in life guided by their own inner law.

In the next chapters only the first steps will be discussed. We hope to make you enthusiastic enough to go confidently ahead and develop the material of this book further in your unique way.

#### THE ESSENCE

*“The psychic is the spark of the Divine Fire which upholds the evolution of each individual upon earth. It is the ‘soul-consciousness’ that governs life after life, or rather that becomes more manifest through the instrumentation of mind, life and body, until all is ready for union with the Divine.”<sup>3</sup>*

—SRI AUROBINDO

*“Even a fleeting idea in a child, at a certain moment in its childhood when the psychic being is most in front, if it succeeds in penetrating through the outer consciousness and giving the child just an impression of something beautiful which must be realised, it creates a little nucleus and upon this you build your action.”<sup>4</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

# The Three Principles of True Teaching

The three principles of true teaching were formulated by Sri Aurobindo in the beginning of the twentieth century. Because they form the base of Integral Education we shall try to explain them here in detail. It is with the three principles the same as with other writings of Sri Aurobindo: every time our own depth increases, we are able to fathom a little more of the depth of Sri Aurobindo's writings. This is an ongoing process. Whenever we read a passage after a few months have passed, we find a deeper meaning in it. But whatever we understand, it seems there is always a still greater depth. So the explanation given here is not the last word but intends to help you in your own understanding of the three basic principles of teaching.

## **The first principle of true teaching**

*“The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect*

*his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process. He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge for himself. He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface. The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine.”<sup>1</sup>*

—SRI AUROBINDO

We shall try to illustrate sentence by sentence what Sri Aurobindo meant with this first principle.

*“The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose.”*

It is not easy for a teacher to be told that nothing can be taught. It seems to undermine the teaching profession totally, but if we look at these lines from the perspective of psychic development, there is a great depth and wisdom in them. What Sri Aurobindo means is that the real knowledge is already hidden within each human being. So the outer perfection a child (or grown-up) can realise, is actually the realisation of the hidden inner perfection that is already there. The instruments that can express this inner perfection are the (perfected) mind, vital and body. The more the psychic is in the foreground and developed, the greater will be the perfection that a human being can realise in the outer world.

In practical terms this means that a teacher has, above all, to provide learning situations that invoke the inner knowledge. For this it is necessary to provide a warm, welcoming and non-judgemental environment that invites and facilitates the blossoming of the psychic presence, of the mental, vital and physical instruments.



**Change in the classroom:**

- From teaching subject matter, to invoking the knowledge that is within.
- From taskmaster to participant and helper; a teacher is learning together with the students.

*“He does not actually train the pupil’s mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process.”*

A teacher cannot know exactly how the mind of the student in front of her works. This may become clear when you think of the fact that we all have a voice, but there are no two people who have exactly the same voice. Similarly, we all learnt to walk but there are no two people who walk exactly in the same way, each one has his or her own walking style. The same is true for how our minds work. We all have a brain and a mind but each mind is a little different; we all learn, but each one has his or her own learning style.

Practically this means that in the integral classroom there must be lots of stimulating learning material around. Some children will use one book or learning aid more, others another; they choose according to their inner and outer uniqueness. Through these choices the child slowly becomes aware of his capacities and his swadharma. The teacher does not tell precisely how the material is to be used. When a child asks how to do a thing, she does not give straight away a long explanation, but builds up the understanding *together* with the child and gives him space to explore. The student remains the initiator in the learning process, in the meantime the teacher tries to understand how the mind of this particular child works, so that she can support him better. Remember: in the integral classroom textbooks are not to be learnt

by rote, but the learning material is meant to develop the faculties of the mind of the student, such as the faculty to think scientifically, the ability to express oneself clearly, and to strengthen the qualities of the vital, such as enthusiasm or perseverance.

**Change in the classroom:**

- From focusing on the content, to focusing on development.
- From one textbook to a variety of learning materials; from fixed inputs to offering varied learning experiences.

*“He does not impart knowledge to him, he shows him how to acquire knowledge himself.”*

A math teacher who teaches the whole class all the steps that have to be taken for subtracting a number and tells the students that they all have to do it in this particular way, might kill a math talent in a child. This one-tract-instruction is related to the fact that teachers are mainly interested in the product: the right answer. They forget that different children have different aptitudes and different learning styles. Learning is a process: before we arrive at an understanding of how we learn, a *process* of trial and error is needed. Once we own the process it is easy to arrive at the correct answer. This learning process changes from person to person.

In the same way a teacher cannot impart one uniform spiritual truth to all students. The Mother used to say that each sadhak has a unique path.

**Change in the classroom:**

- From focusing on the product to focusing on the process.
- From imposing one single method of learning, to opening oneself to guiding several unique individual learning processes.

*“He does not call forth the knowledge that is within; he only shows him where it lies and how it can be habituated to rise to the surface.”*

A teacher has to create a learning environment with learning experiences that helps the psychic to rise to the surface. Inspiring stories, beautiful music, displays of uplifting art, journeys of self-discovery of the children through various activities, all help a child to experience the contact with the deep inner worlds. Each subject has entry points for this. This contact will give another quality as well to all other learning that takes place. In the psychic domain it is essential to offer a variety in form, so that each child can experience consciously what works best for him or her to reach the deeper layers. This opens the way for each child to know how to go within whenever he feels a longing or a need.

**Change in the classroom:**

- From mind-centred to psychic-centred.

*“The distinction that reserves this principle for the teaching of adolescent and adult minds and denies its application to the child, is a conservative and unintelligent doctrine.”*

We all have a soul, our psychic beings are in different stages of development. We all have gone through many lives and a child may even have a deeper inner wisdom than the teacher. In the deeper layers teacher and child are both learners. Because of the difference in age a teacher has built up more life-experience and that is why he can be a guide. Naturally he will experience that younger children ask for more guidance than older ones. If he

spreads an atmosphere that allows the psychic to come to the foreground, the quality of the development of the mental, vital and physical instruments will increase and improve.

**Change in the classroom:**

- From cajoling and judging to respecting a child.
- From fulfilling the standard role of a teacher, to radiating a (psychic) presence.

To live the first principle of true teaching a fundamental change is needed in the attitude of the teacher. He or she has to develop the qualities of a guide or facilitator. This change in attitude is to start from within. The teacher becomes now also a learner, because he is also an evolving human being, and that is why the development of his inner and outer nature never ends.

**The second principle of true teaching**

*“The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition.... To force the nature to abandon its own dharma is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it...”<sup>2</sup>*

—SRI AUROBINDO

*“The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth.”*

A teacher normally teaches the same lesson to all children. If she respects the unique development of each child, she must stop

doing that and allow that in the same class different children are busy learning different things. One child may want to devote a lot of time to writing a long story or a small play, while another is building up his vocabulary by making a mini dictionary. So a teacher has not only to pay individual attention to each child, but also to respect the particular way in which each student wants to make progress.

**Change in the classroom:**

- From content-based to development-based.
- From prescribing a syllabus to allowing a student to choose.

*“The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition.”*

In the integral classroom the child can participate in his own learning programme, can express his choices and have a dialogue with the teacher. She helps the student to look within so that the child can become conscious of his qualities and capacities. Not every child has an aptitude for science and the idea that to do science is the best for everyone has to be de-mystified. The greater wisdom of following one’s individual swadharma has to come to the foreground.

**Change in the classroom:**

- From society-based to dharma-based.

*“To force the nature to abandon its own dharma is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it.”*

Modern society make us believe that we are more respected if we top in science. Many parents stress the need for high marks in all subjects. Many children feel inferior if they don't produce very high marks in their tests. In this way there is no question of a choice based on one's own dharma, no question of a choice at all: if you score high you do science, the next best is economics and commerce, and you are unlucky when you end up in humanities. It is not the aptitude, the uniqueness of the student but the belief-system of a commercial society that defines the career of a student. A wonderful career as a journalist may get lost because the student also scored high in science and is now one of the so many engineers in a big company.

Practically this means that teachers (and parents) must be aware that for nurturing the true growth of a child we must dare to differ from commonly accepted value systems. We must create an atmosphere where dharma-based learning can take place and is respected.

**Change in the classroom:**

- From adjusting to the common values of society, to attempting to bring in a new value system based on the truth of the child's being.

To live the second principle of true teaching a teacher has to learn how to create a resourceful learning environment for children that gives adequate freedom and that respects the child's swadharma. She has to be understanding whenever learning difficulties arise, she has to be like a friend and help the student to find his own solution to overcome the difficulty. A teacher has to be flexible and open to variety in the classroom and allow this variety to be expressed. She has to help a child to find out "Who

am I?" "What do I want to make of my life?" She has to be a living example of dharma-based education.

### **The third principle of true teaching**

*"The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is, to that which shall be.... We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move. If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced on the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development."*<sup>3</sup>

—SRI AUROBINDO

*"The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is, to that which shall be."*

Each teacher knows that each class has its own atmosphere. According to the nature of the individual children and the dynamics of the class as a whole, the learning material must be carefully selected and *offered* according to the age, level, need and interest of each child. From a young age the child participates in this process. A teacher also observes the group dynamics and needs of the group, takes up challenges that occur in the social structure of the group and this is made into a learning programme for all.

### **Change in the classroom:**

- From teaching the next page of the book, to planning and offering learning experiences for the whole being of the child.

*"We must not take up the nature by the roots from the earth in*

*which it must grow or surround the mind with images and ideas of a life which is alien to that in which it must physically move.”*

There are vast differences between urban and rural India. The surroundings of children growing up in a village are so different from those growing up in a big city that they develop a different mindset. Just think of the experiences of a student walking in the morning for an hour to school through the countryside or a student sitting for an hour in the schoolbus in the midst of urban traffic. What all would they have seen and heard before they enter their respective school buildings? Of course, a teacher wants to help a student to widen mentally and vitally, but for that to take place it is important to start from the basic knowledge that is already present in the child. How can a child assimilate and integrate new knowledge if he cannot compare it with and link it to what he already knows? In the Primary section the immediate surroundings are always ‘the first pages’ of each new chapter.

**Change in the classroom:**

- From teaching a general textbook to widening the mind starting from the child’s experiences.

*“If anything has to be brought in from outside, it must be offered, not forced to the mind. A free and natural growth is the condition of genuine development.”*

If it is necessary, especially in the higher classes, to study certain concepts, we still have to allow the student the freedom to come to an understanding in his or her unique way. A lot of potential is wasted by forcing the children to learn things in a prescribed way at a pre-arranged time.



**Change in the classroom:**

- From “As teacher I know better”, to “I try to respect and understand a student’s natural way of progress and education”.

To live the third principle of true teaching the main requirement is to be participant in the learning process of the children; to invite and not to impose. This becomes a more natural habit when one lives as much as possible from one’s own depth.

Part 1 of this book offered suggestions about how to live more psychically. It discussed how acquiring new habits can help in bringing about the shift from living on the surface to living within. In the same way, to become a teacher in the integral classroom a change in attitude is needed. This attitudinal change will ask for new habits in the classroom as well. “Nothing can be taught” is directly related to the soul and the development of the psychic being. This is the base of integral education and this asks for a new focus in the teaching/learning process for which new habits are required.

For an integral classroom in an integral school changes are also needed in the environment, the time table, the textbooks and other learning material. But it is not enough to make such changes on the surface only. On their own such changes will not create the right atmosphere. The outward changes have to be based on an inner change in the teacher, in the principal and if possible in the management. That is why it is so important for integral teachers and principals to have time for self-evaluation, introspection, reflection; that is why it is important to make checklists for oneself and participate in activities that kindle and nurture the inner light.

## SELF-SEARCH

Some personal questions related to your work

- How does a teacher or taskmaster perceive a child?
- How does a helper or guide perceive a child?
- What are the taskmaster-like qualities and capacities in me?
- What are the guide-like qualities and capacities in me?
- What do I need to change in my attitude for becoming a better integral guide?
- What is helpful in my attitude for creating and implementing an integral environment?
- How flexible am I; how do I respond to unexpected circumstances?
- How do I build up my rapport with the students?
- How much warmth do I dare to show to my students?
- By nature do I encourage people to try out things or do I rather keep tabs on what they are doing?
- When I say that I respect elderly persons, what do I really mean?
- When I say that I respect children, what do I really mean?
- Do I generally make positive statements about others or is it my habit to pass less favourable comments on others?
- Do I really believe that a young child can already make choices and take decisions?
- Which part(s) in me object to students making their own choices?
- Which part(s) in me support this?
- How resourceful am I in my work? How much variety do I provide in the learning material?
- What is my belief system regarding the society? How far is this in harmony with the aim of integral education?

- Am I more of a follower or a leader?
- How do I dare to bring in new values, based on what I believe is integral education?
- How resourceful am I towards my own development? What do I do to recharge my battery?
- How big is the role of the psychic in my own life?
- What do I do to help the psychic of the children to come to the foreground?
- Which part(s) in me do not believe that I have still a lot to learn?
- Which part(s) in me do believe that I still have a lot to learn?

WORKSHEET: CHANGE IN THE CLASSROOM

the first steps for implementing the three principles of true teaching

We list here changes that encourage psychic learning mentioned in this chapter (p. 130-40)

- Read them one by one.
- For each change write down what you would need to do to make this change happen in yourself and your classroom:
  - From teaching subject matter, to invoking the knowledge that is within.
  - From instructor to participant and helper; a teacher is learning together with the students.



- From focusing on the content, to focusing on development.
- From one textbook, to a variety of learning materials; from fixed inputs, to offering learning experiences.
- From focus on product to focus on process.
- From imposing a certain method of learning, to opening oneself to guiding unique individual learning processes.
- From mind-centred to psychic-centred.
- From cajoling and judging to respecting a child.
- From fulfilling the standard role of a teacher, to spreading a (psychic) presence.
- From prescribing a syllabus to offering choices.
- From society based to dharma based.
- From adjusting to common values of society, to attempting to bring in a new value system based on the truth of one's being.



- From teaching a general textbook to widening the mind starting from the child's experiences.



- From "As teacher I know better", to "I try to respect and understand a student's natural way of progress and education".

- Choose from this list the changes that appeal to you most.
- What would have to change in you to be able to implement these changes?
- What would have to change in your classroom?
- Make an action plan for implementing these changes in yourself and in your classroom.

## THE FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS

*"Of one thing you can be sure—your future is in your hands. You will become the man you want to be and the higher your ideal and your aspiration, the higher will be your realisation, but you must keep a firm resolution and never forget your true aim in life."*<sup>4</sup>

—THE MOTHER

*"Whatever is new will always meet opposition from conservative people. If we yield to this opposition, the world will never advance one step."*<sup>5</sup>

—THE MOTHER

# The Learning Process

In the previous chapter you saw that, if you take the three principles of true teaching as your base, many changes have to take place in your classroom. This chapter talks about changes related to the teaching-learning *process*. Depending on where you and your school are now, you may want to implement all these changes or just a few.

When a teacher is asked the question “What do you teach?”, the answer is almost always, “The prescribed textbook.” When you ask next, “With what aim do you teach?”, the most common answer is, “I do my best to make the maximum number of students pass with the highest marks possible.” The aim of teaching is to try to produce the best exam results. In other words, the content of what students learn and the personal development of the students is less important than the result that has to be produced: the maximum number of toppers. Teaching in most classrooms is product oriented. That is why many teachers tell their students to just memorise the content; real understanding is not the main concern. Students are taught the method for answering questions in a mechanical way, because teachers know that in

that way the highest possible marks are obtained. Learning is not meant for self-development and the stress, especially in the higher classes, is on mechanically (re)producing a desired product.

When you try to understand Sri Aurobindo's words, you find that he does not lay stress on a preconceived product. For him true teaching is development-based. His ideal is that each child *develops* his mental, vital and physical instruments to the maximum, so that the soul can express itself as fully as possible through them. The soul is the divine portion in us around which the psychic being grows. That is why the discovery and blossoming of the psychic being form the core of this developmental process. Learning that is based on *the blossoming of the psychic being is the most fundamental process of self-development in a child or adult.*

Here is a worksheet that is meant to help you to think more deeply about the difference between product and development based education.

#### WORKSHEET: DEVELOPMENT-BASED EDUCATION

Some questions to help you to gain deeper insight in the difference between teaching and learning.

- Suppose you would have to choose someone to help you in a learning process, what would you wish to see in the person who is to be your guide?

- How do you define teaching?
- How do you define learning?



- What are the landmarks and signals which would indicate to you that teaching is going on?
- What are landmarks and signals which would indicate that developmental learning is going on?



Apply this now to your own classroom situation and think of one of your regular school days:

- A. List the landmarks and signals of *teaching* in your classes.
- B. List the landmarks and signals of *developmental learning* in your classes.
- What is more prominent: "A" or "B"?
- What would have to be changed in you to shift more completely from "A" to "B"?
- What would have to be changed in the class to shift from "A" to "B"?
- What are the capacities and qualities in you that enable developmental learning more freely?
- In which way do you work on your inner development?
- What are you doing to develop or to perfect your attitude?
- What is already there in the class that enables developmental learning?
- What would have to be added or developed in the learning environment?



Through the previous chapters you may have worked on self-development. You most likely have experienced how slowly (and sometimes maybe even quickly) changes have taken place in yourself. If you have learned to observe yourself, you would have become more aware of yourself. This self-awareness helps you to become your own guide in any learning process. Learning in the classroom should be based on a similar process. You are the helper in the learning process of the child, but it is the child who is to become the motor and master of his own learning. Self-awareness is an important tool in this process and we have to help the students develop this tool. That is why it is so important to offer choices to the students. For this we must create a welcoming environment without fear, else the student will choose what he thinks the teacher wants him to do. Sri Aurobindo says that for young children the guidance will necessarily be more, but that does not mean that the teacher decides. He states that it will diminish as the child grows, but he explains clearly in 'the first principle' that the *nature* of the learning process remains the same for young and old. And how could it be different if we start respecting the soul, because the soul is ageless. "The first principle of true teaching" has a very profound meaning. One can read it over and over again, and the depth of the statement grows as one's own depth increases.

If you want to be true to Sri Aurobindo's Three Principles, a major change is needed in the classroom: a change from product-based to *process-based* education. The aim of this process-based education is the integral development of the child. At the core of this development is the psychic being, and next, through finding out and developing his unique capacities a student will become aware of the place he/she wants to fulfil in society. If children

grow up in this way, they will be able to express, to a greater or lesser degree, a portion of divine nature in their daily life.

Let us have a closer look at this process-oriented learning. The most important aspects of an integral learning process are:

- space for self-observation (self-observation is not an aim in itself, it is to lead to self-awareness)
- time and space for reflection
- learning to take decisions guided by inner motives
- learning to take responsibility for one's decisions
- space for making real choices (constraints in the student's choices have to come from the balancing act between his swadharma and the society in general; they should not come from the personal ideas of the teacher or parents)
- time and space for development and perfection of personal qualities and capacities

### **How to implement this?**

Below you'll find the major shifts that are needed for implementing this process-based learning. The list is substantial. Do not become too disheartened to start. Many teachers feel a kind of relief when they do make a beginning. This relief comes from the fact that development-based education allows you to be more yourself in the classroom and build up deep and meaningful relationships with the children.

### **Major shifts for implementing development-based learning**

- the teacher has to change her attitude from that of a taskmaster

to that of a guide: content and mode of learning is decided together with the children; individual differences and individual choices are welcomed and respected.

- the teacher helps a child to develop a new attitude to learning. Learning is seen as self-discovery and self-development. A student is given time and space for reflection. If the child starts to learn in this way from his first day in school, this attitude will develop naturally and students will do most of the work on their own. In case this shift to development-based learning is started with older children who have been exposed to several years of regular schooling, extra care has to be taken to make the students aware of the major shifts that are needed; they have to be helped to build up consciously a new attitude and they have to be given time and space to change inwardly.
- the teacher helps to create self-awareness in the children: he learns to ask open ended questions. Open ended questions are questions that start with how..., why..., why not..., where..., where also..., how come... etc. Open ended questions usually do not have one simple answer, but can be answered in many ways. Such questions make the children aware and help them reflect upon their outlook in life.
- the teacher helps the child to gain confidence in his own capacities. Instead of eroding confidence through comparison with other children, each child is encouraged to progress to the maximum in the areas of his choice. A child is helped to observe him/herself. Through this a child learns to make conscious choices.
- the teacher provides the opportunity for the children to make real and conscious choices. He has to learn to see that variety is

one of nature's boons. He has to allow for variety in content of learning, variety in the way questions can be answered, variety in learning style, etc. By offering choices the students will have to become aware of their own likes and dislikes, their own capacities and difficulties and find their way for maximum self-development; this allows "the mind to be consulted in its own growth."

- the teacher helps the children to be aware of the fact that a choice always has consequences which need to be followed up or, if need be, can be rectified *consciously*. The responsibility for learning shifts more and more to the child as the child grows.
- the teacher gives space for try-outs and does not see them as a waste of time: learning can take place through trial and error; this helps a child to find out what is the right method for him. The teacher learns to see that mistakes are helpers in a learning process; making mistakes is a natural by-product of learning; there is no learning that takes place without mistakes; they help to signal where there is still scope for improvement.
- the teacher needs to have absolute clarity about the minimum common syllabus. Besides this minimum common syllabus that is the same in content for all children, each child makes an individual 'syllabus' for himself. (see also next chapter)
- the teacher understands that the aim of the learning process is that a child develops his mental, vital and physical capacities and skills; the quality of the learning outcome is dependent on this *development*; development is not registered primarily through marks; to score high marks is not an aim in itself.
- responsibility for behaviour and discipline is increasingly with

the student—a teacher allows space for experimentation within certain boundaries—which in case of older students can be decided by teacher and students together; through this a child can realise clearly the effect of his own actions and reactions. A teacher provides time for introspection; she avoids moral lessons.

- the teacher is not indifferent to the choices the children make; she always tries to help them to make a choice from the highest or the deepest level; but she takes care that this guidance has no moral overtones, since this would corrupt the process of choice. If she herself believes in the Light and looks for the Light in the students, they will start looking for the Light themselves and allow themselves more and more to be guided by it.
- the teacher helps the child to strive for perfection guided by an inner quality, (not through scolding or excessive praise, not through tests and examinations).
- the teacher encourages a child to overcome his or her weaknesses: a weakness is not seen as an irritant that brings down the level of achievement, but as an opportunity and challenge for greater development.

The above changes help to strengthen the inward look of the student and the qualities and attitude needed for the psychic discovery. Process-based learning asks for self-observation, for self-awareness, for making conscious choices, for taking responsibility for one's own progress, for calling on the will. All these relate to the inner movements we have discussed in the first part of this book and are essential for an ever greater unfolding and development from life to life.

WORKSHEET: DEVELOPMENT-BASED LEARNING

To take the first steps for implementing it.

- Read the list of major shifts a few times more.
- Tick mark the statements that appeal most to you.
- Write out the statements that you tick marked.
- Out of the ones you marked choose three for direct implementation.
- Make a realistic action plan for implementing each of them.
- What has to change in you to be able to realise these major shifts?



### The three main stages in a learning process

When you want to implement process-based education, it is essential to realise that a learner goes through several stages before a learning process is completed.

Each time we learn something new, we pass through the stages of information, assimilation, utilisation. It is important to acknowledge these stages in the learning that is taking place in the classroom. Here is a short explanation.

Learning begins with a decision about what one wants to learn. Then one collects new information. The next job is to organise this information in broad and more detailed categories

depending on the purpose for which the information was collected. This completes the information stage. The second stage is the stage of assimilation: new information is only really useful if it is meaningfully integrated with what was already known or understood. Some things are not correct any more; new connections have to be made with previous knowledge, previous habits, etc. A learner experiments with combining old and new knowledge till things are settled and a new balance has been found. The last stage is the utilisation or application stage. The learning process is completed when the new information is integrated so well that it can be utilised or applied in any new situation.

**Example:**

Just now you have read information about the stages in a learning process. Maybe the content was totally new for you, maybe you had heard similar ideas before. Your mind has been busy and maybe is still busy taking in the new information. Next comes the stage of assimilation. Most likely you are starting this stage just now, unless you took time for yourself after reading the previous paragraph. Some of the things you have read may seem right to you, other remarks may have brought a frown on your face etc. You have to take time and find out for yourself how to integrate this new information and bring a new balance in your system. Especially with difficult or confronting information, that may take time. Then comes the third stage; according to what you have understood and feel now, you will want to do something with this new knowledge and take care of learning in your classroom in a different way. Some of your 'old' actions have lost their value. Now that you know more and have gained deeper insight, you want to start acting in a new way and encourage the

development of your students in a different manner. That often takes effort because human beings easily fall back into old grooves; colleagues may not have gone through a similar learning process and may question what you are doing. But if you do not make the effort, you block a newly opened area in yourself and in that case you will have missed an opportunity to make progress.

### INTROSPECTION

related to personal changes that are needed

- What are the qualities in me that help to shift to process-oriented learning?
- What can I do to strengthen these qualities more?
- What in me makes it difficult to shift to process-oriented learning?
- What can I do to overcome these difficulties?
- How much importance do I attach to what others say?
- How much do I dare to be different from the mainstream?
- How do I integrate my spiritual life into my daily work?
- From where do I get my inspiration to change myself, to change my teaching style?



It may be a good idea to make a checklist for yourself. This will help you to become aware of the progress you are making in the inner shift in your attitude.

### Child Observation

*“The teacher should not be a book that is read aloud, the same for everyone, no matter what his [the student’s] nature and character.*



*The first duty of the teacher is to help the student to know himself and to discover what he is capable of doing. For that he must observe his games, the activities to which he is drawn naturally and spontaneously and also what he likes to learn, whether his intelligence is awake, the stories he enjoys, the activities which interest him, the human achievements which attract him....*

*The old method of the seated class to which the teacher gives the same lesson for all, is certainly economical and easy, but also very ineffective, and so time is wasted for everybody.*"<sup>1</sup> —THE MOTHER

*"To be able to classify the children one must find out about their nature by observing their habits and reactions. The teacher must not be a machine for reciting lessons, he must be a psychologist and an observer."*<sup>2</sup> —THE MOTHER

The Mother states it very clearly, for implementing development-based education a teacher needs to learn some psychological skills. If you want to be able to help a student to develop in harmony with his true nature and capacities it is important to have a good understanding of each individual student in your class. It is also important to have a good rapport with each child, so that the child starts trusting you and opens up. Child observation can give you a lot of information about the nature of a student, and about his study style, his strong and weak points in a particular subject area, etc. It also helps you to be more open to that special moment where you can help a child to make a leap ahead.

Child observation will help you to stop making judgements about a child. In its place will come discernment, a discernment that is at the service of a greater unfolding of each and every student.

## **The attitude for child observation**

Good child observation requires self-awareness. There is an essential difference between judging a child and observing a child and that is why self-awareness is needed. It is important to check regularly to see if preconceived ideas are colouring the truthfulness of your observation. For example, a teacher is busy with a few children and hears a noise in the class. The first thought, before checking the noise, that comes up in her is "That must be Rahul again." This sentence "That must be Rahul again" is coloured by a preconceived idea about this boy. Maybe it wasn't Rahul this time, but sometimes a teacher puts a stamp on a student that hardly gives him a chance to change for the better. If you become aware of similar opinions in yourself, you can make an effort to change your attitude towards such a child and try your best to extend support to him and encourage him to make progress.

Another important aspect of child observation is to recognise where your "I" is located when you observe a child. "I"-location has been discussed in Part 1 of this book in the chapter on self-observation. Here are some work related examples of "I"-location.

He is a big trouble maker.	lower vital
That must be Rahul again. (on hearing a noise in the class)	lower vital, preconceived idea
What a sweet child.	higher vital
He is a dull student.	vital or mental
He is weak in math.	mental
Your answer is formulated well.	mental
He is my favourite student.	lower or higher vital

Depending on the feelings that go with the sentence "He is my favourite student" it originates from the higher or the lower vital. It belongs to the lower vital when it leads to favouritism in the class. It belongs to the higher vital when the child shows a great receptivity for your guidance and progresses fast; while at the same time the other children feel that they also can always get help and encouragement from you. It is important that a teacher is aware who are the students for whom she has a natural liking, who are the students that do not stir emotions, and who are the ones that stir up unpleasant feelings. The positive or negative feelings about students are often caused by a mixture of performance and personality traits (behaviour) of the students. An ideal teacher cannot allow such feelings to effect her interactions with the students. Part 1 of this book is about self-preparation. In the chapters on Purification it is mentioned how to overcome such feelings. The solution is to have a constant mirror or signpost in front of you that makes you aware of such sentiments and hold them up to the Light. This will help you to give your best to each child.

A good child observation is done from a stepped back position. The deeper you are connected with your inner layers, the purer and perfecter will be your observation. The chapters on Effort and Choice and Change deal with some of the inner movements that help to live within more constantly. In general: self-awareness and a mind and vital as silent as possible, quietened by the deep inner presence, will give a special quality to your child observation. This quality will help you in further deepening yourself, and help the child in bringing out the best in him and possibly (re)discovering the psychic deep within.

WORKSHEET: CHILD OBSERVATION

Aim: to get familiar with child observation and work consciously on this new approach.

- Close your eyes and picture one of the children of your class in front of you.
- What are your main ideas about this child? Write them down.
- Ask yourself: how many of these notions come from my genuine observations? How many come from my preconceived ideas and judgements?
- Observe this child the next day in the class.
- Try to make your mind and feelings as quiet as possible and open yourself to this child, but try to forget as much as possible what you wrote yesterday. Give the child a chance to reveal himself to you anew.
- Observe this child for at least half of the period or day. Let your eyes and ears speak to you. Try to do it from a 'stepped back position'; don't pass judgements on what you see and hear.
- Try, at least for a while, to go within as deep as you can while observing the child from the deepest layer you can reach in yourself. Is there any message for the child that comes to you from the silence within? Is there any message for you that comes from the child?
- Compare what you have written yesterday with what you have observed today.



- Do you have now a more complete picture about this child? If so, what makes it more complete?
- Do you have to change certain notions about him or her? Do you have to change the way you deal with him or her? If so, in what way?

You can observe children with your "I" located in different parts of your being (see p. 19). Try to become aware of the difference this makes in your perception.

### **A new skill**

#### Practice for open-ended questions

Mark the difference in the answer of the following questions:

- Did you go to Orissa in the holidays? Answer: Yes or No.
- Where did you go in the holidays? Answers: to my parents, to Orissa, I went to meet my .... etc.
- Did you like the concert? Answer: Yes or No.
- How did you like the concert? Answers: It was great. I love this singer, he always touches me very deeply etc.

Practise asking open-ended questions with your colleagues first with questions from daily life. Mark the difference in the answers.

- Did you prepare lunch this morning? or What did you do for lunch today? etc.

After this take any simple concept that children study in school and ask each other open ended questions on that subject. Concepts in environmental science are easy starters.

Mark if it is easy for you to do so. Notice how the answers become more interesting when you ask open-ended questions.

### **Process-based learning and the Board Examination**

In our descriptions of Integral Education we have sketched the ideal situation. But, you may think, “As long as the students have to pass a Board exam, how will I implement this? It is important that the children pass the exam with good marks so that they can get into good colleges, how to do that? Can the two be combined?” These questions are very valid; every teacher in the higher classes will want to give thought to such questions. The answer is, “Yes it is possible, provided the students have been allowed to make choices and have been made familiar with development-based learning from a young age.”

In process-oriented learning the responsibility is, as the age of the student increases, more and more with the student. As they grow older, most children automatically take up learning experiences that focus more and more on an academic product: a chapter of a math book, a difficult concept in science etc. Because over the years they have learnt to take responsibility for their own development, most of them do this very effectively and confidently, for it is their wish; this makes the students very motivated and hard working.

It is now up to you to see to what extent you want to implement development-based learning in your class. You can check your own progress through the checklist on the next page. Hopefully you are not going through these chapters in isolation, and your school has made a policy decision to implement Integral Educa-

tion more completely. The chapter called Environment discusses some of the areas that need attention when the implementation is introduced in the whole school. For implementing Integral Education it is also necessary to make changes in the timetable and the syllabus and the assessment procedures. We shall deal with these in the following chapters. Before turning to the next chapter it is advisable to start practising the skills for implementing process-based education right away. A little later you can add the changes related to the content of learning, which are discussed in the next chapter.

#### CHECKLIST: IMPLEMENTING CHANGES

Tick mark the questions that you can answer with "Yes".



Put a question mark next to the questions that you can answer with "Somewhat".

Leave the questions blank that you answer with "No".

Some questions may seem more important to you. It is good practice to reflect afterwards on what you could do to reach greater perfection.

- Did I observe today some of the children consciously with an open mind?
- Have some of the children in my class become so vague to me that I need to devote more time to them?

- Do I pay enough attention to the slower learners?
- Is there enough interesting material for them in the class?
- Do I pay enough attention to the middle group?
- Is there enough interesting material for them in the class?
- Did I pay enough attention to the fast learners?
- Is there enough material for them in the class?
- Do I allow children to choose their tasks?
- Do I allow children to bring their own learning material to the class?
- Today, did I help some child(ren) who had a specific difficulty while learning something?
- Today, did I avoid scolding children for making a mistake?
- Could I fully avoid judging children today?
- Did I help a child to open up today? How often did I help someone to open up?
- Do I ask open-ended questions? Do the children respond well to my questions?
- Am I really listening to the children?
- Do I really respect the choices the children make about their own learning?







- Do I encourage children to come up with different solutions for the same question?
- Do I encourage children to develop their own study methods?
- Do I do enough to make the children more self-aware?
- Do I help a child when he lacks focus? Can I do this better?
- Do I avoid putting a moral tag (like it is bad to make a mistake) on a child who makes mistakes?
- Have I learnt to see mistakes as helpers in a learning process?
- Have I stopped comparing children with each other in front of the class?
- Do I avoid putting a moral tag (like it is very bad behaviour) when a child is undisciplined?
- Do I give children the opportunity to concentrate on the development of their capacities?
- Do I concentrate on the positive side of the children?
- Do I help children to live from a deeper level? Can I do this better?
- Do I provide enough psychic-oriented activities?

This is a long list, because there are so many ideas that have to be implemented. You may already do some of them, you may feel that you are not able to do all at the same time. If that is so then it is best to focus on a few things at the same time. Here is a method for that:

After working through this list, pick out 6 or 7 questions on which you want to start working immediately. Focus on these and keep a tab on your progress by re-checking regularly how much you have implemented and mastered the new attitude or skill.

As soon as you feel more or less comfortable with the execution of these, pick out 6 or 7 new ones and repeat your exercise. You could repeat this till you mastered all questions.

Remember that the attitude with which you implement this is the most important factor; try to leave the taskmaster behind and become a real friend and guide to the children.

### **A closer look at psychic development**

The mental domain, the vital and the physical domain have each their own processes for developing special faculties or functions. For example, it has become now common knowledge that our brain is a marvellously complex organ and that the intellect can be divided into right brain and left brain functions that can be developed separately. The right brain faculties are comprehensive and creative, like imagination, observation and memory; the faculties of the left brain are analytic, like reasoning, classifying etc. Such insights make it necessary to broaden the scope of the teaching-learning process, so that all these faculties can be developed. Similarly, knowing that there is a developing psychic in each child, demands that the teaching-learning scope must broaden even more.

The main processes for spiritual development that were often mentioned by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are widening, deepening and heightening. In Sri Aurobindo's vision the spiritual development is not for its own sake, to flee from this world, but for expressing divine nature here on earth. Seen from this perspective, widening and deepening should become a part of the natural development of the growing child.

## **Widening**

We start with a few examples. You widen mentally when you learn about another country or when you notice that you can look at one subject from several viewpoints. You widen vitally when you see another teacher or a classmate handle a difficult situation in a different way than you. You widen physically when you learn a new physical skill, say cycling, or when your body is doing the same thing in a more capable way, like running faster. Widening in the psychic sense means to see more and more the hand of the Divine in everything and every situation.

Widening in all the parts of the being is one of the important processes of Integral Education. To enable students to widen mentally, vitally, physically and psychically you must create a warm, welcoming and trusting atmosphere; it is important that you respect diversity, that you help the children to have confidence in themselves, that you help them to be wide awake, that you give them the feeling that nothing is impossible, that you help them discover the wonder of this creation, that you help them open to the Light. In short that the atmosphere in your classroom supports maximum development in each of these domains.

Small children are learning all the time, their whole day is full of widening activities. If we take care not to disturb this proc-

ess when they go to school, they will progress very fast. As the children grow older, a teacher can help the students to see how they themselves can actively play a role in their own process of widening. Encourage them to widen mentally by examining a problem from different angles. Show them how each solution has plus and minus points. Encourage them to widen vitally and physically and through that help them to see beauty in variety instead of getting irritated by it. Help students to be more accepting but don't ask for a premature peace in their interactions. Give them time for assimilation. Help them to see that the deeper inner layers give the most beautiful support in life and invite them to search for the psychic presence. See if you can help them to find in themselves that marvellous thing called aspiration. All this cannot be done through preaching; it is best is to try to live it yourself and to be always open for the sensitive moments in the class, where a sweet smile or the right question or a compassionate remark will bring the psychic touch to some of the children.

### **Deepening**

There is deepening in the mental, the vital, the physical and the psychic domains. When you deepen mentally, you get a deeper understanding, for instance, you start seeing how things are related to each other. When you deepen vitally, you truly respect others from a deep inner layer, and not because you were told to show respect and behave as you have been taught; when you deepen vitally you are not caught in and effected by the vibrations of others any more. When you deepen physically, you get insight into why you fall ill and you can consciously work on your body's health and performance; you are able to perceive an illness before it gets hold of you and ward off the attack. When

you deepen psychically you connect yourself deeper and more constantly with the deeper layers in yourself. Sri Aurobindo calls this ‘the inward look’. When you have deepened psychically, you are always identified with your psychic being and all that you think, feel and do is influenced by the psychic consciousness or, in a later stage, directed by the psychic being.

We concentrate here on deepening in the psychic domain, because in this sense it was used by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother and in this sense it takes us to the core of Integral Education. It is the process to live from a deeper level, to start living within. It is the process of moving slowly from the outer layers to the inner and innermost layers of yourself.

Here are The Mother’s words:

*“You must always step back into yourself—learn to go deep within—step back and you will be safe. Do not lend yourself to the superficial forces which move in the outside world.”*<sup>3</sup> —THE MOTHER

She gives an example of how this stepping back works in every day life:

*“If someone is angry with you, do not be caught in his vibrations but simply step back [go deep within] and his anger, finding no support or response, will vanish...”*<sup>4</sup> —THE MOTHER

It is a matter of practice to learn to separate yourself from the anger of someone else or from your own anger towards another person. It is the choice of “I”-identification: you can identify yourself with your surface existence or with a deep layer that exists inside yourself. The movement of connecting yourself consciously with the deeper layers in yourself is called deepening.

This book has shown that psychic education brings with it

new inner movements that can be practised. Do not force the practice on the children, but on the other hand do not shrink from showing your students, whenever the situation arises, that they have a choice. Fifty years ago computers hardly existed. Our grandparents never learned the skill of working on a computer. Today, gaining computer literacy belongs to the normal practice of a school-going child. In the same way we could say that, as The Mother has announced that the new world has been born, psychic education has become essential. The possibility of psychic learning should be offered to a child, because the psychic being is the intermediary between the supramental world and this world.

Remember that this can never be done by preaching. If *you* practise living within, practise this deepening, the children will be exposed to it and may get attracted to start practising themselves.

## Heightening

Heightening is the opening to the power and presence of the Spirit. Sri Aurobindo has called this movement “the upward look”. To live in the spiritual consciousness leads in the end to a state of concentration on the highest, the infinite and eternal beyond form, space and time. The Mother says:

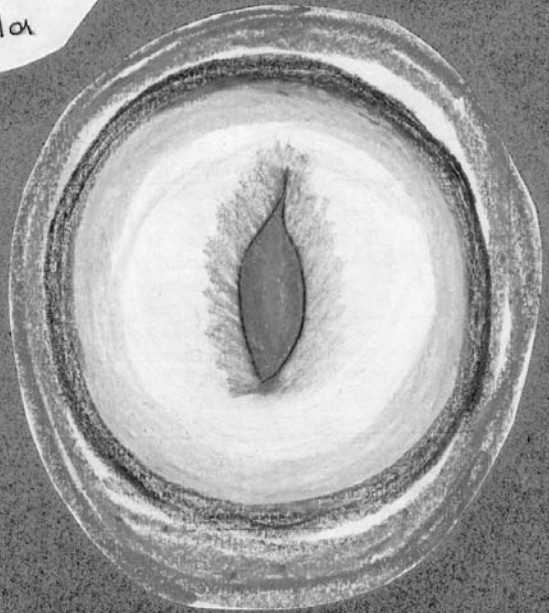
*“To become fully aware of your psychic being and to live a psychic life you must abolish in you all selfishness; but to live a spiritual life you must be selfless.”*<sup>5</sup>

—THE MOTHER

This is part of spiritual education and beyond the scope of this book. But if heightening comes spontaneously to you, do give it a place in your work. Some children may also have an inclination in this direction, depending on what they did in previous lives.

This is a little light  
which wants to show  
all its beauty to  
everyone in the  
world.

- Ila



A drawing of a ten-year-old, made during the topic Light

TOOLBOX

Here are some inspiring activities that may help to keep up the effort of deepening.

When I feel that I must quieten myself and go deeper within,

I recite slokas

I walk in nature

I read Savitri

I listen to soft harmonious music

I meditate

I see the murti of my home in front of me

I imagine the pearl deep inside my heart

I look at a picture of The Mother or

I repeat Her name

You may have your favourite activity that helps you to go back to the Source. Do not forget to use it often!



TIPS

- Child observation is an important component of process-oriented education.
- Your observation is not meant to judge the child, but to get more clarity on how you could help him to find his solution.
- Best is to observe a few children each day with an open and quiet mind: how does the child learn? what goes well? where does he encounter difficulties? what could be the cause of this? Afterwards, solutions are sought together with the child during a dialogue. If you can, try to observe a student from deep within and wait for an indication from there.



- Do not impose one way of learning. Encourage experimentation. Encourage children to develop self-awareness about their way of learning. Show the students that variety is something beautiful. Acknowledge the differences in children as positive.
- Make a shift from competition to co-operation. Each child has a unique way and something to offer to the class. Do not encourage competitive behaviour that works to the detriment of other children in the class. Let all the children feel welcome and worthwhile by bringing out the perfection of “however small a sphere” of each and every child in your class.
- Make a shift from talking *to* the students to talking *with* the students.
- Make a shift from directing a child to listening to a child. Learn to listen. There is lots of wisdom in children. If we listen to them, if we recognise and acknowledge what is best in them, it encourages them to let their inner wisdom come to the foreground and guide their actions.
- Look always for the positive side in the children; try to invoke and see the Light.

### **The process from judgement to observation**

Try to recognise these stages in yourself so that you move consciously from one stage to the other.

1. “Rahul, it is very bad to pass nasty comments.” (judgement)
2. “Rahul, I don’t like it when you pass a nasty comment to Siddharth.” (observation with a ‘colour’ attached to it)
3. ”Rahul you are passing a nasty comment and I notice that Siddharth is effected by it.” (a clean observation)
4. You can decide if you want or don’t want to *mirror* the behav-

our to the student. If you mirror you could say for example: “Siddharth is hurt, how do you feel when somebody hurts you?” Do not say this in an accusing manner. Mirroring is to be done in an open manner, inviting a real conversation. Then the child may answer for example, “This morning Siddharth did not allow me to become the captain of the basketball team.” This can be the beginning of a further conversation.

### THE TRUE PROCESS OF LEARNING

*“Constraint is not the best or most effective principle of education. True education has to unfold and reveal what is already present in the children. They open themselves in joy just like flowers to the sun.”*<sup>6</sup> —THE MOTHER

*“It is not through uniformity of programmes and methods that you will obtain unity of education. Unity is obtained through a constant reference, silent or expressed, as the case demands, to the central ideal, the central force or light, the purpose and the goal of our education. The true, the supreme Unity expresses itself in diversity. It is mental logic that demands sameness. In practice, each one must find and apply his own method, that which he understands and feels. It is only in this way that education can be effective.”*<sup>7</sup> —THE MOTHER

In guiding the learning process of the child, the effort of the teacher has to be based on the evocation of the deeper self or, in Sri Aurobindo’s words, on

*“...the realisation that each human being is a self-developing soul and that the business of both parent and teacher is to enable and to help the child to educate himself...”*<sup>8</sup> —SRI AUROBINDO

## Child Observations

From the diary of a Biology teacher

We were studying Insects. I had told the class that one of the reasons insects cannot grow bigger is that they do not sweat. Because they do not sweat, they cannot cool their bodies and that is why they cannot grow bigger. I had noticed that some children listened to this explanation with big eyes, especially Rajat. I wondered what was going on inside him, but did not manage that day to get a quiet moment with him.

A few days later, one morning after sports I happened to arrive when they were leaving the field and I walked back with Rajat to the school building. We started talking about general things. After a while I realised that his mind was elsewhere. So I stopped talking to give him a chance to come out with what he was thinking. He looked at his wet shirt, wiped his wet face with his hand and, holding up his hand to me, said with a broad smile, 'Look! I am sweating!'

From the diary of a math teacher, also teaching computer classes

In the computer class Arvind presumes he is in charge of the computer. He looks down on it, he expects mastery for himself. The computer is, or must become his tool.

Neha on the other hand is shy and looks up towards the magical computer with awe. She is grateful and happily surprised if this strange machine obliges and does do what she has tried to indicate.

Surely, when I talk to Arvind I must support his controlling attitude. I will talk to him man-to-man and presume he will need to hear the computer-commands only once to take to action. On the other hand I will also try to stimulate his curiosity and learning, by making at the end of the class the computer do something fantastic that he could never have anticipated.

Neha I will approach in her sense of magic, in her awe for the speed and accuracy of the computer. But I will also encourage her to get a sense of control, even if she will remain somewhere a little surprised if the machine actually does what she says.

# The Content of Integral Education

We have been dealing with the psychic being in ourselves and in the children. We have seen that in the psychic domain we all are learners. We know that this learning continues throughout our lives, even longer, through many lives. While living on earth we can make progress and human beings have been given the possibility to speed up this progress consciously. We can take or refuse this opportunity in our lives from minute to minute.

Present day education studies and engages itself only with the outside world. It aims at transferring a certain quantity of facts, skills and concepts, it does not include the task of discovering and developing the deeper self. Integral Education, on the other hand, aims at helping children to remain in contact with their soul and help them to develop and perfect their mind, life and body as instruments of their soul to express itself here on earth. The soul cannot be taught, so there has to be a shift in the learning process from teaching to facilitating learning. A teacher has to create circumstances that allow meaningful learning; she will have to teach less and instead spend more time assisting individual learning. In this chapter we will see how a teacher can

make changes in the content of the learning material, so that Integral Education can truly take place. We all know that regular textbooks do not acknowledge the possibility of education for the soul. Though changing the process of learning is the most important element, a teacher who wants to follow the three principles of true teaching, also has to bring new learning material into the classroom. Just teaching the next page of the textbook will not suffice.

In the previous chapter we talked about changes in the learning process. In this chapter changes in the content of learning will be outlined. The changes proposed here will have a much greater effect if, side by side, there is also a change in the assessment procedures of the school. We will look closer into evaluation and assessment procedures in the next chapter. This chapter focuses on the content only.

### **New learning material in the classroom**

- The learning material must have a great variety and one textbook does not suffice. The learning material can be displayed regularly in a corner or on shelves of the classroom. The students should always have free access to this material. Here are some guidelines. They apply to all subjects:
- There must be a great range in the learning material so that it caters to the different learning levels of the children.
- There must be a good assortment in the learning material, so that a wide choice is offered to the children.
- There must be diversity in the learning material, so that children who learn predominantly with their eyes, or their ears, or through movement, feel welcomed.

- There must be material that caters to perfecting the faculties and qualities of the mental, vital and physical instruments. (See the end of this chapter for a list of faculties, qualities and skills).
- There must be material for practising skills related to the subject.
- There must be material that uplifts the being.
- There must be material that caters specifically to psychic opening and psychic development.
- There must be material that explores psychic concepts in the regular subjects taught in schools.

You may not be able to implement all these points right away. To search for or develop such learning material is typically work that becomes much nicer when it is done with a group of teachers. Done in a group it can become a great source for inspiration. In case this is not possible, even if you start alone, it will give you a new outlook (and it may strengthen also the so hoped for outlook). It surely will bring fresh energy into your classroom.

Here are more details for each of the statements above. Hopefully they will inspire and help you to implement the changes successfully.

- Material that caters to the different learning levels of the children:

#### WHY

The regular textbook may be too difficult for some children and too easy for others. Feeling stupid closes up a student and erodes confidence. Because of this, other capacities of the child tend go down as well. Confidence is important for learning new things.

On the other hand the learning material should not be too easy either. Fast learners do not reach their potential when there are not enough challenges for them. They tend to become lazy and uninterested. Remember, effort gives joy!

#### HOW

Provide a wide range in the material but do not just take the book of the previous year and the one of the year above: that creates feelings of inferiority and superiority. Try to look for different sources. Complementary copies could be of help here and it is worth putting in effort to get these if the publishers do not visit the school. If the school is equipped with a computer lab the internet can also provide a lot of good material. Observe the children and try to find out what stimulates them and find related material.

Inform younger children about the minimum 'syllabus' for the next month, (later the next two months etc.). For older children you can give straight away the minimum common syllabus for the whole semester. (see p. 190) The quantity of the requirements in the minimum common syllabus should be such that even the so-called average learner can complete it in half of the available time and spends the other half in extension work of his own choice.

- Variety in the material, so that a wide choice is offered to the children:

#### WHY

Interest is the basis of good concentration. Avoid fickle-mindedness due to material that does not suit the nature of the child.

#### HOW

Make sure that you have prepared a wide range of topics within

your subject. Allow children to delve deeper in topics of their interest, allow them to pursue skills that they want to master. (Multiplication for example can be learnt in many different ways; offer the children a choice.) In this way they come to know their real interests and strengths.

After a child has completed the minimum common syllabus for that month or semester, do not make a student repeat the regular subject matter but allow students to work within the subject on a project of their own choice, like “Pollution” in social studies or a topic like “Imagination” in English. A student also could opt for an activity like making a glossary related to an area that interests him a lot. This is a self-assignment that can be done in any subject. Such projects give scope for a large range of activities that cover most or even more of what children need to learn in the regular subjects. For this a good organisation is needed in the school, but it is worthwhile to set this up.

- Diversity in the learning material, so that children who learn predominantly with their eyes, or their ears, or through movement feel welcome:

#### WHY

Learning styles are different. Formal education through textbooks caters mainly to visual learners. This deprives auditory and kinesthetic learners to learn in a way that is natural for them. In mainstream learning we do as if we all fit the same size of shoes. If we would continue to do this in real life, some of us would walk crippled! That is exactly what happens to the development of auditory and kinesthetic learners. A lot of potential is wasted and many intelligent children feel needlessly inferior or frustrated.



**HOW**

For the visual learners there is usually enough material, but a beautiful layout and presentation will surely enhance their learning process. For the auditory learners audio tapes can be helpful. For the study of languages these are easily available. It becomes more difficult with the sciences. In any case allow such children to whisper whatever they read, allow them to do the computations while whispering the numbers etc. Encourage them to talk to you about a concept, let them give presentations to the class etc.

The kinesthetic learners need movement. Allow them to do things, to handle counters when they learn computations, to handle the scientific equipment when they are older, to act out things while studying stars and planets and so on. To access learning material from a computer is also a great help for kinesthetic learners.

- Material that caters to perfecting the mental and vital instrument:

**WHY**

The base of Integral Education is development of the mental, vital, physical and psychic being of the student, it is not transferring information. Transferring information is only one of the means through which this development can take place. The mental being has many functions and faculties, like the power of observation, analytic reasoning, imagination, verbal expression etc.

Developmental material is hardly present in average textbooks because consciously developing the mental capacities of a student is not acknowledged as an important aim. Interestingly the entrance tests for IIT's, professional colleges, schools of architecture and management are more and more based on questions that test different aspects of the mental instrument, like the capacity to infer, deduce,

the degree of spatial insight etc. So even for this it is important to take this development up more systematically.

Perfecting the qualities of the vital nature is in most schools only done through arts and crafts and as co-curricular activities. But in the integral classroom the children should work on this throughout the day. They should be made familiar with self-observation and there should be opportunities to strengthen positive qualities like will power, enthusiasm, generosity, courage. During their years in school students are to be encouraged to understand their swadharma and gain insight into their aim of life, so that their choice for further studies is based on this.

HOW

There has to be more emphasis on the development of capacities and qualities, concepts and skills. You will find a list for qualities and skills at the end of this chapter.

For training of the mental instrument there is quite a bit of material available in the market.

Facilitation of vital development is more difficult; it requires a lot of understanding and flexibility from the teacher to be able to grapple with ethical issues without becoming moralistic. In most classrooms the usual 'tone' is moralistic and it takes time to reach the depth where this is no longer needed. When we allow children to be honest and straightforward they often present us with remarkable wisdom. Daily interactions in the classroom often give wonderful opportunities for vital development. Maybe it should be emphasized that according to Sri Aurobindo values cannot be taught. Group discussions about a fight that occurred in the classroom, individual conversations with students are very effective for positive vital development. It follows that teaching value education or moral education through a textbook with questions and answers is not in harmony with the three principles of true teaching.

- Material that uplifts the being:

**WHY**

In all children there is an urge for the deeper and the higher. Often we do not notice this because we are so busy teaching the regular stuff. Children need learning material that can fulfil that urge.

**HOW**

Tell uplifting stories, there are so many. Inspire students with stories of heroic deeds of adults and children. Each subject has its own heroes, and biographies and autobiographies are readily available. Select material of great people from different walks of life, great scientists, great social activists, great sportsmen and women, musicians, adventurers, etc. Nowadays there are also wonderful books about children who did heroic deeds. All these can be related to the regular subjects.

- Material that caters specifically to psychic opening and psychic development:

**WHY**

It is good to help a child to become aware of the possibility of a psychic opening.

**HOW**

Bring moments of silence in your class. In the beginning it may be the easiest to do something in complete silence with the children. A good activity for such quiet times is drawing with crayons with soft meditative music in the background, but also for learning to find the solution for a difficult math problem from within.

At the end of the day ask the children to relive the day in silence and observe what stands out. Is it positive or negative?

If it is positive ask them how to strengthen it; if it is negative, ask them to think about how they could prevent it from happening again. All this should be done in silence, without the compulsion of participating.

A class teacher who is loved by her students can do now and then a guided self-observation with the children. Here are the main focuspoints: play some meditative soft music in the background. With a very quiet voice ask your students, “What does your mind tell you?” Pause for quite some time, then ask, “Is it mainly positive or negative? Do you want to work more consciously on some of these things?” Pause again for a longer time. If the class is still concentrated you could continue with “What do your feelings tell you?” Pause again. Then you could ask, “Does your body tell you anything?” Pause; if the class remains concentrated you could say, “Now go deep within, behind your heart, go as deep as you can, go deeper with every breath, try to reach your inner heart. Does your inner heart have a message for you?” Wait for quite some time. After you feel that the concentration diminishes you can invite the children to assimilate what they ‘heard’ in various ways; through writing, drawing, a private conversation etc.

### **Psychic concepts in regular subjects taught in schools**

Most teachers are appointed as subject teachers but even the regular syllabus gives a lot of scope for a psychic touch. Though this chapter is a plea for cutting down on subjects and allowing the child to develop according to his swadharma, we realise that the Board Examination brings some constraints. We hasten to say that these constraints are not as big as they seem to be; up to standard VIII there is enough freedom to work with a minimum common

syllabus and allot at least half of the time to self-directed learning of the children. Above standard VIII it depends on the policy of the school. Even while working with the minimum syllabus allow space for the children to study it in the way that is best for them.

When there is a need to 'teach' part of this syllabus it should not be done in the 'old' way. While teaching, a teacher should not fall back in the old pattern but should radiate the same warmth and respect as during the self-directed work periods. Another aspect that needs attention is to look for the psychic element in the portion we are 'teaching'. The divine is the creator of everything, so this soul element is omnipresent. Below you find subject-wise a list of concepts that are especially suited to encourage discovery of the inner worlds. We list here only three per subject, but there are many more. Use your own inspiration and go on adding topics to this list in your own subject.

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Psychic Concept</b>
Biology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- subtle body</li> <li>- evolution as an unveiling of consciousness from amoeba to humans and beyond</li> <li>- immortality</li> </ul>
Physics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- non-visible forces</li> <li>- empty space in solid objects</li> <li>- how inside a solid object everything is in motion</li> <li>- consciousness in matter</li> </ul>
Chemistry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- how all matter is one, starting from hydrogen</li> <li>- how the shape of an atom repeats itself in larger forms</li> </ul>

- how diversity was created through different combinations of simple elements
- Social Studies - vital aim of nature is to live as comfortably as possible
- higher aim is to live a divine life on earth
- History - work as a means for self-expression
- people of a nation have a group soul
- look at history from the point of view of evolution of consciousness
- how one individual can change the course of things (positive & negative)
- Art - to reveal beauty
- to reveal the inner worlds
- to understand symbolism and symbols on a deep level
- Math - how there are certain magic patterns in numbers
- geometry: how the common factor of each shape is a dot; how a dot contains all the concepts of infinity
- Language - the wonder of script
- how different words match different feelings
- can language express the inexpressible?
- Physical Ed. - body to be ruled by the psychic instead of by the mind or vital
- plasticity, receptivity and endurance for receiving the Force
- the alternate rhythm of relaxation and vigorous activities; listening to the body consciousness

## Topic Light

Here is an example of project work that involves development on all levelsÑphysical, vital, mental as well as psychic. The topic Light has a large variety of concepts and activities, so that it can cater from KG to standard XII.

### Concepts

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| -sun gives light                  | -light and warmth  |
| -light and colours                | -light makes plants grow                                     |
| -light makes us see               | -light reflects  |
| -mirrors and light                | -light and shadow  |
| -light travels in a straight line | -light bends   |
| -speed of light                   | -light purifies  |
| -artificial sources of light      | -inner and outer light                                       |
| -festivals of light               | -myths about creation of light                               |
| -tratak meditation                | -professions with light, e.g. photographer, radiologist etc. |

### Activities

Many of the activities listed below demand a combination of mental, vital and physical involvement, but we list them only in the main category.

#### Physical domain:

- |                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| -play the game shadow tag    | -play the game tippy tippy tap |
| -play the game day and night | -surya namaskar                |

#### Vital domain:

- make shadow theatre, the puppets for it, write script, present it
- make goggles with different colours, report your observations while looking at the world around you
- makes diyas with clay, decorate them
- make Óstained glass windowsÓ with papercraft
- experiment with colour mixing and produce an abstract painting (for small children crayon drawings)
- watch the sunrise and sunset, write down your inner and/or outer observations

- colours have moods, reflect what they do to you (for small children in a story form)
- make a collage with one or two colours, using different shades

#### Mental domain:

- all the concepts listed above
- recognition of colours
- give each colour a new name that expresses this colour best
- make a sundial
- make a kaleidoscope
- make a periscope
- other scientific work with mirrors
- mirror writing
- can you believe your eyes? (optical illusions)
- do experiments with wet pieces of cotton cloth of different colours. Why do they not dry in the same amount of time?
- interview a photographer (or other professional working with light)
- write a story with Colours as theme
- colour therapy
- write a story with Light as theme

#### Psychic domain:

- mantras offered to the sun, the light
- meditation on light
- light brings clarity
- inner conversation with light
- relax and let light travel through your body
- make a drawing on Light while playing soft meditative music
- contact the light, and, if you want, the shadow-side inside yourself; any progress you want to make?

Usually the school library has a whole range of books related to this topic. But try to be original and creative; let topic-work not become a merely bookish study. Open a new world for yourself and for the children: bring out the wonder of life, invite the scientist, go in search of the artist, open yourself to the psychic; make learning an experience in which all the parts of the being can participate.



### **Minimum Common Syllabus and self-directed learning**

The aim of introducing a minimum common syllabus is not to reduce the workload of the students but, through the extension work, to allow more variety for greater development of the children. Before a school takes a decision on self-directed learning there is always the worry about what to do with basic knowledge, such as the 3Rs and certain facts that all children should know. Do not worry because in a normal syllabus there is a lot of repetition. For instance the topic Stars and Planets is taught year after year and can easily be compacted. There are also many facts that can be omitted without any harm. It is possible to break new ground.

The minimum common syllabus will contain truly basic knowledge of each subject and skills like reading, writing, computation. A good guideline for the quantity of material in the syllabus is that the average child should be able to complete it in half of the time that is allotted for the subject. It is best to define the minimum syllabus in each department right from class I up to class VIII, so that the teacher of the next class knows what to expect. Acquiring basic knowledge will not be the only aim, because the students will also use the minimum common syllabus as a means for the training of their capacities and faculties.

### **Extension work and the minimum common syllabus**

After the minimum syllabus has been defined, a teacher has to learn to work with a variety of levels and a variety of activities. It is important to have a good but flexible organisation to keep track of the progress of individual students, because they should be allowed to work on the syllabus at their own pace but stu-

dents need not necessarily first finish all the syllabus work and then continue with extension work. The extension work will always be work that a student chooses himself. The organisation for keeping track of the student's progress should not be another straight jacket; if a student is not allowed to make choices how will he discover what it is to take responsibility for his development, how will he be able to express and perfect his unique capacities? Try to create a friendly, student-centred framework that allows teachers to know what is happening and allows students space for self-directed learning. (see pages 195-200).

Before you start to work in this way make sure that there is enough interesting material for extension work. Interest is the basis of concentration. When there is not enough material to choose from the students may lose interest and become restless. Allow students also to bring material from home. (see also the checklist and worksheet on extension material on pages 200-203).

This may seem a tremendous change to you but here is some good news: the whole society is making a shift and moving in the direction from rote learning to information processing. There are two reasons for this shift. In certain sciences new data are added so fast and previous data change so frequently, that, if learned in standard IX, they may be outdated when the student enters college. The other reason is the explosion in Information Technology (IT for short). IT has made it possible to gather from all over the world the latest data at the click of a button! More and more schools have a computer centre and use it not only for learning how to work on a computer but use it as a centre for gathering information as well. The new trend is that instead of memorising facts for possessing knowledge, human beings have to be able to gather and process information in order to remain knowledgeable. This insight has been taken seriously by deci-

sion makers in education and in March 2000 the director of the CBSE made the remark that Board Exams are too much based on learning by rote and that a change in the examination system is on the anvil!

CDs with extensive information on subjects and topics that are studied in school bring information with the click of one finger into the classroom. IT and computers have entered even into remote areas of India and this trend is picking up. So it is important that students and teachers develop a new attitude towards learning. The main new skill that is to be learnt in the classroom is the ability to *process* the information that is available in books, on tapes, on CDs, in journals and newspapers and via the Internet. This information processing will replace to a great extent the method of learning by rote. For processing information a student has to be able to assess, organise, analyse and utilise the information of the text he is reading. This is exactly a development in the direction of the training of the mental instrument of which Sri Aurobindo speaks so forcefully in his essays on education. With this new trend it is important for teachers to teach less and guide more; in Sri Aurobindo's words you are "not an instructor or a taskmaster", but "a helper and a guide". You are a participant in the development of the children. You and the children are all learning and growing together.

When you implement this, you will see that after some time the attitude of the children will change. Most of them will become independent learners, who feel responsible themselves for their own progress. As they are young and enthusiastic they take initiatives that help them to grow fast. Of course there will be some children who cannot straight away make the shift to self-directed learning. It is sometimes tough, but always beautiful

work to help each of these children to understand themselves, to help them to understand why they do not concentrate and look for ways to overcome this problem; to help them to see what is behind their fickle-mindedness and restlessness or laziness. If this is done with compassion the child will start trusting you and together with the student you can chalk out a plan for overcoming the difficulty. You have helped a young life to gain a victory and have been instrumental in changing something that could have spelled disaster throughout the school years into a springboard for greater unfolding.

WORKSHEET: MINIMUM COMMON SYLLABUS

Define a minimum common syllabus for each of the classes you teach.

Try to do this in co-operation with the teacher(s) who teach(es) one year below and one year above the class you are teaching, so that there is a relevant continuation of the learning content.

Define the minimum in such a way that average students are able to spend at least half the time, preferably longer, on extension work related to subject.

You can define the minimum syllabus by content or by concept. See what works best for you and your colleagues.

You can introduce ideas and suggestions for learning experiences for extension work, but stimulate the students to come up with their own ideas.



## Example of a Minimum Common Syllabus

Minimum expectations for English  
Standard VI for one semester (half of the year)

Total amount of periods for one semester: 132 (calculated as 6 periods per week). This means that an average student will spend 11 weeks on syllabus work and devote the other 11 weeks to extension work. This amounts to an average of 55 work periods for the students for the minimum common syllabus and, if the teacher feels the need, to 11 instruction periods related to the syllabus, for the whole class. *The rest of the instruction is done individually or in small groups.*

The other 66 periods will be used for extension work. This is an average because some children will finish well within 66 periods and so have more time for extension activities. Others may spend more time, but the purpose of designing a minimum syllabus would be defeated if some children would spend close to 132 periods on it.

- Comprehension (12 periods): 6 comprehension lessons, answer the questions. Themes for fiction: stories that raise issues; classic fiction. Concentrate on viewpoint; how this influences the reader. Themes for non-fiction: biography; records that recount experiences or events. Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Writing composition (16 periods): 2 essays and 6 creative (or 4 and 4); work on sentence construction of simple composite sentences; use of vivid adjectives and adverbs. Include spoken dialogues in some of the compositions.
- Poetry (8 periods): select 6 poems; explain for each of them what made you select it. Learn 4 of the poems by heart. Write 2 poems.

(If you feel the need, give specifications about length, etc.)

- Vocabulary (5 periods): learn the meaning of 60 new words; use each word in a sentence.
- Spelling (3 periods): learn the spelling of the same 60 words. New words will include practice of suffixes like -ing, -able, -ible, -ly. (most of spelling work is done through compositions)
- Punctuation (4 periods): rules for proper use of comma in composite sentences; quotation marks. Use of apostrophe. (to be practised in compositions)
- Grammar (7 periods): ability to analyse predicate, subject and object. Parts of speech: noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun, conjunction.

This is an average. Some students will spend more time on one unit and less time on an other.

## **Implementation**

- Display a variety of learning material for covering one full semester of this minimum common syllabus in a corner or on a few shelves in the classroom and allow the students free access. Look for material that has instructions that can be read and understood by the children themselves! (many textbooks lack this requirement)
- Do not work with one book; through complementary copies you can offer variety. Divide the textbook in smaller portions/ chapters and put these portions into separate files. In a class of 40 children have at least 12 to 15 copies available of each part of such a chapter, so that there is enough choice.
- Tell your students that they all have to complete this work in half a year, but that they need not first finish the whole syllabus.

bus before they can devote their time to extension work.

- If you have 40 students in your class you could correct every week 10 to 12 notebooks with syllabus work, and so have once in three to four weeks a clear overview of the progress of each student. In your diary always note the date on which you corrected the notebook. It is often useful to add a short diagnostic remark in your diary, so that you can support the work of each student adequately.
- If you have 40 students in your class you could have daily an individual discussion about their *syllabus* work with one or two students.
- If you feel the need to introduce and explain certain facts, concepts, axioms etc. to the whole class, you can do this during a fixed period once a week.
- Regularly work with a small group of students, while the other children engage themselves in work that they can do on their own. If, with young students, they keep asking questions, encourage them to find a solution themselves and check if the instructions are simple and clearly written. With younger children a volunteer/parent can provide here a welcome support.
- Tell the students that they can come to you individually and ask questions to you.
- Display on another table or on separate shelves the material for extension work that the children could use when they do not work on the minimum common syllabus.
- Allow the children to bring material of their own to school, especially when they do work of their own choice. Let the extension work be done in a separate notebook or file.
- If you have 40 students in your class you could have daily an individual discussion with one or two students about the progress made in their *extension* work. In this way you have

every month an overview of the work done by each student.

- Allow specialisation: if a student would like to write a science fiction story that would fill a whole notebook, encourage him to do so. If a child would like to make a questionnaire for a survey in her class on the advantages and disadvantages of TV, stimulate her. If a student wants to utilise the extra time with more comprehension lessons and more grammar exercises, first observe if he does it out of interest. If so, it is fine; if not, help him to find something that really interests him.
- You may like to ask older children to set themselves also a non-academic goal while doing a task. Such a goal could be to persevere when the task is difficult. Do not try to coax a student into such a choice.
- Assessment of extension work will be done through various assessment procedures. (see the chapter on evaluation and assessment).
- Let there be no difference in the importance you attach to the work of the minimum syllabus and to the other work.
- Give general suggestions for homework, such as: all things you have to learn by heart you do best at home; all things that need regular practice like calculation, spelling etc. you will have to practise at home. You can also mark certain portions of the learning material that are suitable for homework. Have a separate homework notebook and check it regularly, but do this on an individual basis. Do not use half of a period to check homework with the whole class. In any case, they would not all have done the same homework.
- If you notice that a child starts lagging behind, discuss with him if it would be possible to make up through a more efficient homework schedule. Decide together with the child on a strategy for checking this work. Of course there could be another



reason for lagging behind, so first find out if there are other circumstances that make this child work slowly.

- Do not force a child, even if he progresses slowly, to finish first the minimum syllabus, before he can start the extension work of his own choice. If such students are allowed to take up an activity they like, it is likely that they complete it with satisfaction and interest. This will give a boost to their confidence and this will often help them to do better in syllabus work.
- If you see that a child hardly works on the minimum syllabus, have a dialogue with the child. Ask her for the reasons, without putting pressure on the child, else she may not give you honest answers. You can explain in various ways that time management and planning are two important skills in life. Help your students to learn these skills through self-awareness. Try to avoid sentences like "If you do not....., then you will fail." Be patient and understanding. Because the students have most likely been used to spoon feeding, some children may take time to dare to trust their own capacities; other children may for some time revel in the freedom given to them. Help them to slowly find an inner balance.
- If you teach classes with about 20 students it is easier to keep track of the students. In that case you can innovate further and allow still more freedom and a more personalised approach.

### **The Minimum Common Syllabus and intelligent children**

Above we have given some suggestions for children that are below the average of their class. There are also various ways of allowing intelligent children to spend time with the minimum common syllabus.

Here are two easy-to-implement procedures.

The first one is that they do the same activity in a more elaborate, an open-ended way. This procedure is good when you feel that even intelligent children should spend a certain amount of time on the minimum syllabus. An example for spelling:

Minimum level: Master the spelling of 60 basic words.

Open-ended procedure: Write a story that involves all 60 words or select 60 words that are very difficult to spell and master the spelling. Make a story involving these 60 difficult words.

The second procedure is to reduce the time spent on the minimum common syllabus. Here the students will spend only a little time on the syllabus because they have already mastered the requirement without spending time on it. Here is an example:

Minimum level: Master the spelling of 60 basic words.

After hearing the content of the Minimum Common Syllabus a student can straight away ask you to be tested without any preparation, because he feels he already masters the spelling of these 60 words. If he scores 90% or higher, you allow him to work the rest of the time on any work of his choice. This could be other spelling activities but it can also be an activity that is not related to spelling; it is the student's choice!

Caution: never coax the student to devote this extra time to a learning weakness. If you do that he will not come forward enthusiastically with the things he has mastered. Respect the choice of a student. In this way the writer, the analyst, the orator will come to the surface. Remember the first principle of true teaching.

It need not take much of your time to keep track of the students who already master the common minimum syllabus.

You can do it in the following way:

Make 3 columns behind the name of each student.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Area mastered</b>	<b>Mastery obtained</b>	<b>Choice</b>
Arpit	spell 60 words	2.8.2001/ 56 words	Will write a story of many chapters with an intricate plot.
Monika	spell 60 words	9.7.2001/59 words	Will prepare a talk about the Harry Potter books.

**IMPORTANT:** When you inform the students about the minimum common syllabus, communicate clearly to them whether you want them first to do open-ended activities on a more difficult level or whether they can immediately do a test of their mastery. After a student has completed the test, you could give her suggestions and ideas on how to spend the extra time, or even show her some special learning material. But stimulate her to come with her own ideas and ensure that it is her own choice.

CHECKLIST: PROCESS AND CONTENT OF LEARNING



- Does the material for the minimum syllabus have enough variety?
- Is there also enough material for auditory and kinesthetic learners?

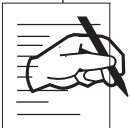
- Is the learning material multi-layered enough?
- Is the extension corner used frequently?
- Has the extension material enough variety?
- Do I allow students to integrate art and craft in the learning material?
- Do I work regularly with a small group of children or an individual child?
- Is there enough good material available in the class so that the big group can work independently without disturbing the small group I work with?
- Do I consider extension work as important as syllabus work?
- Is there enough variety in the material and the activities, so that the children can go through the stages of information, assimilation and utilisation?
- Do I handle discipline problems in a new way?
- Do I handle homework in a new way?
- Do I make the children responsible for their own learning?
- Do I allow the students to choose extension activities on their own?
- Do I help children to learn to plan their work?
- Do I help children to learn the skill of time-management?





- Do I *enforce* learning? or
- Do I *encourage* learning?
- Does the atmosphere in my class help psychic opening?
- Is there enough uplifting learning material?
- Do I allow time and space for self-evaluation and introspection?
- Does silence play a part in my daily work?
- Does silence play a part in the daily work of the children?
- Do I help children to come to know their swadharma?

#### WORKSHEET: EXTENSION MATERIAL



There are many different ways for collecting learning material that can be used by the students when they do not work on the minimum syllabus.

A few examples are mentioned here:

Material on a topic that came up during a class discussion in which many children showed interest.

Material that, from your experience, always goes well with the students.

Material that some of the students requested.

Material that the students themselves bring to school.

Material that links up with a current issue in the town or the country.



Plan how you will collect new material.

Plan how you will make it ready for use: in files? on cards? any other way more suitable for your environment?

***“As for the subjects, it is indispensable to choose those which coincide with the personal experience [of the students] so as to encourage introspection, observation and analysis of personal impressions.”<sup>1</sup>***  
—THE MOTHER

If it is not possible to immediately collect material for half a year, take care that there is enough variety to start with. You know the capacities and interests of your students and you can start from there. Keep collecting and keep adding; it is very stimulating for the children to find something new. Make sure there is always enough to choose from. Remember that interest is the basis of concentration.

It may take extra time to collect this material but in return you get a class interested in learning, a class in which you will be a participant in lively discussions, a class in which you can help students to find and strengthen their capacities, a class with students who take responsibility for their progress, students who become aware of themselves and their aim in life!

From the diary of a class teacher of standard V.

How to take care of visual, auditory and kinesthetic students?

Our Christmas celebrations were beautiful. There was a quiet but joyous atmosphere, the faces were beaming, all children had sparkling eyes.

I think everybody was really in it. The days before we had made the children familiar with the meaning that Christmas has for Christians and also with what The Mother has said about Christmas.

Some of the activities went very well: the children observed pictures on 'The Adoration of the Magi' from different countries and different ages. They identified clothes, background etc. Especially the visual learners took a deep dive and learned about art appreciation as well as different cultures.

Another activity was to go to the neighbouring Christian hostel and interview one of the nuns. This was a big success. The students had prepared a questionnaire. While they were there, very soon a real conversation started. It was a widening experience for the children as well as for the two nuns that were present. Afterwards many children said that they wanted to do more interviews. Not only did this visit make them think deeply, they also practised several social skills.

In order to feel closer to the festive spirit of Christmas, the students made decorations for the Christmas tree. They first studied the meaning and symbolism of some of the traditional Christmas decorations. They produced many lovely pieces and the Christmas tree must have felt very happy. Especially the kinesthetic learners revelled in this activity.

### THE EVOLUTIONARY PROMISE

*“Mind is not the last term of evolution, not an ultimate aim, but, like body, an instrument.”*<sup>2</sup>

—SRI AUROBINDO

*“Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.”*<sup>3</sup>

—SRI AUROBINDO

*“Essentially there is but one single true reason for living: it is to know oneself. We are here to learn—to learn what we are, why we are here, and what we have to do.”*<sup>4</sup>

—THE MOTHER

## Some Faculties, Qualities and Skills

### Mental faculties

Concentration

Observation

Memory

Reasoning

Expression

Intuition

All these faculties are mentioned in the book *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*.



**Vital qualities**

Enthusiasm  
Perseverance  
Discipline  
Leadership  
Courage  
Equanimity  
Generosity  
Trust  
Honesty  
Nobility

Never try to judge or assess these qualities, but do constantly try to help the students to develop these.

(some of these qualities exist in a higher form on the psychic level)

**Physical skills and qualities**

Eye-hand coordination  
Body posture  
Fitness  
Agility  
Stamina and endurance

**General Skills**

Study skills: research, referencing, laboratory, examination, computer literacy etc.

Thinking skills: problem solving, logic, concept formation etc.

Social skills: organisation, communication, civic sense etc.

(This list is not complete, only some of the most prominent qualities and skills are mentioned)

## Evaluation and Assessment

In most classrooms the content of teaching is determined by the examinations. To achieve good exam-results students are not allowed to devote much time to areas of their own particular interest, because that would mean less time for their regular studies. Another area that is neglected due to the pressure of preparation for examinations is the development of the faculties and qualities of the students. This practice of forcing the same content on all the students is harmful. In one of his essays on education Sri Aurobindo writes

*“To force the nature to abandon its own dharma is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth and deface its perfection. It is a selfish tyranny over a human soul and a wound to the nation, which loses the benefit of the best that a man could have given it...”<sup>1</sup>*

—SRI AUROBINDO

We have to muster the courage to strike a balance between the demands of the Board Examination and the yearning of our soul. We have to allow and help each student to fulfil his ‘dharma’. The previous chapter shows that it is possible to make signifi-

cant changes in the content of learning and, through implementing a minimum common syllabus, still enable a student to pass the examinations. If we want Integral Education, then changes in the assessment procedures are also inevitable. This chapter concentrates on that.

### **Why change the assessment procedures?**

Most of us have experienced that it requires continual effort to come in contact with our psychic, to contact the presence of the Divine within us. Why is this so? One important reason is that the society is not soul-oriented and pulls us in the other direction. Present day society does everything to make us believe that we are happiest when we possess the maximum. Similarly, in schools, students, parents and teachers are made to feel that the main aim of education is to obtain the highest possible marks. In some schools only those who score above 90% are considered “good students”. This almost forces students to close the door to the inner worlds. Another unfortunate by-product of exams is that they have become a stick to make children study; assessment is very often used to coax children into action. Last year, (2000), the Central Board of Secondary Education made it known that it wanted to abolish the Board examination of class X. The biggest opposition came from the teachers, saying, “How will we make the students study when there isn’t an examination any more?”

Because we all know what an important role tests play in a child’s life, it is our task as Integral Education teachers to make a shift in assessment procedures, so that a student’s life is not dominated by them. Integral Education asks for assessment procedures that are based on a *developmental* model. In integral schools as-

essment has to be diagnostic and has to create self-awareness.

There is so much eagerness and beauty in a growing child. Just observe a few young children when they are on their own. They are all the time busy with something, exploring, discovering, experimenting, repeating; in short a constant learning is taking place. An educator has the wonderful task to guide this process, to offer certain inputs, to help the children see certain structures so that they can grow to the maximum of their potential.

Growing as much as you want in a certain direction, dreaming of a lofty aim in life is most of the time answered with “but first you have to get high marks”. Even if it is true that children need good marks to enter a good college, it would make such a qualitative difference in a child’s life, in the atmosphere of the school, if they were allowed to pursue their *swabhava* and carry out their dreams. Most of them would be responsible enough to take care of their studies because they know what is needed to fulfil their aim and take an exam as one of the hurdles that they have to overcome to realise their aspiration.

### **What does developmental assessment mean in practice?**

- We need assessment that informs the teacher about what a student is able to do and *diagnoses* what he or she still needs to understand better. This information is not meant to rank the child and pronounce a judgement, but is meant to help the teacher to be a better guide in the *process* of learning. The aim of such assessment is to *identify the next goals* in the learning process of a child.
- We need assessment that gives *positive feedback* and helps the student to build a noble character.
- We need assessment in which the student *participates*. A stu-

dent who participates in the assessment process will have to become aware of his responsibility regarding his own development and his role in the society. Such assessment helps child and teacher both to look for optimum development. Such assessment builds confidence. For older students this means that they themselves decide the next step in the learning process in consultation with the teacher.

- We need assessment that identifies the learning victories and learning frustrations in order to help a student to understand his special gifts and help him in developing these to greater perfection. It also must help him to understand the how and why of his limitations and lead to a support in his effort to overcome them.
- We need assessment that is *non-judgemental* so that it does not create fear of failing; assessment that does not make the student shrink from the outcome, but emphasises “you are the master of your own learning process and you can make the difference”. Such assessment encourages a student to give his best, and to try out various possibilities without having to face threatening consequences. It helps students to be honest and objective about their own performance.
- We need assessment procedures that are *individualised* and allow different tasks/tests for different students. Such assessment allows the blossoming of an individual’s uniqueness, helps a child to become aware of personal capacities.
- We need assessment that welcomes and respects a student’s *self-evaluation*. Self-evaluation is one of the best tools for creating *self-awareness*; self-awareness which is so essential for deciding one’s aim in life, and for the discovery and emergence of the psychic being.

## SUMMING UP

Integral Education requires assessment that is in harmony with the “principles of true teaching” and is based on development and not on ranking.

Therefore it

- is diagnostic
- is participatory
- fosters self-understanding
- is non-judgemental
- gives positive feedback
- is individualised
- requires self-evaluation
- creates self-awareness and self-discovery

## **How can such assessment be implemented?**

Since assessment in the integral classroom is development-based it is best to have a continuous evaluation based on *observation* of the students. This observation is meant to create an inner awareness in the teacher about each of the children under her care, so that she is able to give the right amount of guidance when a child comes to her for help. This observation can serve the development of the students, as explained in the chapter called The Learning Process. The teacher can also observe students in order to identify and analyse the achievements of a particular student. The amount of individual attention from the teacher will decrease when the number of children increases, but even in classes of thirty children or more, it is possible to keep track of individual children by making it a habit, after an observation, to jot down a few keywords behind the name of the student.

### **Assessment through observation**

This observation can be done in three ways with three different goals in mind:

- daily: make it a point to observe quietly four or five children while they are working on their own. If you are a subject teacher and have at least four different classes during a morning, you could limit the observation to only one or two children per period. Such observation can be development-based (see chapter *The Learning Process*). It can also be diagnostic. In that case it is directed towards understanding learning strengths and/or learning difficulties.
- at least once a week: do an activity with a small group of children, while the other children are engaging themselves in something else. This is a good method for finding out unique features of a child's development and learning process. It is also good for getting insight into group dynamics. One often comes to know the nature of the students in a very direct way. This observation can have developmental as well as diagnostic aims.
- pupil tracking: observe a child for a week or so to diagnose some specific learning difficulty. This observation should give you enough information to go on to the next stage of helping the child to overcome the difficulty.

### **Reduce the number of tests**

Assessment through observation does not ask for any special assessment task or test! It is a good way to reduce the number of tests. It gives a teacher a lot of information about a child's learning process, learning capacity and uniqueness of personality. In fact, with younger children it is the only assessment that is really

needed to guide the child effectively in his development and gives you enough information for writing a report on his progress. You can easily proceed in this way up to standard V without ever giving a test. The Mother says,

*“I find tests an obsolete and ineffective way of knowing if the students are intelligent, willing and attentive. A silly, mechanical mind can very well answer a test if the memory is good and these are certainly not the qualities required for the man of the future.... To know if a student is good needs, if tests are abolished, a little more inner contact and psychological knowledge for the teacher.”<sup>2</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

It is important that you learn to refine your observation skills and become aware of the different aims observation can fulfil. In Part 1 of this book we discussed self-observation. The do's and don'ts for self-observation also apply to your child-observation: it has to be non-judgemental, full of warmth and respect. As long as you feel that you have to form an opinion about a child, your observation is not yet pure enough. Even diagnostic assessment should not lead to an opinion like, “Poor in multiplication.” Such a judgement does not lead to better results. The outcome should be an observation like, “This child is confused while multiplying 2 and 3 digit numbers because the concept of place value is not clear.” The next step is to make the student aware of this gap in his comprehension and suggest some extra practice for mastering place value tailored to his needs. It is not opinionating, but understanding from the heart that is needed for child-observation.

It is essential to realise that you can observe children from a different “I”-location. It makes a lot of difference if you observe a child with your “I” located in your mind or in your heart. If a psychic opening is there while observing, you will do wonderful



work and may get clear indications from within of how to help the child best. (see also page 159 and 174)

### **How does a teacher assess students in the higher classes?**

Child-observation is to continue also in the higher classes, because it gives you insights that you can never get from a formal assessment task. Along with observation, (because development of the whole instrument is the aim), it is important to have a large variety of assessment procedures. Assessment means much more than checking if the student has learnt a number of chapters from the book. Assessment has to be so varied that it helps the student as well as the teacher to keep track of his mental, vital and physical *development and progress*. Another reason for having a wide variety of tasks is that it makes learning far more enjoyable! If you do this well, you will see that the regular pen and paper test will form only 10% of the assessment procedures.

At any time you must have clarity about what you assess and how you assess; for instance, if a child gives a speech, is the assessment on the content of the subject he talks about, or on the way he gives his talk or on both? Always be as specific as possible about what you are going to assess and inform the students well. When you assess a child let your comments include always what was good, and let it give the individual student an encouraging insight into how things could be done still better.

When it comes to certain capacities and qualities, like generosity, perseverance, any assessment, any judgement is out of place. If a student knows he will be assessed on these, he might try to 'show off'. Yet it is the task of the teacher, through unconditional encouragement, to help foster these qualities and to provide op-

opportunities for strengthening qualities. We have to get used to the fact that in the integral classroom important areas of a child's development have to come to the foreground without ever being assessed.

### **What to assess**

In general, it is important that teacher and student have a good idea of the progress that is made. We list here the main areas:

- content, facts as well as concepts

- learning processes

- development of faculties and capacities

- skills

“Technical” knowledge, facts and certain skills like computation, can be assessed in a more formal way.

Following is an overview of the large variety of assessment procedures that can be used. This list is not complete and a creative teacher can surely add her own procedure(s) to it. It is important *to choose the right procedure* for what you want to assess. Do not forget that you can take a decision together with the child(ren) on a possible mode of assessment. For an individual assessment task it is always better to decide together with the child. For example, if you want to assess how well a child has understood a scientific concept, a traditional pen and paper test hardly gives you any insight. Assessment of this can be done much better by inviting the child to have a dialogue with you or to ask him to give a presentation to the class including a hands-on explanation of an experiment.

It is good to realise that an assessment procedure has a certain effect on the type of learning that takes place. For instance,

assessment through a quiz trains the long term memory, gives practice in retrieving facts accurately, but a quiz does not help a student to incorporate facts into earlier obtained knowledge.

A discussion is meant for assessing insight in certain concepts or for assessing discussion techniques or both. A beneficial effect of class discussions is that students often obtain greater clarity in the concepts and issues discussed and helps the child to incorporate it in previous knowledge.

### **List of possible assessment tasks**

#### **Oral assessment procedures and the purpose they can serve**

quiz	good for assessing facts
talk discussion debate	good for assessing insight in concepts, social skills and faculty development; training of discussion techniques
presentation (talk with self-made material or lab equipment etc.)	good for assessing concepts, mental and vital skills and faculties, such as clarity in thinking, training of oral presentation skills

#### **Written assessment procedures and the purpose they can serve**

questionnaire	good for facts
report file	good for assessing and consolidating scientific and social concepts, mental skills and faculty development

essay	good for assessing reasoning, writing skills
poetry story	good for assessing faculties, gives insight in qualities
diary	good for assessing self-awareness
newsletter	good for developing mental organisation skills, capacity to see different viewpoints, creates awareness about the question of objectivity, provides practice for social interactions, working under pressure

### **Displays and the purpose they can serve**

3D art/craft wall display	good for assessing faculties, qualities, skills and academic information
video audio poster	good for assessing social issues and also for faculties, qualities and skills, such as aesthetic sense, training spatial insight and layout techniques, defining main points and secondary points
computer display	good for assessing understanding of graphs, accounts etc.

### **Tasks in organisation and the purpose they can serve**

outings school events	good for assessing faculties, organisational capacities
school magazine	opportunity to train social skills, interactions with various members of the school community

Do not brush the last category aside as less relevant. Do a small survey and ask your colleagues what they consider the most important aspect of their student days. If they have participated in school events their answer will most likely be "When I participated in the stage performance of my school" or "When I organised the craft fair in aid of cyclone victims."

#### WORKSHEET: ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Aim: to reduce the pen and paper tests

Assessment procedures related to minimum common syllabus

Below you'll find a list of possible assessment procedures. Have a look at the content of the minimum common syllabus for the next three months for the subject you are teaching. Write down the content area that is suitable for each particular assessment procedure.

ORAL:

talk e.g. English: *My favourite book and why I like it.*

discussion e.g. History: *Was there an Aryan invasion or not?*

debate

presentation e.g. Biology: *What I have learnt about birds and the birds I have observed in the school compound.*

WRITTEN:

questions



report e.g. Ecology: *Make a report about how an individual can reduce the amount of water he/she uses during the day.*

file

essay

interview

poetry/story

diary

newsletter

DISPLAY:

3D in art and craft (with or without academic information)

wall display

poster (with or without academic information)

video/audio

computer display e.g. Mathematics: *Make a graph of the height of the children in your class.*

TASKS:

outings

school events

school magazine

Repeat this exercise for work not related to the minimum common syllabus.



### **Self-assessment procedures**

In schools where students are allowed to assess themselves, and are given true respect, the children are remarkably honest about their capacities and limitations and assess themselves very well. A child who is willing to look sincerely into himself can give very valuable information to his teacher. Such information is very important to the child, is confidential and is to be received with great care. If received and handled well, it will open the door further to the outer and inner worlds of the student, but the door may also be closed with a bang if the teacher is not perceptive and responsive enough. Responding to a student's self-assessment forces a teacher to live from her inner being and as such is a great stimulus for progress for the teacher.

### **Open-ended assessment**

Integral education demands that we cater to the individual capacities of the students. Once we allow open-ended learning it follows that we need open-ended assessment too. This means that there is hardly a need, except in standard IX to XII to give the same assessment task to all the students. "What about the assessment of the minimum common syllabus in the other classes?", you may ask. In the chapter on content it was explained that it is important, even if all the students have to study a prescribed minimum syllabus, to offer variety in the learning material. Besides, we want to give them the freedom to divide their time between the minimum syllabus and the extension work. So with older students it is best to discuss with them how they want to be assessed. You will see that practically all students take this seriously and do not try to go for the easiest solution, but you

can experiment for yourself with how open-ended you want the assessment to be. Often younger children can do with a little more guidance. Sometimes fully open-ended assessments have marvellous outcomes and produce work that will never be produced in regular tests. In general, a variety in procedures always inspires.

A nice way of introducing the same task to class VII and class VIII students is to do with them a small project on Examination Skills. In this project the teacher explains that there are certain examination skills, for instance how to first go through the entire paper before starting to write the answers, how essay-type questions require a different answering technique, that it is good to start with the answers you know, etc. After practising these skills for some time, a test paper can be given to all the students. In the same project the students can practise separately certain skills that are relevant for each subject specifically.

### **School policy**

A fundamental change in assessment procedures requires a change in the school policy and has to be expressed in the mission statement of the school. This is an area where a teacher cannot decide on her own. It needs the support of the principal and the management, because implementation of new procedures brings necessary changes to every aspect of the school's functioning. It asks especially for changes in the report card and the way the school presents itself to the world outside.

Principal and staff have to have clarity and consensus about what to assess, how to assess and why the assessment is to be done. It is also essential that the parents are involved at an early



stage. They have to be informed why the school is changing its assessment policy; the advantages of a development oriented assessment policy have to be communicated to them. In this stage it is be good to have meetings with the parents of each class to help them to *understand* how such assessment is beneficial in the learning process of their child and how they can support it at home.

New assessment procedures ask for a change in the report card. There are many possibilities for expressing the shift to development-based learning in this card. It is best to form for this a core group with the head of the school and a teacher from each department. The main shift to be made is that the system of ranking has to be replaced by a system that encourages individual progress. Insight into the various aspects of the learning process of a child should get a major place in the report card.

### **Change in the Report Card**

Here is an example that is not too difficult to implement.

This report card has two major components. The first component reports on work related to the minimum common syllabus and the second component reports on the extension work done by the student.

It is filled up according to subject by each teacher. The major categories of the minimum common syllabus are printed on the report card (see sample) and the teacher can choose to write a small remark behind each. Another possibility: if the school feels the need, the teachers can indicate the level of the child on a 5-point scale instead of writing a short remark, but this would delete valuable information for the parents. A school can also decide to do both. Indicating the level on a five-point scale could be done systematically from standard IX onwards.

**REPORT CARD**Name Student: *Kabir*Class: *VTb*Session: *2000-1***Minimum Common Syllabus**

| Grade Description | Completed | Remarks

**Subject****English**

Comprehension

*Shows great clarity of mind.*

A

*Talk about "Outlaws of Sherwood"*

8/10/00

*A captivating talk which made some children want to read the book.*

Composition

*Wrote 2 poems with good depth about friendship.*

A

*Wrote an adventure story of 8 chapters in which magical powers play a great role.*

9/30/00

*There is great variety in the structures of his sentences, he has an extensive vocabulary.*

Vocabulary

*Mistakes due to extreme hurriedness*

A

*Glossary of computer terms*

10/23/00

Grammar

**Mathematics**

Algebra

Geometry

etc, etc

**Social Studies**

etc.

*This report card gives an example for the subject English.**The categories for other subjects have been indicated incompletely.**An interesting aspect of a report card like this is that it allows each department to accentuate different categories within their subject.*

**REPORT CARD**Name Student: **Tanika**Class: **VIB**Session: **2000-1****Minimum Common Syllabus****Extension Work**

Subject	Remarks	Grade	Description	Completed	Remarks
<b>English</b>					
Comprehension		<b>C</b>	Report about trip to Andaman Islands	12/9/00	The report is in correct simple English. Very beautiful illustrations.
Composition	She writes simple sentences correctly. Punctuation is correct.	<b>B</b>	Spelling assignment with words of average difficulty	16/9/2000	She worked hard on it and did well.
Poetry		<b>B</b>			
Vocabulary	Reading regularly good story books will help her to increase her vocabulary.	<b>C</b>			
Spelling		<b>B</b>	Made a collection of her favourite poems	30/10/2000	Did the work completely on her own. She divided the poems in four sections and wrote a small, but good introduction for each.
Grammar	Complex structures are still difficult for her but there is progress.	<b>C</b>			
<b>Mathematics</b>					
Algebra					
Geometry					
etc, etc					
<b>Social Studies</b>					
etc.					

This report card gives an example for the subject English.

The categories for other subjects have been indicated incompletely.

An interesting aspect of a report card like this is that it allows each

department to accentuate different categories within their subject.

The second component, Extension Work, has three columns. In the first column the teacher gives a short description of the extension work done. In the next column the teacher notes the date of completion of this work.

The last column is a broad column and here the teacher can write a little more extensively about something particular in the child's work or give a more general remark about something outstanding in the child. In case the teacher feels that a student could improve in a certain area, she writes a *positive* remark mentioning the direction in which the child should improve, with a suggestion how it would be possible for the child to intensify his effort to achieve this. The whole idea is that the reporting to the parents becomes diagnostic and development oriented.

During the parent-teacher meeting the semester work of their child is shown to the parents. This, together with the report card, gives the parents a very broad insight into aptitude and progress of their child. The end result is that parents feel informed better than before.

### **Self-assessment**

The older students (standard VI onwards) are informed by their teachers that it is time to write a self-assessment that will be attached to the report card. Inform the students well in advance and be prepared to deal in a sensitive manner with children who, for some reason, are afraid to be totally frank with their parents. One could ask the children to write separately about the minimum common syllabus and the extension work. Another way of doing this is to ask them to write an open ended self-evaluation. This often gives beautiful reports.

### Self-evaluation

A thirteen-year-old boy writes at the end of the year:

"Self-evaluation is done to evaluate our body, our mind, our feelings and our inner heart. The qualities I have are perseverance and courage. I enjoy the free atmosphere most, because I would not have widened my horizons in the manner I have done if the atmosphere in school was otherwise. This year I have taken a very unique approach to qualities. Most of the time I have chosen one quality and worked on it for a few months, and then, when I felt I needed to work on something else, I took that up. This year among other things I have worked on equality, generosity and self-control."

(after this the boy continues with reporting on his academic achievements)

### SUMMING UP

Here are the basic principles:

- Create an environment that is open, respectful, enriching and encouraging.
- Test less. A lot can be done through observation.
- Reduce the number of paper and pen tests; use a variety of evaluation strategies.
- Be always clear what it is that you want to assess and why you want to do so.
- Remember: assessment is not done for ranking; the aim is development.
- Avoid as much as possible tests that ask for rote learning.
- Do not enforce learning through if-then threats, but stimulate learning through encouragement.

- Respect and help to bring out the personal ways of learning of each student.
- Learn to observe qualities and capacities. Never assess these, always try to understand the students and help them to come to know themselves.
- Involve students and encourage self-evaluation.
- Be enthusiastic and understanding. Inspiring. Open-hearted.

### **Will it really make a difference in the child's personality?**

The department of Educational Psychology and Foundations of Education of the N.C.E.R.T. conducted a study in Mirambika, an integral school in New Delhi with classes from K.G. to standard VIII, attached to the Integral Teachers Education Centre which carries the same name.

The investigators gathered data over a period of 8 months. In June 1999 they brought out a report titled, *Schooling in Mirambika, a Case Study*. The report gathered data about the characteristics of Mirambika students after joining class IX of a well known Secondary school which is on the same campus. According to the teachers of this school the students who join in class IX are confident learners, are expressive and are information seekers. They have self-discipline, they are social stars and thinking individuals. We quote from the report.

Personality traits of Mirambika students:

"Information seekers: Apart from being independent and responsible learners their style of learning may be termed as "information seekers". Teachers feel that the children are 'really very enthusiastic about learning and gaining knowledge' ".

"Social stars: Teachers find Mirambika children good at group work, and how to present and compile information. They also expressed that these children have the "ability to outshine others" and have leadership qualities. Children's perceptions too substantiate this view as they expressed "if a child has any problem they approach the Mirambika children to solve it". According to these teachers, Mirambika provides opportunities to each child to come forward which encourages independent behaviour in seeking solutions to problems and issues. Teachers also expressed that these children are more emotionally stable than their counterparts as they get into fights fewer times, have the ability to resolve conflicts in class, see others' perspectives and analyse their actions and behaviours."

Academic achievements of Mirambika students:

"Will the students be able to cope with the examinations of the mainstream?"

The report says that three students of Mirambika joined class IX of this secondary school in 1995. Their performance in the CBSE Board Examination of class X of 1997: two students scored between 70% - 80% marks; the third one secured marks above 80%.

In the same year class XI of this school had five students from Mirambika. We quote from the report:

"Class XI had five students, three in the science stream, one in commerce and another one in humanities. All the students came from Mirambika in class IX i.e. the 1994-95 academic session. As it is evident from the table [here not shown] the overall performance of 4 students is above average and fall in the percentage range 70% to 90%, while the remaining one student scored 50%. Class X board examination results [of these students] show that

one student falls in the range of 60% - 70%, one of 70% - 80% range, while the other three students got percentages between 80% and 90%.... In co-curricular activities also all these students have performed especially well in sports, cultural activities, debates etc. Two of these students have been given "All Rounder of the Year" award by the school in Xth as well as in XIIth class."

### **How far do you and your school want to go?**

There is a long road between where we are at present and where we want to be and each school has to decide how far it wants to walk that road. The circumstances, the environment, the aspiration of the principal and staff, all have an influence in finding the right balance. Each one of the teachers has to find his or her own position. What is important is that you and your school are clear on where you want to be and take a conscious position on the continuum from complete mainstream education to complete integral education. This involves a process of evaluation and policy decision. Once this deep level evaluation and re-thinking is done, a concrete plan for implementation is to be made. In the previous chapters many suggestions related to attitude, process and content have been given for implementing integral education more completely. A school is also a being, and it is important that the implementation expresses itself in the mental, vital and physical layers of the school, and, if consciously lived, the psychic of the school. Part of the attempt to live integrally is to try to express the soul, to try to express one's highest ideal in every aspect of one's life. And so it is also for a school: if a school wants to follow integral education it has to try to implement its highest ideal in every aspect of the school's functioning.



As said before, developmental learning based on the soul, which is the essence of integral education, is not yet part of mainstream education. This means that for realising integral education there are no standard solutions to apply automatically. This openness, however, allows freedom to the staff to give expression to the highest aspiration. “No institution can live unless it is progressive,” says The Mother. It may not always be easy to go forward, but overcoming difficulties gives strength. Because of the trend of our commercialised present day society, strong determination and a continuous effort from the principal and staff members are needed to implement changes in the direction of ‘education guided by the soul’. Let the new world of which The Mother speaks find human beings ready to receive and manifest it.

Finally it is aspiration and love that will sustain our endeavour. Sri Aurobindo and The Mother have told us so clearly the importance and beauty of Integral Education, not only for each individual growing child but also for India and this earth? Let this help us to go confidently ahead.

### **The role of the principal**

An active support of the management and principal is needed to successfully introduce the necessary changes. If the principal is not able to execute all the work herself, she may ask a vice-principal, head teacher or a staff member to become the facilitator for a certain component and guide the staff. As long as she schedules regular discussions with them about the progress, the work will blossom; in this way she will remain in touch and she can give her support and inspire from a distance.

The following worksheet could provide a base for formulating a new mission statement of the school. A mission statement is usually written by the management and/or the principal but it needs to have an active backing of all the members of the staff. If a school decides to make a conscious shift in the direction of Integral Education a lot of time, detailed planning and effort has to go in implementing it. Seminars and workshops have to be organised for both the staff and the parents, otherwise the daily routine takes over and, consequently, hardly time and effort is spent to implement the mission statement. A starting point for a workshop, ensuring full co-operation of everybody involved, could be the filling up of the following worksheet by staff, office staff and principal.

WORKSHEET: SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENT

What is, according to you, an ideal school?

What are for you the main characteristics of an integral school?

How would you describe your present school?


Where do you see possibilities to bridge the two?

To make that bridge what has to change in:

- the process of learning
- the content of learning
- the assessment procedures
- the environment



What change would you like to see in

- 
- the management
  - the principal
  - the teachers of your department
  - the other staff members
  - the administrative staff
  - the maintenance staff
  - your own attitude

### THE AIM OF EDUCATION

*“It is not for our family, it is not to secure a good position, it is not to earn money, it is not to obtain a diploma, that we study. We study to learn, to know, to understand the world, and for the sake of the joy that it gives us.”*<sup>3</sup>

—THE MOTHER

Question: *“What illusions and delusions is our education today beset with? How could we possibly keep clear of them?”*

The Mother’s answer:

*“The almost exclusive importance goiven to success, career and money.*

*Insist on the paramount importance of the contact with the Spirit and the growth and manifestation of the Truth of the being.”*<sup>4</sup>

—THE MOTHER

# Environment

The school has to be a place where the psychic can come to the foreground. In the previous chapters we mentioned a few times how the environment can play an important role in this. When we enter a beautiful place we get uplifted. A place with simple beauty has an harmonious atmosphere. Costly things are not needed to make a place beautiful. We are speaking here about beauty that comes from care and attention; we mean places where care has been taken to arrange the furniture harmoniously, where love has guided the hands that arranged a simple bouquet of country flowers, where the display boards are done up artistically. The Mother says there is beauty wherever His footsteps have passed. If you want to, you can make the classroom day in and day out a place where His footsteps have passed. This will spread an harmonising influence over all that is happening and give an uplifting feeling to all who open themselves to it.

To create an environment where the psychic can blossom, an inner preparation as well as an outer preparation is needed. Why is this so? There is a physical environment but there is also a psy-

chological environment. If you start caring for both, the psychic will really feel welcome.

### **The inner preparation**

- Before going to school reconnect yourself as much as possible with the psychic presence within you.
- Radiate inner peace and quietude by living within as much as you can while doing your work.
- Radiate harmony from within.
- Radiate warmth from the depth of your being.
- Be trusting and trust in the innate goodness of everybody.
- Encourage the children's progress on as many layers as you can, from the most inner to the outer layers.
- Live from the awareness that each new day brings opportunities for growth for you as well as for the children.
- Keep observing yourself while working: do you live the three principles of true teaching?
- Take time out for reflection whenever you can, make positive use of your free periods.

Try to put this into practice as much as you can and you will experience that the atmosphere in your classroom will get another quality. If this is taken up as a concerted effort of principal and staff the whole school will breathe a different atmosphere: fearful apprehensions and skin deep polished behaviour will make place for openness, trust and caring friendliness.

When you have responsibilities to fulfil before leaving home, you may find it most difficult to get at least twenty minutes for yourself in quietude, before you leave home. But the day will get

a special touch if you consciously invoke this quality of peace and devotion in yourself in the morning. If you are already take the time for a pooja every morning or recite some slokas, you will understand this. Housewives who have to make themselves and children ready in time, and who may have to attend to other family duties as well before leaving for school, may think that it is not possible to take time for themselves. Yet, in the end, all that it really takes, is to have the will to wake up half an hour earlier and to inform your family that you do this, because you want this time all by yourself to prepare yourself from within for the day. Here is The Mother's advice:

*“Let beauty be your constant ideal.*

*The beauty of the soul*

*The beauty of the sentiments*

*The beauty of the thoughts*

*The beauty of the action*

*The beauty in the work*

*so that nothing comes out of your hands which is not an expression of pure and harmonious beauty.*

*And the Divine Help shall always be with you.”<sup>1</sup> —THE MOTHER*

## INTROSPECTIVE REFLECTION

With a mind as silent as possible read again “The inner preparation”.

- Which of these sentences open your heart?
- Can you do something to function more consciously like that in the classroom?





- How can you prepare yourself more intensely for this?
  - Make a plan that is realistic so that you can keep it up.
  - Which points in your plan seem difficult for you?
  - What can you do to overcome these difficulties?
  - Make a plan.

You may like to reflect on The Mother's words on beauty.

How can you express in your class:

- the beauty of your soul?
- the beauty of your sentiments?
- the beauty of your thoughts?
- the beauty of your action?
- the beauty in your work in general?

### **The outer preparation**

Let us start with your own classroom. If you are not a class teacher and are moving from room to room, select the room you like best of all the rooms you teach in and do what you can to beautify the room, to create a quiet and concentrated atmosphere. You could team up with the other colleagues who use this room and decide who will take care of what.

Next is to make also a list of all the common rooms in the school and ask the teachers to write their name behind the room they will take under their care; all the rooms should be looked after by at least one person. In case it is not possible to take up this beautification with the whole school, it is best to start yourself with your own room. As soon as others start noticing the improvement and show interest, it is time to expand.

## Changes in class set up

### -cleanliness

Are there areas that need cleaning or dusting? Call the cleaning staff or do it yourself with the students. The advantage of you doing it together with the students is that, since everybody participated, the children will be more motivated to keep the class clean.

### -orderliness

Are there untidy areas with some broken pieces of furniture, old charts, untidy cupboards etc? Tidy them up; you will see that there are always children who will volunteer to help you.

### -harmony

See if re-arranging the furniture as nicely as possible would make the class look better, would give a more harmonious environment.

### -self-awareness

Break the routine of having all children do the same lesson at the same time. Respond to the students individually. Have one to one conversations with them, do an activity with them in a small group. Help them to bring out the writer or the scientist or the artist; help them to radiate goodwill, enthusiasm, wonder etc.

### -beautification

Daily add some simple beauty: flowers, a kolam, a special picture etc. Even if the class is over-full with furniture because the number of children has increased, there is always a place on a desk, a stool or low table that you can use to create a focus point of radiating beauty.



**-quietude**

Make the physical environment of your classroom as peaceful as possible; do not use too many flashy colours; talk clearly but not very loudly, etc. If you talk softly the children have to be more attentive to listen to you and the level of concentration will increase. If you feel agitated, take time for a one-minute concentration and invoke peace or light. Then start the class. If the children are very restless do a concentration together. But always start with first being quiet yourself.

**-everyone counts**

Regularly renew the display of the work of all children (not only of the best), and display it in an artistic way. Display articles with beautiful pictures that could lead to interesting discussions.


**Changes related to learning**

- Make it a habit to work at least once a week, if possible more often, with a small group of children while others work on their own. In this way you come much closer to the students. At the same time the other children are learning what it is to work independently. When you do this, make the students that study on their own aware of the fact that during these periods they will not only study the subject matter, but at the same time will be able to learn a new skill: to work independently and be responsible for their behaviour from within. Most students respond very well to the idea of taking responsibility for their own learning. In case you have a student who keeps disturbing the others, have a separate conversation with him and to-

gether try to find out the reason for this behaviour.

- Be very careful that you do not sit more often with some of the children, because that could make some of the others jealous and they could start disturbing the class.
- Display a large variety in the learning material for the Common Minimum Syllabus and for the Extension Work. Allow the students to access this material freely. Allow the students to bring learning material to school. (see chapter on Content).
- In an other corner have material for a variety of short duration activities. Short duration activities such as stories, books with an uplifting narrative and beautiful pictures to elevate the feelings, puzzles, quizzes, any material that sharpens the mind, stimulates thinking, creates self-awareness.
- Now and then have 5-minute oral games with the whole class. You may like to laugh a lot during such games.
- Build in moments of silence with the whole class to help distracted children to centre themselves. This is also good for intensifying the power of concentration of the students.
- Talk about the heroes, the great men and women related to the subject you are teaching. Inspire (but do not preach) the children to bring out the best in themselves.
- Give time for reflection, for introspection; now and then do an introspective activity, this can be done with a small group or with the whole class.
- Reflect regularly on how you can 'beautify' the psychological environment.

## WORKSHEET: CHANGES IN THE CLASSROOM



Write down in detail the changes you want to make.

Changes in the environment related to:

- cleanliness
- orderliness
- harmony
- self-awareness
- beautification
- quietude
- everyone counts
  
- Which changes will you implement straight away?
- Anything needed for that?
- Plan how you will organise it.
  
- Make also a plan of action for changes that may take a longer time to organise.
  
- List here changes you like to implement that are not mentioned in the list above; changes that apply specifically to the unique environment of your school.

- List physical changes that are needed for implementing the differences in the learning process.



- List psychological changes that are needed for implementing the differences in the learning process.

- List changes related to the new content.

How far have you implemented them?

- List the changes needed in the learning material to adjust it to the new process and the new content.

### TIP

Try to experience consciously how the changes in your attitude beautify the psychological atmosphere in the classroom; how they positively effect your style of teaching and how this has a positive influence on the attitude of the students towards learning and their inner development.

If you like expressing yourself on paper, a wonderful way of keeping in touch with your own progress and the inner progress of the children is to start writing a diary. If you love drawing, start illustrating your diary.

## **Timetable**

We will discuss here changes in the timetable that would help staff and students to live more from within. Integral learning asks for reflection and introspection. The morning assembly is supposed to take care of collective reflection. It might be a good idea to see if the morning assembly has not become too much of a routine and so lacks depth. Enlist the help of the older students to make changes—they sometimes come up with brilliant ideas.

In integral schools the timetable has to provide time for individual reflection too. We cannot force children to go within, but if the timetable does not provide an opportunity, we deprive the students of something that could be very precious to some of them. We should not try to coax them into individual introspection with plain moralistic talk; in the end this works in the wrong direction and puts another layer between the soul and the outer nature. Try to be a role model for the children yourself. Live your quest for the psychic discovery quietly while doing your work; it will inspire some of the students. You could, if the occasion arises, make them see how top musicians, top sportsmen and women etc. they all take time out for reflection to come to better performances. This is of course mainly done to perform better in the outer nature, but for many children this is a good starting point.

## **Changes in the timetable**

In big schools changes in the timetable are again a matter to be decided by staff and principal together. When we talk about changes in the timetable we do not mean that the time the children are in school should be increased.

We suggest that the time in school could be used more crea-

tively and allow for a greater variety in the usual routine. For instance, to listen every morning to the morning assembly becomes a routine that is seen by many children as uninspiring. During assembly-time one could allow each class once a week to do something uplifting on their own with one of their favourite teachers. This could be the class doing together a nice task *put forward by the students*, or having a group discussion on some actuality, etc. A change like this would certainly bring a feeling of belonging to the environment and would help in bringing out qualities in the children that otherwise would not get an opportunity to be expressed.

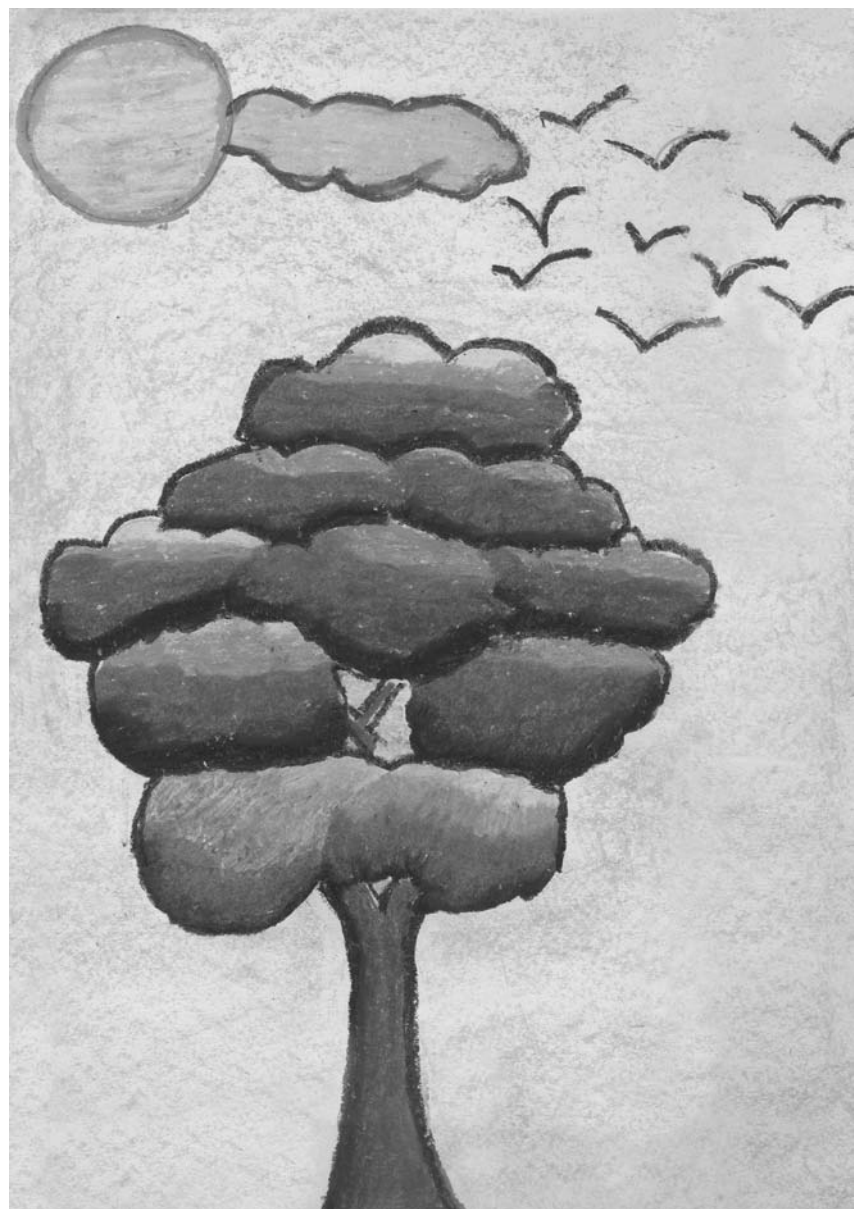
Similarly, many schools have a twenty minute period at the end of the day for homework and other 'technical' matters. This could be utilised a few times a week for self-evaluation, section-wise or with the whole school. Many schools have a public address system and if, at that time, soft, harmonious music would be played throughout the school, it would feel as if the school had entered all of a sudden another domain.

Another suggestion is that on some days all the periods could be shortened by 5 minutes, so that at the end of the day there is about half an hour time for introspection or, if the children wish, a question and answer session on existential issues with a teacher they trust.

These are some ideas, but you may like to use your creativity, take the help of your imagination to find even better solutions for creating an environment which gives importance to the psychic discovery.

### **Introduce self-development for students**

This is certainly only a beginning. With a creative principal and a



committed team much more could be done: the rigid routine of periods could be discarded, say first one morning per week. This morning could be called Self-Development. The students should plan their own activities and their own timetable for such a morning. If they want, they should be allowed to devote the whole morning to one topic and dive deeply into it and enlist a teacher of their choice to guide them. They could also invite a resource person who could do a special workshop with them. On such mornings the art and craft teachers can play a wonderful role. In big schools this requires a little bit of organisation to make it run smoothly, but with the help of the computer it is not difficult to keep track of students' activities and the related teachers. It is very rewarding and most children will remember some of the activities they did during these mornings for the rest of their life. Self-Development mornings will definitely help "the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use", as said by Sri Aurobindo.

### **New timetable requirements**

Below is a list of suggestions for provisions in the timetable that help to keep Integral Education alive in schools. Since a school has to break new ground it is important to provide opportunities for keeping up the effort and strengthening it.

Provisions in the timetable related to the staff:

- Daily: at the end of the school day, half an hour of time for reflection by the teachers, individually. This time is meant for assimilating child observations, planning the next step for individual children as well as for the class. Also a time for self-



evaluation, introspection and inner self-preparation of the teacher. (keeping a diary works very well here) Having time for oneself before leaving school is a must. Many teachers are married women. As soon as they come home they get involved in their own family and children. This is why it is *essential* that teachers regularly have half an hour for self-observation, assimilation and/or planning before going home.

- Once a week a short get together: the teachers can meet with their department, the teachers can meet with the other class teachers. The composition of the group can change, according to the content to be discussed. During such meetings it is good to make it a habit not to dwell long on the problematic side. Such meetings should be *solution-oriented*. One needs to mention the problem only for making it clear why a change is needed. It is always better to concentrate on the positive side, to try to look for and find solutions and collectively take decisions that work. Divide the responsibilities for executing the change and decide on a next meeting for checking how much progress is made.
- Introduce now and then a morning for self-development workshops for the staff that concentrate on their resourcefulness. This would be done with the aim to widen and deepen themselves and through this elevate the implementation of Integral Education in the school.
- Always look for opportunities “to recharge the battery” individually or collectively and take time for that. The role of the principal is important here. If he or she remains a traditional principal taking all decisions, the best will not be brought out in the teachers. An attitude like this is in contrast with the fundamentals of integral education. A principal should be a role model to the teachers: open, welcoming, resourceful.

Provisions in the timetable related to the students:

- Introduce block periods for the students to work in depth on something of their own choice.
- Introduce one morning a week (at least up to recess but preferably longer) a Self-Development morning for the students; allow them to sign up anywhere and work on something totally of their choice, arts and crafts included. This is also good for students who would like to study a topic like 'water' from different view points: chemistry, physics, geography, social issues, etc. which involve water.
- Introduce time for self-evaluation. This can start with students jotting down comments on their learning outcomes, but with the help of a sensitive teachers this could lead to explorations in deeper layers of the being. Always allow full privacy of what the students write. Never insist on wanting to read it. If you want to be informed by the students of what they think of their progress, tell them beforehand that you want to read it.

### **Beautifying and harmonising the school premises**

When entering the school premises one should feel a difference in atmosphere. The Mother says that the school should be a temple of learning. Let a visitor feel this when he enters the place. To become truly an integral school, the philosophy of Integral Education has to be expressed on all layers. What does this mean? Sri Aurobindo, in his book *The Human Cycle*, informs us that an institution also has a body, vital, mind and a soul and also seeks self-fulfilment, like a human being. If the school is meant to be an integral school, the essence of integral education should express itself through the building, the gardens, the playground, through

a genuine attempt to strive for development of the teachers and students, through vital sincerity in the interactions among the people on campus, through the honesty in the dealings with the society, and the genuineness in the expression of the philosophy. Let the care for the soul run through all that is done.

Here are some suggestions on how the environment physically, socially and mentally can get a psychic touch.

- Look upon everybody is a valuable part of the whole. This includes all: the principal, teaching staff, administrative staff, cleaning staff and students. Here the principal plays an important role. Can she/he bring a work culture that makes everybody feel that it is their school and that all together can make this a beautiful place? In case she/he remains a traditional principal and only directs from the office, there will never be that special commitment of the other members of the school community to make a significant change in the school. The principal has also to be “a helper and a guide” to the staff. A warm and encouraging involvement will make the difference.
- Be welcoming to visitors and parents. Let there be physically and socially and mentally an openness. Look upon the other as a soul in the becoming.
- Keep the environment clean. Let the cleaning staff feel that they are an important link in creating a beautiful atmosphere. Respect them for taking care of the body of the institution. It is quite possible to involve children, but do the cleaning *with* them; do not give them the feeling that they have to do the work and you are there only to supervise.
- Let the environment breathe the feeling of care. Regarding care and maintenance, The Mother says that each object has a con-

sciousness. If cared for it will shine! First try to live this truth through your own actions, then help the students to experience it. Younger children are very open to this. If brought in as a wondrous experience at a young age, it will become a natural way of life. Make the furniture in the class happy by treating it gently, arranging it well. Gardening can be done all together, different areas can be allotted to each section. If there is negligence in the beginning, do not police the children but try to go back to the core and explain this without getting moralistic. Do not make a system where one of the students polices the others; you may have leaders, but then help them to see what the qualities of a *good* leader are (in contrast to closed authoritarian behaviour).

- Create simple beauty. Showing off lacks sincerity. Below you will find some suggestions for this, but a brainstorming session with staff members could certainly supply better and more creative ideas.
- Let each one do his/her best to develop an harmonious atmosphere, based on the belief that all people and objects are a treasured part of a whole, created by the Divine for a special purpose.

Suggestions for beautification without spending extra money:


- In the entry: a few country flowers with a few green leaves do wonders. In places with little vegetation: kolams or any local variation that is meant for beautification will give a special atmosphere.
- Display beautiful quotations on a beautiful display board. Allow everybody to contribute and to bring material from home. Allow the childlike touch.

- Also on display boards: what we call 'gems'; these are short narrations of something special that happened in the school or elsewhere.
- Allot a special place in the school where there is always something special on display, produced by anyone of the school community (this display to be changed at least once a month). Let walking through the school become an inspiring experience.
- The school library can become an important hub for widening and deepening.
- In the teachers room: beautiful anecdotes about something special that happened in the class.
- Encourage small exhibitions of *regular* work of the students anywhere in the school premises.

For all these activities it is best to have them done on rotation so that it does not become mechanical routine work, because that would defeat the purpose.

#### WORKSHEET: ENVIRONMENT OF THE SCHOOL

physical and psychological



This worksheet is meant to involve everybody, the management, principal, teachers and administrative staff. Try to let the voice of the cleaning staff also be heard, and do not forget to listen to the students. The older students could fill it up themselves.

How can our environment become more psychic oriented?

Make a list of all the changes and support structures that you feel are needed:



- Changes in physical environment: set-up, cleanliness, beautification etc.
- Changes in timetable that reflect a different approach in learning outcome, learning process.
- Changes in timetable that reflect care and respect for introspection for teachers, for students
- New support structures to be added for greater resourcefulness and deeper inspiration like meetings, workshops etc.
- Changes in attitude (inward deepening reflected in relations with colleagues, cleaning staff, principal, parents, students etc.)

Make an action plan for the points that get the maximum support of the whole school community. Make a time frame and list the persons that are willing to take up extra responsibilities.

Announce the developments of the implementation regularly. This would help spreading greater awareness and active participation.

### TIP

Start making CHECKLISTS yourself.

You can of course keep using the checklists of this book again and again. But it may be better to add questions of your own that are relevant to you personally.

## SELF EVALUATION

Q1. What are the things that make you unhappy?

Ans1. When someone teases me then I feel unhappy. When someone scolds me I feel unhappy.

Q2. What do you do about it?

Ans2. I try and console myself to try and stop being unhappy.

Q3. Are you able to solve the problem by yourself or you take somebody's help?

Ans3. I try and solve it myself but if I cannot I take some body's help.

4. Give some suggestions that would make you happy.

Doing sticker exchanging and stamp exchanging  
Playing squash, listening to stories, they all make me happy.

5. If somebody is unhappy does it affect you?

Yes, it does.

6. Why?

they are my friends, so I want them to also be happy.

7. What are you going to do about it or how are you going to help him/her?

I will tell him/her an interesting thing so he becomes happy.

8. Does unhappiness affect your work?

Yes, it does.

9. How would you overcome this problem?

I will tell the problem to my mother.

## ORGANISE THE INNER AND OUTER ENVIRONMENT

*“In the physical world, of all things it is beauty that expresses best the Divine.”*<sup>2</sup>

—THE MOTHER

*“The school should be an opportunity for progress for the teacher as well as for the student. Each one should have the freedom to develop freely. A method is never so well applied as when one has discovered it oneself. Otherwise it is as boring for the teacher as for the student.”*<sup>3</sup>

—THE MOTHER

*“...there is a world in which you are the supreme maker of forms: that is your own particular vital world. You are the supreme fashioner and you can make a marvel of your world if you know how to use it. If you have an artistic or poetic consciousness, if you love harmony, beauty, you will build there something marvellous which will tend to spring up into the material manifestation.”*<sup>4</sup>

—THE MOTHER



## My Summer School

One day I was asked, "Why don't you teach English conversation to the vocational trainees five days a week over the summer?"

I thought about it. I have noticed that my first reaction to most things is "Yes, why not," but once the time of doing something I have never done before comes closer, I begin to find excuses of not doing it - it is too hot, I have never taught before and anyway I am terrified of speaking in public. (This is a direct result of insensitive teachers. I still remember the moment when that window shut in school, it was class five and I was play-acting in front of the class. I froze in the middle and the act fell apart. I remember the teacher ridiculing me, the class sniggering and I felt like vanishing into the ground. That I think was the beginning of a great fear of opening my mouth in public). I have noticed that whenever I give in to such a feeling or thoughts, something closes inside. I get a feeling of irritability, of anticlimax, of emptiness and a rush to fill it with some other thing that distracts me from thinking about what I have done.

This time I attacked the problem with my rational mind. I reasoned that since I have decided to get over my fears, this is a good time to begin to get over my fear of public speaking. Why not cut my teeth on the poor vocational trainees?!

Then I reasoned that if I did not do this, the whole summer would go at home, complaining about the heat, for I have noticed that I feel the heat worse at home with nothing to do, and if I am out, even when it is 44 degrees, I survive.

So with the whole army of good reasons to do this, I began. The first day when I walked into class, I froze! I was terrified of all the strange faces who stared and were from a different social and economic class than I am. Anyhow, the regular teacher was there and she just asked me to watch for a couple of days. At home later, I began to find excuses not to do this any more - the heat, my little daughter etc.

But the internal dialogue showed that it was the old habit that was surfacing and I shut off the negative thoughts; like shutting a door. Once shut, the question of not going has not come up again. And now, after two weeks, I get a high when I walk in the door and get greeted by 60 voices. I get a high when I get my group of 20-25 people to talk. I get a high when the girl who only whispered answers with her head almost to her knees, lifts her head and speaks clearly.

# Attitude

To become an ideal teacher in an integral school is a lifelong process. An integral teacher has to have the qualities of a guru, says The Mother. In her conversations with teachers she mentioned several times that teachers must be ever willing to learn themselves. Because Integral Education seeks to help students to discover the contact or remain in contact with the deeper layers in themselves, it is essential that the teachers also widen and deepen constantly and grow more and more into their divine nature.

## **The essential shift in attitude**

A soul comes down to take birth: a new life is started with the aim to grow in consciousness. Education should help students to pursue that aim. The goal of Integral Education is to do that. It is necessary for teachers of integral schools to make an essential shift in their attitude. This change is so crucial that The Mother says that if teachers do not make that shift Her work will be at a standstill:

*“Most teachers want to have good students: students who are studious and attentive, who understand and know many things, who can answer well—good students. This spoils everything. The students begin to consult books, to study. Then they rely only on books, on what others say or write, and they lose contact with the superconscious part which receives knowledge by intuition. This contact often exists in a small child but it is lost in the course of his education. For the students to be able to progress in the right direction [to progress in consciousness], it is obvious that the teachers should have understood this and changed their old way of seeing and teaching. Without that, my work is at a standstill.”<sup>1</sup>*

—THE MOTHER

A teacher of an integral school has to expand her consciousness and grow above the usual mental and vital level. As you grow in consciousness the demands on yourself and the way you work, automatically become higher. Here is an example: being partial to children. (This may not apply to you personally, but many teachers suffer from an unconscious tendency of being partial to certain students.) As you become more and more conscious of your actions there comes a day when, from within, you know that you cannot allow yourself this partial behaviour any more. As soon as you have discovered this, the inner struggle begins. How can you come close to the children with which you do *not* have a natural affinity? How can you start understanding their behaviour and help them to blossom in their own unique way? The beauty of such a conscious inner struggle is that you will benefit by making inner progress, and, at the same time, these students will benefit from the new way in which you approach them, which in itself becomes a fulfilling experience for you as well as for the student. This growth in consciousness for *all* involved in a school,—children, teachers, principal, office and cleaning staff — is

the cornerstone of Integral Education.

The previous chapters discussed how in your work the shifts in attitude, which start from within yourself, have to extend to all the parts of the being. Part 1 of this book explained how purification of the mental, vital and physical instruments is helpful in paving the way for a psychic opening. In the same way it is beneficial if you bring about certain changes in your mental and vital notions related to your work. It is most important to realise that it is best that such changes, as well as the implementation of certain changes in the classroom, start from within yourself. Cosmetic changes on the surface that have no connection with the core of yourself do not bring about Integral Education, because such changes have no connection with the main aim of Integral Education. The starting point is the inner change. This inner change is to guide you in the outer work and so come to expression in the changes you will make in your classroom. If you do it in this way the aim of Integral Education will be fulfilled and the path will unfold itself harmoniously.

### **New habits and skills**

The previous chapters discussed where the major changes in process, content, examinations and environment have to take place. If we look at these changes from a psychological angle, it means that you will have to allow shifts in yourself on the mental, the vital and the physical levels. Though these shifts will have to be guided as much as possible from within, it is good to realise that in the teaching profession there are also a number of very concrete habits and skills that can help to create the right atmosphere for Integral Education. Such skills are, for example, asking open-ended questions, learning to work with a small group of chil-

dren while the other children are engaging themselves on their own, learning to work with a Minimum Common Syllabus, learning to develop meaningful evaluation tasks, learning to observe children etc. Practising and implementing these skills successfully leads to a different frame of mind. This will aid the development of a new attitude and help to bring a new atmosphere into the classroom.

### **Self-preparation related to the outer work**

In Part 1 of this book we talked about a self-preparation in all the parts of the being related to the inner work. Similarly, in Part 2 there is a self-preparation in all the parts of the being related to the outer work. On the levels of the mind, the vital and the physical there are new qualities, new capacities, new habits and skills to be developed. Hopefully you have already experienced new abilities in yourself and can see this as an interesting journey with stimulating explorations and new achievements. As you grow in consciousness the difference between time for yourself and time for work slowly diminishes. You start perceiving each day as a string of events given to you for the growth of consciousness and for the preparation of your mental, vital and physical being, so that they become fit instruments for expressing the highest possible consciousness. Sharing this with the students in your class gives immense joy.

### **How to deal with the society**

Often the biggest opposition to change comes from the part in us that feels dependent on the society. After all nobody lives in isolation; almost everyone has been a student of a mainstream school

and that has left its influence on us. It is only when we are willing to look into ourselves and reformulate our aim of life that we can really implement Integral Education. So the question that arises and has to be answered is: "Am I so convinced that I dare to differ from mainstream education?" It takes courage to do things in a different way. It takes time to withstand and overcome the opposing forces in yourself and others. A good beginning is to start in your own classroom with making changes that are convincing to you. For instance, if you see time and again that neither your intelligent, nor your slow learners are interested in their studies because the book is either too easy or too difficult, and if you feel this is more a mistake of the system than of the students, and if it pains you to have to reprimand them over and over again, you change the system and bring variety into your learning material and consequently bring also variety into the tests and replace them by assessment tasks. Try to prepare yourself well, take care to assimilate and integrate your new ideas thoroughly, in as many parts of your being as possible, so that you can express them freely and strongly in your classroom. In this way you will also be prepared to give convincing answers in case you are questioned about what you are doing.

### **Preparation of a teacher of an integral school**

The starting point is from within, from the deepest level possible. Written question asked by a teacher:

"Sweet Mother, You have said '*The first duty of the teacher is to help the student to know himself.*' How can we help a student to know himself? For that, isn't it necessary for us to have attained a higher level of consciousness ourselves?"

# Jim

Agile, flexible, muscular body having great stamina and able to enjoy this suppleness.

Be present wholly (physically, mentally) in every moment; live every moment and thus be free always, refreshed, energetic welcoming the next moment. Enjoy the every moment.

Do not try to escape from yourself when in conflict or confronted with duality; face it, look into it.

Try to solve the difficulty as it arises; do not wait to take it an impossible form.

Be truthful always, in every circumstance, without fearing for consequences.

Do not build image about anyone. Whenever I meet a person with an old image, I am not able to relate with him and it just remains a formal talk and of very little significance.

Listen to others but evaluate myself.

Share with others whatever I have and that I feel worth sharing.

Do everything with the best of your possibility and with complete attention.

## REVIEW of Aims

I find myself more flexible and am getting more and more conscious of my body.

I exercise regularly and am more aware of my diet.

I ~~am~~ certainly have more courage to be honest now.

I love to share with others whatever I find worth sharing as I have understood that it increases with sharing.

I am able to concentrate more.

I will attribute my progress to more of concentration, determination, conscious effort, hardwork and experimenting on new things ~~by~~ without the fear of failure or others opinion.

I am more open and friendly to others.

A teacher-trainee writes down his aims at the beginning of the year and reviews them two months later.



The Mother's answer:

*"Oh, yes indeed! The attitude of the teacher must be one of a constant will to progress, not only in order to know always better what he wants to teach the students, but above all in order to be a living example to show them what they can become. (after 5 minutes meditation) The teacher should be the living example of what he asks the students to become."*<sup>2</sup>

—THE MOTHER

### Capacities to be developed

With intelligent students it is relatively easy for a teacher, says The Mother.

*"But as one goes down the scale and the capacity of the students becomes lower, the teacher must have higher and higher capacities: discipline, self-control, consecration, psychological understanding, infectious enthusiasm, to awaken in the student the part which is asleep: the will to know, the need for progress, self-control, etc...."*

*Moreover, every difficulty and every difficult student should be an opportunity for him to find a divine solution to the problem."*<sup>3</sup>

—THE MOTHER

Written question asked to The Mother:

*"Sweet Mother, You have said that the teacher must [have psychological understanding] be a discerning psychologist, a Guru. You know very well that we are far from being that. The teachers being what they are, how should the system of education be organised in order to improve our way of teaching?"*

The Mother's written reply:

*"By doing what they can, knowing that they have everything to learn. In this way they will gain experience and do things better"*

*and better. That is the best way to learn, and if they do it in all sincerity, in two or three years they will become experts and will be truly useful. Naturally, work done in this way becomes really interesting and makes the teachers as well as the students progress.*"<sup>4</sup>

—THE MOTHER

## Qualities to be developed

*"The ideal to attain is an unflinching equality of soul and conduct, a patience that never fails, and, of course, the absence of any preference or desire. It is obvious that for one who teaches, the essential condition for proper fulfilment of his task is the absence of all egoism; and no human being is exempt from the necessity of this effort."*<sup>5</sup>

—THE MOTHER

## REFLECTION ON CAPACITIES AND QUALITIES

Read the four quotations of The Mother one by one with a mind as silent as possible. Let each quotation sink in deeply.

Read the first quotation again.

- Where, in what do you succeed in being a living example for your children?
- Where, in what do you not succeed in being a living example?
- What would you have to do to succeed better?
- What would you have to refrain from for succeeding better?



Read the second and the third quotation again.

- Reflect: what are the capacities and qualities in you that help in providing an atmosphere where integral learning can take place?



- Which capacities or qualities would you like to develop?

- What will you do to unfold these or get these unfolded with greater intensity?

Read the last quotation again.

- What does it stir in you?

- Anything you want to take up or to change?

- How will you start?

In case your list is long, decide on what is most essential for you and start from there.

From time to time review your own progress. This can be done through reflection, writing a diary, or going through a checklist that you made for this purpose, or any other way that works for you.

The next quotation may give you a most beautiful introspection:

*“If we are to be total, complete beings, to have an integral realisation, we should be able to express our spiritual experience mentally, vitally and physically. And the more our expression is perfect, executed by a complete and perfect being, the more integral and perfect will our realisation be.”*<sup>6</sup>

—THE MOTHER

## Two observations that helped in a child's development

A class teacher of standard VI reports to her colleagues:

A child in my class often remained mum or played the clown in difficult situations. After some time she realised she did this because she lacked confidence and felt shy of making mistakes in front of others. In sports, though, she was good and she felt always happy while playing basketball. An outing to Nainital was planned for standard VI. Before embarking on this excursion this child saw that here came an occasion through which she could develop her confidence and she expressed this to me. I encouraged her to go for it. She went about it by throwing all her energy into being successful in all the challenging activities she undertook, like rock-climbing and boating. She was one of the best in rock-climbing and her classmates admired her. She felt the satisfaction of a mission accomplished and the confidence she gained in the physical field later translated itself to the academic side as well.

Another teacher writes:

Rajesh had been working with me on a project. Seemingly easily distracted, I would find him looking out of the classroom quite often; darting glances outside, shifting his feet, pacing up and down sometimes even during group discussions. I found this quite disconcerting, though he fared well in the quiz at the end of the topic.

I later spent some time under a tree silently picturing this child. The child came across brilliantly, with a beautiful smile and clear sparkling eyes. He was happy with the things he could do with his body. 'I get bored quickly; I like to do a lot of things.' And lastly, with beautiful sincerity, I received a strong message, 'I want to know, I want to know a lot of things.'

I was able to learn quite a lot from this image. It answered many questions about the child. It became quite clear that it was his unquenchable thirst for knowledge that made him restless in the class. He wanted to go deeper with the questions he wanted answered. The next project I will be able to help him by providing more challenging material.

## Willingness to learn

The Mother has emphasised the fact that teachers must be willing to learn. Integral Education is so decisively different that many things in ourselves and in the environment have to change. We need to develop a new attitude backed up with new skills and new habits

There is so much to do, but each learning process, each journey begins with the first step, so begin with the ones that appeal most to you.

### TOOLBOX

Here are some helpful tools. You may like to use these or may prefer to use other tools of your own.

For development of self:

- self-observation
- purification
- stepping back and reflection
- widening, deepening and heightening
- aspiration
- faith

For successful implementation:

- align yourself with the highest or deepest in you in as many circumstances as possible
- work consciously on new habits and skills
- write a diary about what happened in the class
- call on the dynamic will
- faith



## WORKSHEET: REVIEWING YOUR PROGRESS

We all have the experience of so many pushes and pulls inside ourselves, each wanting their say! So often it feels that we are only reacting to what happens around us, instead of acting from the aim we want to achieve. It is important to be focused. When you are focused all the parts of your being point in the same direction. Being focused is the beginning of self-control. Now comes the question, "On what are you to focus?"



In the first paragraph of *The Science Of Living*, The Mother points out that "*on the quality of your aim will depend the quality of your life.*" So again you have to ask yourself the question "What do I want to make of my life?"

Most likely, after so many weeks of self-observation and purification, your answer will not be the same as when you started this workbook. Go on a self-search and see how much you have grown.

## SELF SEARCH

What is NEW

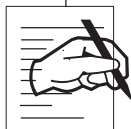
Fill up the areas in which you made progress.

Personal progress:

Example

- This week I widened physically: *I was on the verge of getting a cold, but could ward it off with will power and prayer.*

- This week I widened vitally:
- This week I widened mentally:



Progress related to your work:

Example:

- *This week I grasped what is the problem behind Atisha's difficulties in defining pronouns.*
- This week in my work I widened mentally:
- This week in my work I widened vitally:
- This week in my work I widened physically:

Do not worry if you could not fill up all the areas.

- Is there anything you remember about deepening or about the psychic presence?

## To conclude

What extraordinary times we are living in! We experience upheavals everywhere on earth. But do these spell only destruction or can they part of a purification on a global level? *“There are times”,* says Sri Aurobindo, *“when we say God is in the movement. He is the leader...”*

With God in the movement we are witnessing decisive changes: the Supramental Force has started to bring about a transformation from life in ignorance to life in the truth-consciousness. Old structures are broken down, but at present we have hardly understood by what they have to be replaced on a global level.

Yet, The Mother has assured us that the new world has been born and She said that, if we want to participate in it, we have to prepare ourselves sincerely for it.

This evolutionary process has made the role of the psychic being more prominent. Since the psychic being is the intermediary between the mind, vital, body and the Supramental Light and Force, the significance of psychic development has become more important.

One of the means to aid psychic development is Integral Education. If we, who are working with children, could take the psychic attitude in all we do, how beneficial that would be for our own progress, and what a blessing that would be for the development of our youth who will be the leaders of tomorrow here on earth. If they would get the opportunity to learn how to be guided in their decisions by the psychic presence what a difference it would make...



### SELF-PREPARATION

Question asked by a teacher to The Mother:

*“What is the best way of preparing ourselves, until we can establish a new system [of education]?”*

Her answer:

*“Naturally, it is to widen and illumine your consciousness—but how to do it? Your own consciousness, to widen and illumine it. And if you could find, each one of you, your psychic and unite with it, all the problems would be solved.*

*The psychic being is the representative of the Divine in the human being. That’s it, you see—the Divine is not something remote and inaccessible. The Divine is in you but you are not fully conscious of it.”*<sup>7</sup>

—THE MOTHER

*“The true, the supreme Unity expresses itself in diversity. It is mental logic that demands sameness. In practice, each one must find and apply his own method, that which he understands and feels. It is only in this way that education can be effective.”*<sup>8</sup>

—THE MOTHER

*“And when we know how to call the Lord in all circumstances to make Him share in all the events of our life, then life becomes an Ananda, because He covers all with His Delight.”*<sup>9</sup>

—THE MOTHER

# Appendixes

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CWSA = The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo

SABCL = Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library

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# Glossary of Spiritual Terms

**Aspiration** — the urge for finding the Truth; the highest aspiration of a human being comes from the psychic being; there is also a mental, a vital and a physical aspiration.

**Atman** — the original and essential nature of our existence; the true or highest Self.

**Consciousness** — the self-aware force of existence whose energy and movement create the universe and all that is in it. Consciousness is usually identified with the mind, but mental consciousness is only one gradation of consciousness and there are gradations of consciousness above and below mental consciousness.

**Divine** — the Supreme Truth, the Supreme Being from whom all have come and in whom all are.

**Ego** — the “I” constituted by a mental, vital and physical being which serves to individualise the outer consciousness and action; when the true Self is discovered, the utility of the ego ceases.

**Grace** — higher Divine Force which comes down to help the aspirant.

**Ignorance** — a veil that separates the mind, life and body from their true source and true reality. It is called Ignorance because it has forgotten the Knowledge of unity and acts from division; by this very fact it is unable to know truly or completely either itself or the universal reality.

**Inconscience (the Inconscient)** — the most involved state of being, the state where the consciousness is maximum veiled; all the evolved powers like matter, life and mind have emerged successively out of the Inconscient.

**Inmost being** — see psychic being

**Inner being** — the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical with the psychic behind it as the inmost.

**Innermost being** — see psychic being

**Integral** — the acceptance of the whole world, of the whole nature (mind, life and body), as a manifestation of the Divine Power; the acknowledgement of the psychic being as the Divine centre and intermediary between mind, life and body and the Supramental.

**Mental** — see mind

**Mind** — in its ordinary use, the word “mind” covers the whole consciousness; for man is a mental being and mentalises everything; but in the spiritual language the words “mind” and “mental” are used specially for the part of nature which has to do with cognition and intelligence, with ideas, with mental perceptions, with the reaction of thought to things etc. which are all part of his intelligence.

**Outer being** — the surface being in us, made up of our ordinary exterior mind, life and body consciousness as opposed to the inner being which consists of an inner mind, inner life and an inner physical consciousness.

**Personality** — a complex compound of Nature, with many layers; it is a temporary mental, vital, physical formation which the inmost being or the real Person puts forward on the surface.

**Psychic being** — the soul; a spark of the Divine, the Divine essence in the individual. This spark grows and evolves and slowly develops an individuality in the course of evolution; that psychic individuality is called psychic being.

**Psychic centre** — see psychic entity

**Psychic entity** — the spark of the Divine that descends into matter as a divine principle to support the evolution of the individual out of the Ignorance into the Light; it grows behind the surface mind, vital and physical till it become the psychic being.

**Psychic presence** — see psychic entity

**Rejection** — the inner refusal of movements (thoughts, feelings and actions) which are contrary to one's higher aspirations.

**Self** — our self-existent Being; the conscious essential Existence, one in all.

**Subtle body** — the subtle-physical support of the inner being.

**Subtle physical** — the plane closest to the physical and most like it, but with a freedom, plasticity, power and manifold play that is not yet visible on earth.

**Supermind** — see Supramental

**Supramental** — the full Truth-Consciousness of the Divine Nature in which there is no place for the principle of division and ignorance; in the supermind, mental divisions and opposites cease, the problems created by our dividing and fragmenting mind disappear and Truth is seen as one luminous whole.

**Surrender** — the act of giving oneself completely to the Divine, without asking for anything in exchange; to unfold one's being before the Divine in a complete sincerity that allows nothing to hide.

**Transformation** — the state in which the higher consciousness or nature is brought down into mind, vital and body and takes the place of the lower nature.

**Truth** — the ultimate spiritual Truth.

**Truth-Consciousness** — the consciousness that sees the Truth directly and is in possession of it spontaneously.

**Vital** — the life-nature of the being; it is made up of life-energy, sensations, feelings, desires, impulses and instincts.



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