

FOOD

Compiled by Vijay from the writings of
Sri Aurobindo and the Mother



Sri Aurobindo Society

AUROPUBLICATIONS

POWERFUL THOUGHTS, INSPIRING VISION

Yoga in Everyday Life – Booklet Series

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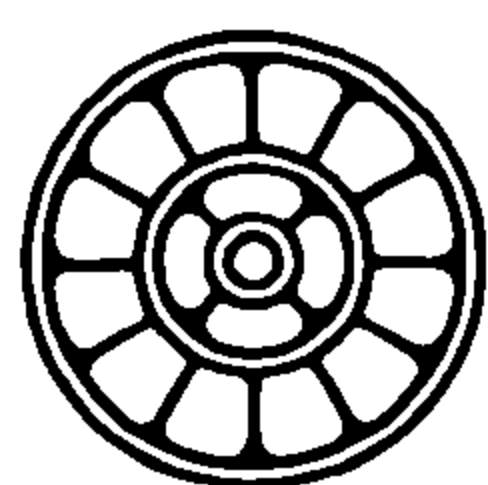
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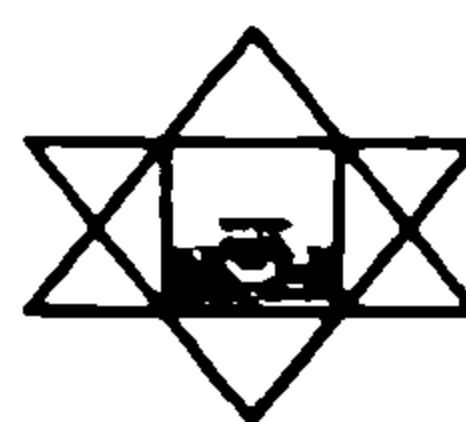
This is one in a series of thirty booklets published by the Sri Aurobindo Society under the title "Yoga in Everyday Life." Our effort is to bring together, from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, simple passages with a practical orientation on specific subjects, so that everyone may feel free to choose a book according to his inner need. The topics cover the whole field of human activity, because true spirituality is not the rejection of life but the art of perfecting life.

While the passages from Sri Aurobindo are in the original English, most of the passages from the Mother (selections from her talks and writings) are translations from the original French. We must also bear in mind that the excerpts have been taken out of their original context and that a compilation, in its very nature, is likely to have a personal and subjective approach. A sincere attempt, however, has been made to be faithful to the vision of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

We hope these booklets will inspire the readers to go to the complete works and will help them to mould their lives and their environments towards an ever greater perfection. The quotations from Sri Aurobindo are prefaced by his symbol and those from the Mother by her symbol.



The Mother's



Sri Aurobindo's

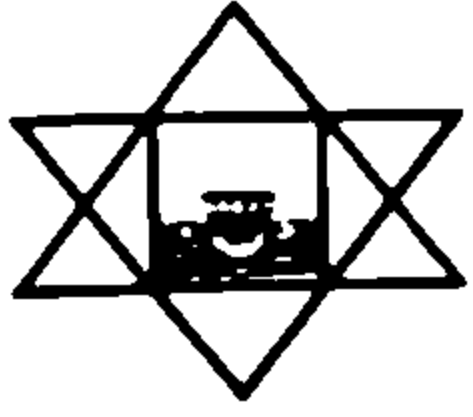
"O TRUTH, COME, MANIFEST."

“आयाहि सत्य आविर्भव”

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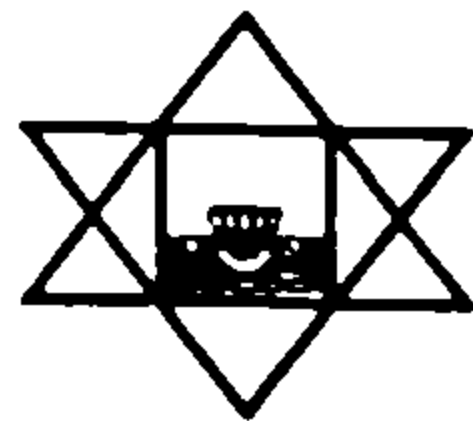
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RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOOD



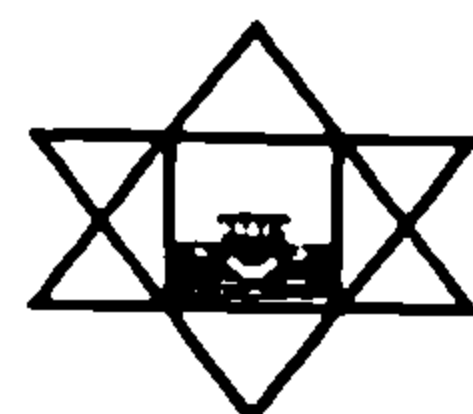
The proper attitude to food is a certain equality. Food is for the maintenance of the body and one should take enough for that – what the body needs; if one gives less the body feels the need and hankers; if you give more, then that is indulging the vital. As for particular foods the palate likes, the attitude of the mind and vital should be, ‘If I get, I take; if I don't get, I shall not mind.’ One should not think too much of food either to indulge or unduly to repress – that is the best.

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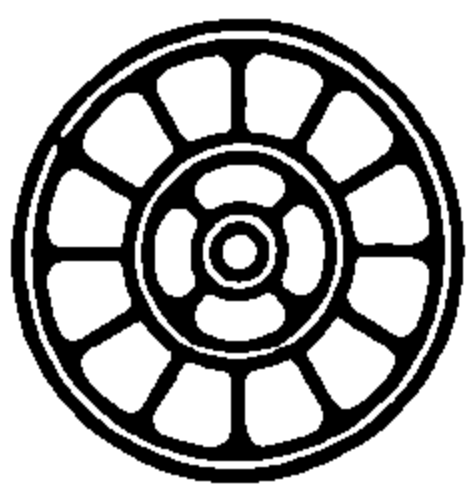
Do not trouble your mind about food. Take it in the right quantity (neither too much nor too little), without greed or repulsion, as the means given you by the Mother for the maintenance of the body, in the right spirit, offering it to the Divine in you; then it need not create *tamas*.

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Too much eating makes the body material and heavy, eating too little makes it weak and nervous – one has to find the true harmony and balance between the body's need and the food taken.

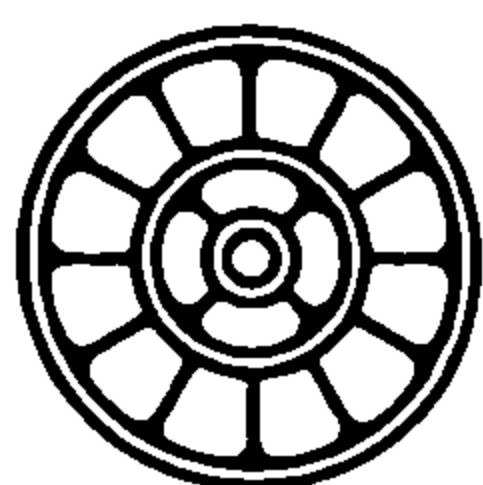
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Physically, we depend upon food to live – unfortunately. For with food, we daily and constantly take in a formidable amount of inconscience, of *tamas*, heaviness, stupidity. One can't do otherwise – unless constantly, without a break, we remain completely aware and, as soon as an element is introduced into our body, we immediately work upon it to extract from it only the light and

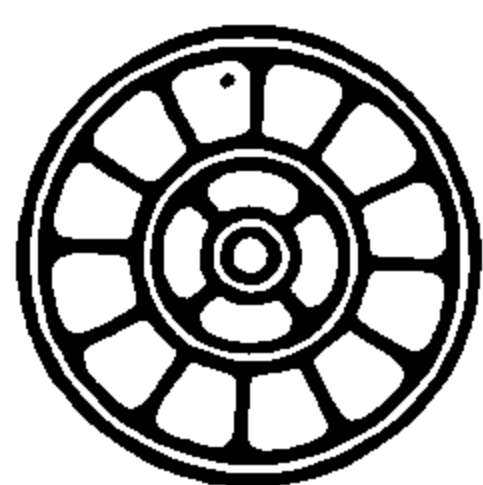
reject all that may darken our consciousness. This is the origin and rational explanation of the religious practice of consecrating one's food to God before taking it. When eating one aspires that this food may not be taken for the little human ego but as an offering to the divine consciousness within oneself. In all yogas, all religions, this is encouraged. This is the origin of that practice, of contacting the consciousness behind, precisely to diminish as much as possible the absorption of an inconscience which increases daily, constantly, without one's being aware of it.

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...as long as our body is compelled to take in foreign matter in order to subsist, it will absorb at the same time a considerable amount of inert and unconscious forces or those having a rather undesirable consciousness and this alchemy must take place inside the body. We were speaking of the kinds of consciousness absorbed with food, but there is also the inconscience that's absorbed with food – quite a deal of it. And that is why in many yogas there was the advice to offer to the Divine what one was going to eat before eating it (*Mother makes a gesture offering, hands joined, palms open*). It consists in calling the Divine down into the food before eating it. One offers it to Him – that is, one puts it in contact with the Divine, so that it may be under the divine influence when one eats it. It is very useful, it is very good. If one knows how to do it, it is very useful, it considerably reduces the work of inner transformation which has to be done.

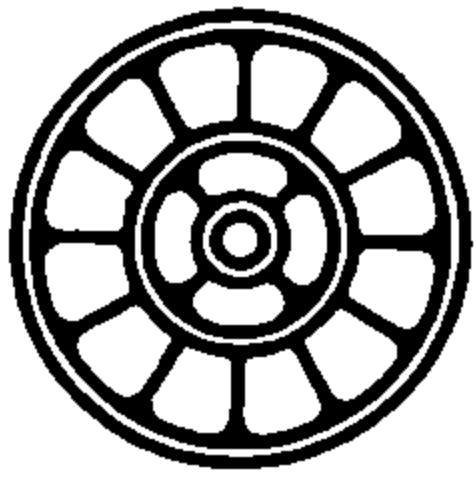
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...Offer all your movements to it [the Divine Presence], not only every mental action, every thought and feeling but even the most ordinary and external actions such as eating; when you eat, you must feel

that it is the Divine who is eating through you...

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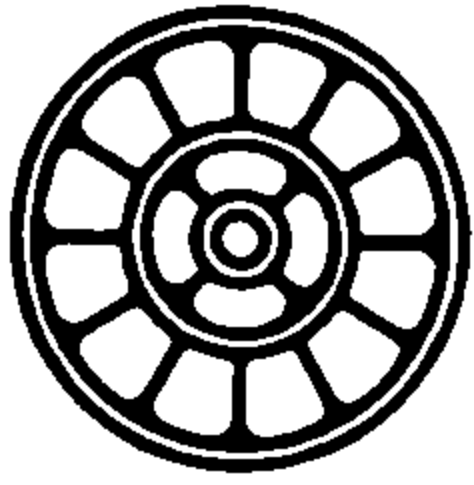


The body in its normal state, that is to say, when there is no intervention of mental notions or vital impulses, also knows very well what is good and necessary for it; but for this to be effective in practice, one must educate the child with care and teach him to distinguish his desires from his needs. He should be helped to develop a taste for food that is simple and healthy, substantial and appetising, but free from any useless complications. In his daily food, all that merely stuffs and causes heaviness should be avoided; and above all, he must be taught to eat according to his hunger, neither more nor less, and not to make his meals an occasion to satisfy his greed or gluttony. From one's very childhood, one should know that one eats in order to give strength and health to the body and not to enjoy the pleasures of the palate. Children should be given food that suits their temperament, prepared in a way that ensures hygiene and cleanliness, that is pleasant to the taste and yet very simple. This food should be chosen and apportioned according to the age of the child and his regular activities. It should contain all the chemical and dynamic elements that are necessary for his development and the balanced growth of every part of his body.

Since the child will be given only the food that helps to keep him healthy and provide him with the energy he needs, one must be very careful not to use food as a means of coercion and punishment. The practice of telling a child, "You have not been a good boy, you won't get any dessert," etc., is most harmful. In this way you create in his little consciousness the impression that food is given to him chiefly to satisfy his greed and not because it is indispensable for the proper functioning of his body.

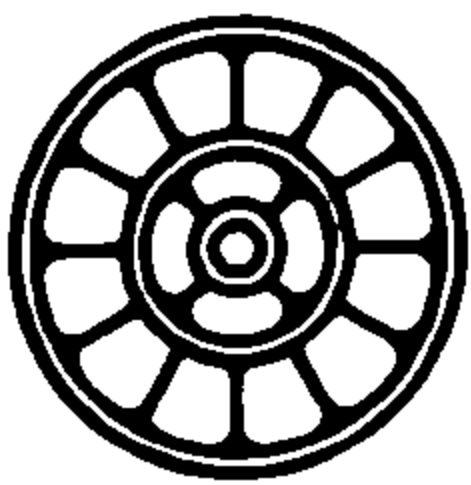
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(Based on a talk by the Mother)



With regard to the food that man takes, there are two factors that determine or prescribe it. First of all, the real need of the body, that is to say, what the body actually requires for its maintenance, the elements to meet the chemical changes occurring there, something quite material and very definite, viz, the kind of food and the quantity. But usually this real need of the body is obscured and submerged under the demands of another kind of agency, almost altogether foreign to it, (1) vital desire and (2) mental notions. Indeed, the menu of our table, at least 90% of it, is arranged so as to satisfy the demands of the second category, the consideration that should come first comes last in fact. The body is at present a slave of the mind and the vital; it is hardly given the freedom of choosing its own requirements in the right quantity and quality. That is why the body is seen to suffer everywhere and is normally sick for the greater part of its earthly existence.

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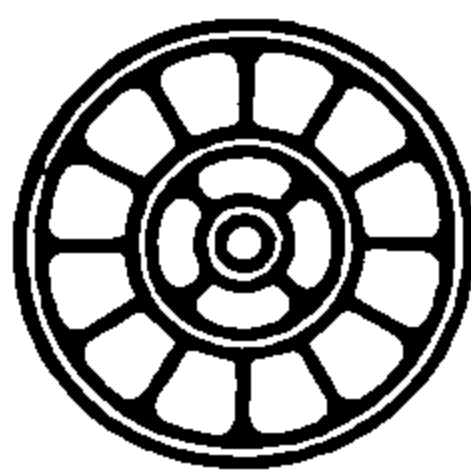


...the best thing is not to think about it (food) but to regulate one's life automatically enough not to need to think of eating. You eat at fixed hours, eat reasonably, you don't even need to think of the food when you are taking it; you must eat calmly, that's all, quietly, with concentration, and when you do not eat you must never think about it. You must not eat too much, because then you will have to think about your digestion, and it will be very unpleasant for you and will make you waste much time.... You must put end to all desire, all attraction, all movements of the vital, because when you eat simply because the body needs to eat, the body will tell you absolutely precisely and exactly when it has had enough; you see, when one is not moved by a vital desire or mental ideas, one grasps this with surety. "Now it is enough,"

says the body, "I don't want any more." So one stops. As soon as one has ideas or else desires in the vital, and there is, for instance, something that you like particularly, because you like it particularly you eat three times too much of it... In fact, this may cure you to a certain extent, because if you don't have a very strong stomach, you get indigestion, and then after that you have a disgust for the thing which has given you indigestion. Still, these are rather drastic means. One can make progress without having recourse to such means. The best is not to think about it.

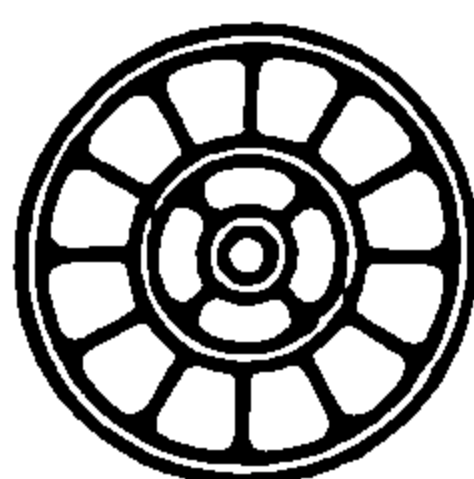
Of course there are people who prepare food for themselves and for others, and who are obliged to think about it, but just a very little. One can prepare food while thinking about more interesting things. But in any case, the less one thinks about it the better; and when one is not concerned with it, either mentally or vitally, the body becomes a very good indicator. When it is hungry it will tell you, when it needs to take in something, it will tell you; when it has finished, when it doesn't need any more, it will tell you; and when it doesn't need food, it doesn't think about it, it thinks of something else. It is only the head which creates all the trouble. In fact it is always the head which creates the trouble, because one doesn't know how to use it. If one knew how to use it, it could also create harmony. But it is something very strange that people always use their imagination for something bad, and it is very very rarely that they use their imagination for the good. Instead of thinking of happy things which would help to keep them in balance and harmony, they always think of all the possible catastrophes, and so naturally they disturb the balance of their being, and into the bargain, if they are unfortunate enough to be afraid, they attract the catastrophes they fear.

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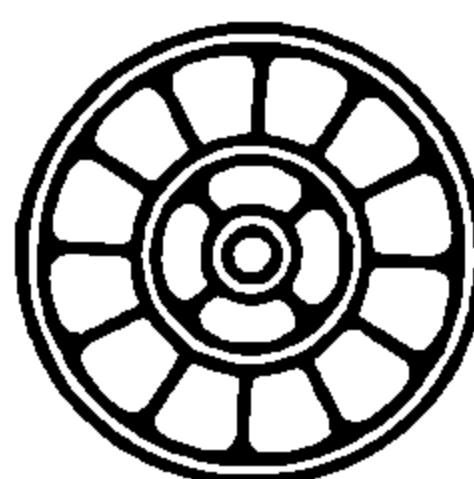
...The all-absorbing interest which nearly all human beings, even the most intellectual, have in food, its preparation and its consumption, should be replaced by an almost chemical knowledge of the needs of the body and a very scientific austerity in satisfying them....

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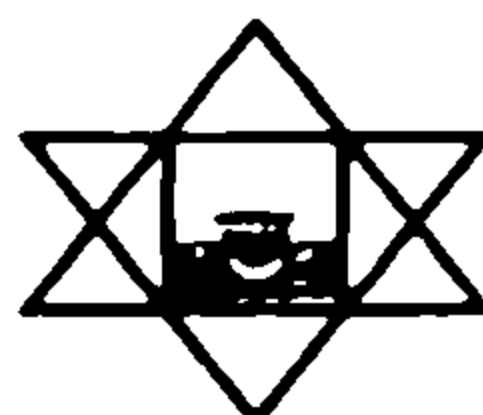
From the physical point of view, it is obviously better to eat quietly and without hurry, and I am quite sure that most often one can manage to get time for it. It is all a question of organisation.

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All quarrels in the place where food is prepared make food indigestible. The cooking must be done in silence and harmony.

ATTACHMENT TO FOOD AND TASTE

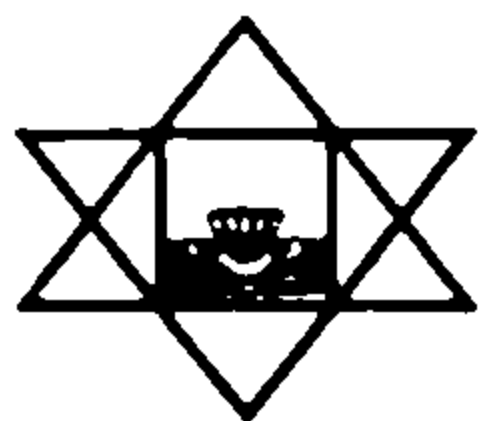


It is the attachment to food, the greed and eagerness for it, making it an unduly important thing in the life, that is contrary to the spirit of yoga. To be aware that something is pleasant to the palate is not wrong; only one must have no desire nor hankering for it, no exultation in getting it, no displeasure or regret at not getting it. One must be calm and equal, not getting upset or dissatisfied when the food is not tasty or not in abundance – eating the fixed amount that is necessary, not less or more. There should be neither eagerness nor repugnance.

To be always thinking about food and troubling the mind is quite the wrong way of getting rid of the food-desire. Put the food

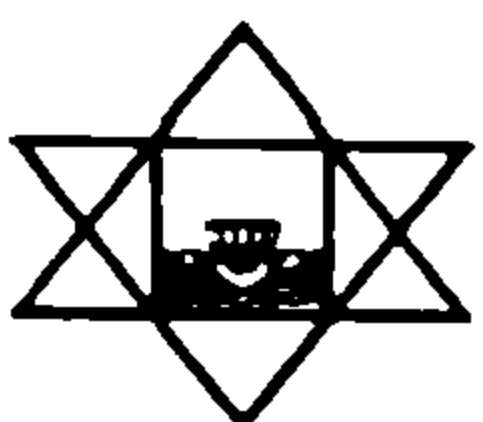
element in the right place in the life, in a small corner, and don't concentrate on it but on other things.

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Neither neglect this turn of the nature (food-desire) nor make too much of it; it has to be dealt with, purified and mastered but without giving it too much importance. There are two ways of conquering it – one of detachment, learning to regard food as only a physical necessity and the vital satisfaction of the stomach and the palate as a thing of no importance; the other is to be able to take without insistence or seeking any food given and to find in it (whether pronounced good or bad by others) the equal *rasa*, not of the food for its own sake, but of the universal Ananda.

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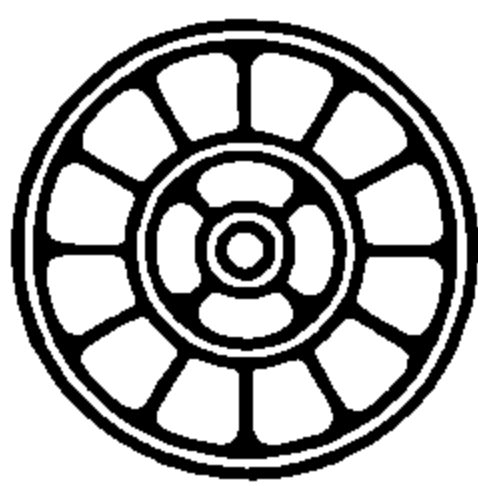


I think the importance of sattwic food from the spiritual point of view has been exaggerated. Food is rather a question of hygiene, and many of the sanctions and prohibitions laid down in ancient religions had more a hygienic than a spiritual motive. The Gita's definitions seem to point in the same direction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

more conscious forms of life for the satisfaction of the belly.

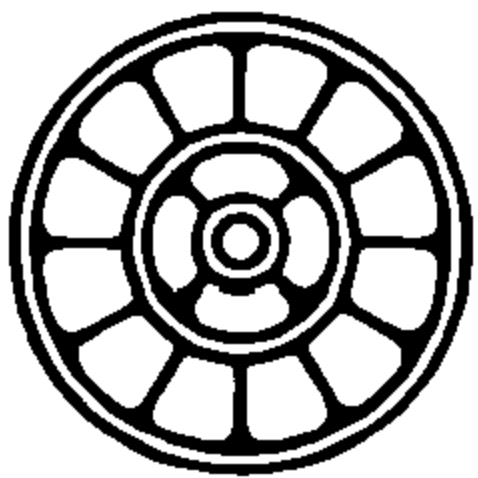
As for the question of practising to take all kinds of food with equal *rasa*, it is not necessary to practise nor does it really come by practice. One has to acquire equality within in the consciousness and as this equality grows, one can extend it or apply it to the various fields of the activity of the consciousness.

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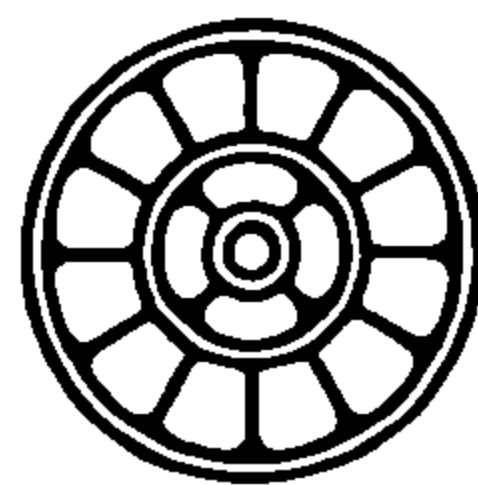
When you have a desire you are governed by the thing you desire, it takes possession of your mind and your life, and you become a slave. If you have greed for food you are no more the master of food, it is the food that masters you.

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A sadhak must eat to satisfy the needs of his body and not to meet the demands of his greed.

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...there is a difference between educating one's senses to the point of being able to bring in all kinds of refinements, developments, knowledge, all the possibilities of appreciation, taste, and all that – there is a difference between this, which is truly a development and progress of consciousness, and attachment or greediness.

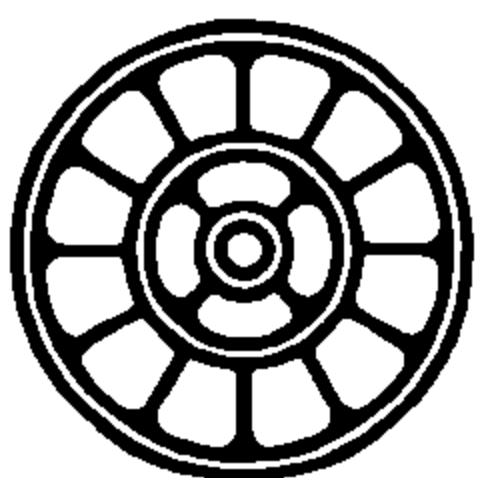
One can, for example, very well make a very deep study of taste and have a very detailed knowledge of the different tastes of things, of the association between ideas and taste, in order to acquire a full development – not positively vital, but a development of the senses. There is a great difference between this and those who eat through greediness, who think all the time about food. You see, for them eating is the most important thing; all

their thoughts are concentrated on it, and they eat not because they need to eat but through desire and greed and gluttony.

In fact people who work in order to develop their taste, to refine it, are rarely very much attached to food. It is not through attachment to food that they do it. It is for the cultivation of their senses, which is a very different thing. It is like the artist, you know, who trains his eyes to appreciate forms and colours, lines, the composition of things, the harmony found in physical nature; it is not at all through desire that he does this, it is through taste, culture, the development of the sense of sight and the appreciation of beauty. And usually artists who are real artists and love their art and live in the sense of beauty, seeking beauty, are people who don't have many desires. They live in the sense of a growth not only visual, but of the appreciation of beauty. There is a great difference between this and people who live by their impulses and desires. That's altogether something else.

Usually all education, all culture, all refinement of the senses and the being is one of the best ways of curing instincts, desires, passions. To eliminate these things does not cure them; to cultivate, intellectualise, refine them, this is the surest means of curing. To give the greatest possible development for progress and growth, to acquire a certain sense of harmony and exactness of perception, this is a part of the culture of the being, of the education of the being.

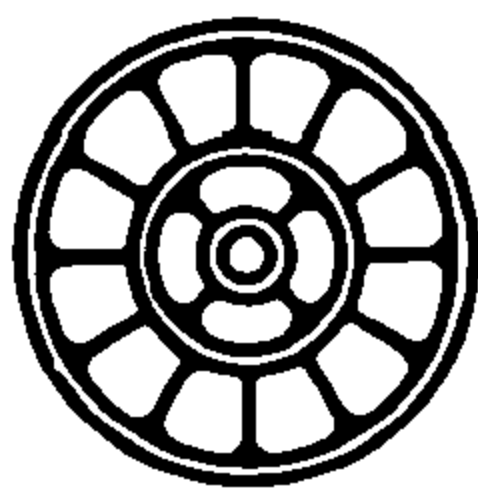
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Suppose that you want to make a progress regarding attachment to food, for example; well, almost constantly there will come to you thoughts particularly interested in food, about what should be taken, what should not be taken, how it should be taken, how it

should not be taken; and these ideas will come to you, they will seem quite natural to you. And the more you say within yourself, "Oh! how I would like to be free from all that, what a hindrance to my progress are all these preoccupations", the more will they come, quietly, until the progress is truly made within and you have risen to a level of consciousness where you can see all these things from above and put them *in their place* – which is not a very big place in the universe! And so on, for all things. Therefore, your occupations and affinities are going to put you almost contradictorily into contact not only with ideas having an affinity and relation with your way of being, but with the opposite. And if you don't take care from the beginning to keep an attitude of discernment, you will be turned into a mental battlefield.

MEAT-EATING



What happens if one eats meat?

Do you want me to tell you a story? I knew a lady, a young Swedish woman, who was doing sadhana; and she was by habit a vegetarian, from both choice and habit. One day she was invited by some friends who gave her chicken for dinner. She did not want to make a fuss, she ate the chicken. But afterwards, during the night suddenly she found herself in a basket with her head between two pieces of wicker-work, shaken, shaken, shaken, and feeling wretched, miserable; and then, after that she found herself head down, feet in the air, and being shaken, shaken, shaken. (*Laughter*) She felt perfectly miserable; and then all of a sudden, somebody began pulling out things from her body, and that hurt her terribly, and then someone came along with a knife and chopped off her head; and then she woke up. She told me all this; she said she had never had such a frightful nightmare, that she had not thought of anything before going to sleep, that it was just the conscious-

ness of the poor chicken that had entered her, and that she had experienced in her dream all the anguish the poor chicken had suffered when it was carried to the market, sold, its feathers plucked and its neck cut! (*Laughter*)

That's what happens! That is to say, in a greater or lesser proportion you swallow along with the meat a little of the consciousness of the animal you eat. It is not very serious, but it is not always very pleasant. And obviously it does not help you in being on the side of man rather than of the beast! It is evident that primitive men, those who were still much closer to the beast than to the spirit, apparently used to eat raw meat, and that gives much more strength than cooked meat. They killed the animal, tore it apart and bit into it, and they were very strong. And moreover, this is why there was in their intestines that little piece, the appendix which in those days was much bigger and served to digest the raw meat. And then man began to cook. He found out that things tasted better that way, and he ate cooked meat and gradually the appendix grew smaller and was no longer of any use at all. So now it is an encumbrance which at times brings on an illness.

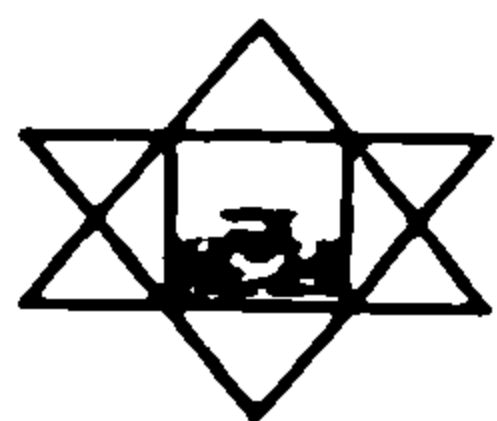
This is to tell you that perhaps now it is time to change one's food and go over to something a little less bestial! It depends absolutely on each one's state of consciousness. For an ordinary man, living an ordinary life, having ordinary activities, not thinking at all of anything else except earning his living, of keeping himself fit and perhaps taking care of his family, it is good to eat meat, it is all right for him to eat anything at all, whatever agrees with him, whatever does him good.

But if one wishes to pass from this ordinary life to a higher one, the problem begins to become interesting; and if, after having come to a higher life, one tries to prepare oneself for the

transformation, then it becomes very important. For there certainly are foods which help the body to become subtle and others which keep it in a state of animality. But it is only at that particular time that this becomes very important, not before; and before reaching that moment, there are many other things to do. Certainly it is better to purify one's mind and purify one's vital before thinking of purifying one's body. For even if you take all possible precautions and live physically taking care not to absorb anything except what will help to subtilise your body, if your mind and vital remain in a state of desire, inconscience, darkness, passion and all the rest, that won't be of any use at all. Only, your body will become weak, dislocated from the inner life and one fine day it will fall ill.

One must begin from inside, I have already told you this once. One must begin from above, first purify the higher and then purify the lower. I am not saying that one must indulge in all sorts of degrading things in the body. That's not what I am telling you. Don't take it as an advice not to exercise control over your desires! It isn't that at all. But what I mean is, do not try to be an angel in the body if you are not already just a little of an angel in your mind and vital; for that would dislocate you in a different way from the usual one, but not one that is better. We said the other day that what is most important is to keep the equilibrium. Well, to keep the equilibrium everything must progress at the same time. You must not leave one part of your being in darkness and try to bring the other into light. You must take great care not to leave any corner dark.

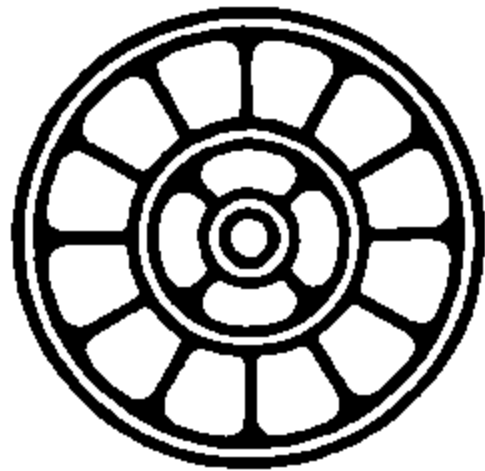
SMOKING, DRINKING AND DRUGS



It is the habit in the subconscious material that feels an artificial need created by the past and does not care whether it is harmful or disturbing to the nerves or not. That is the nature of all intoxicants (wine,

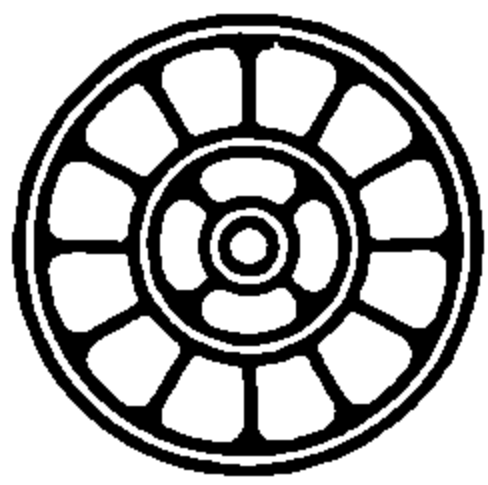
tobacco, cocaine etc.), people go on even after the deleterious effects have shown themselves and even after all real pleasure in it has ceased because of this artificial need (it is not real). The will has to get hold of this subconscious persistence and dissolve it.

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...one must strictly shun all excess and every vice, great or small; one must deny oneself the use of such slow poisons as tobacco, alcohol, etc., which men have a habit of developing into indispensable needs that gradually destroy the will and the memory....

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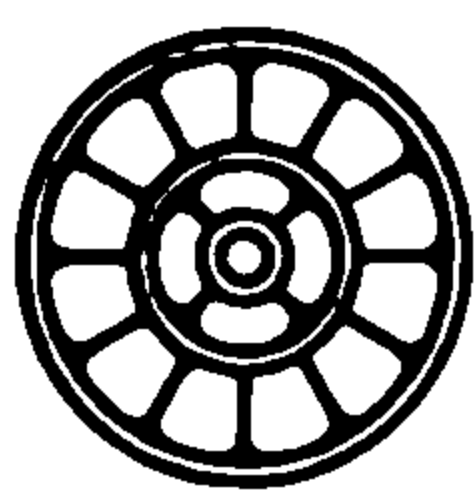
There are human beings also who indulge in vice – one vice or another, like drinking or drug-injections – and who know very well that this is leading them to destruction and death. But they choose to do it, knowingly.

They have no control over themselves.

There is always a moment when everyone has self-control. And if one had not said "Yes" once, if one had not taken the decision, one would not have done it.

There is not one human being who has not the energy and capacity to resist something imposed upon him – if he is left free to do so. People tell you, "I can't do otherwise" – it is because in the depths of their heart they *do not want* to do otherwise; they have accepted to be the slaves of their vice. There is a moment when one accepts.

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I remember a man who came here a very long time ago, to stand as a candidate for the government. It so happened that he was introduced to me because they wanted my opinion of him, and so he asked me questions about the Ashram and the life we lead here, and about what I considered to be an indispensable discipline for life. This man used to smoke the whole day and drank much more than was necessary, and so he complained, you see, that he was often tired and sometimes could not control himself. I told him, "You know, first of all, you must stop smoking and you must stop drinking." He looked at me with an unbelievable bewilderment and said, "But then, if one doesn't either smoke or drink, it is not worth living!" I told him, "If you are still at that stage, it is no use saying anything more."

And this is much more frequent than one thinks. To us it seems absurd, for we have something else which is of course more interesting than smoking and drinking, but for ordinary men the satisfaction of their desires is the very reason for existence. For them it seems to be an affirmation of their independence and their purpose in life. And it is simply a perversion, a deformation which is a denial of the life-instinct, it is an unhealthy interference of thought and vital impulse in physical life. It is an unhealthy impulse which does not usually exist even in animals. In this case, instinct in animals is infinitely more reasonable than human instinct – which, besides, doesn't exist any more, which has been replaced by a very perverted impulse.

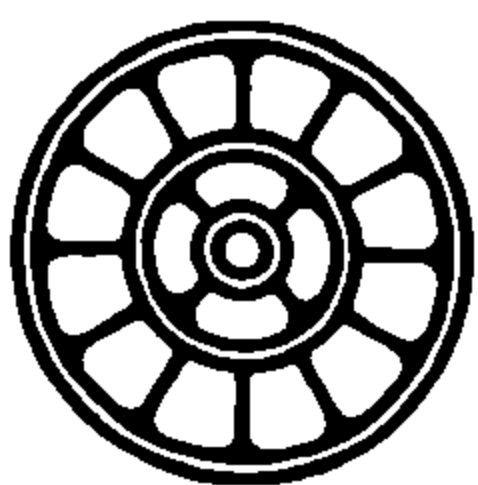
Perversion is a human disease, it occurs only very rarely in animals, and then only in animals which have come close to man and therefore have been contaminated by his perversion.

There is a story about some officers in North Africa – in Algeria – who had adopted a monkey. The monkey lived with them and one day at dinner they had a grotesque idea and gave the monkey something to drink. They gave it alcohol. The monkey

first saw the others drink, this seemed to it something quite interesting, and it drank a glass, a full glass of wine. Afterwards it was ill, as ill as could be, it rolled under the table with all kinds of pains and was really in a very bad way, that is, it gave the men an example of the spontaneous effect of alcohol when the physical nature is not already perverted. It nearly died of poisoning. It recovered. And some time later it was again allowed to come for dinner as it was all right, and somebody placed a glass of wine in front of it. It picked it up in a terrible rage and flung it at the head of the man who had given the glass to it.... By that it showed that it was much wiser than the men!

It is a good thing to begin to learn at an early age that to lead an efficient life and obtain from one's body the maximum it is able to give, reason must be the master of the house. And it is not a question of yoga or higher realisation, it is something which should be taught everywhere, in every school, every family, every home: man was made to be a mental being, and merely to be a man – we are not speaking of anything else, we are speaking only of being a man – life must be dominated by reason and not by vital impulses. This should be taught to all children from their infancy....

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You have heard about those drugs? Have you seen any pictures?... I have. People are thrust without the least defence into the lowest vital, and according to their nature they find it either frightful or marvellous.

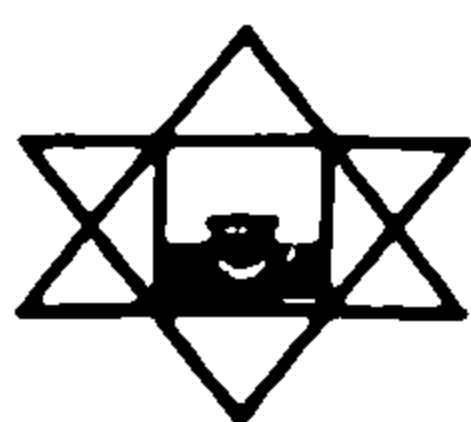
For example, the cloth covering a cushion or a chair suddenly takes on a wondrous beauty. This lasts for about two or three hours. Naturally, they are completely out of their senses the whole time. And the pity of it is that people call these "spiritual experiences", and there is nobody to tell them that this has nothing to do with spiritual experience.

Some time ago I received a letter from someone who told me he had taken these drugs, and he said he had had terrible visions, that the walls of his room were alive with thousands of evil and desperate faces which persecuted him till nightfall. There you are!

And so this gave me yet another proof.... I saw pictures in *Life* – there were some photographs – it was as though you had entered a madhouse. For these are images registered in the subconscious – images of thoughts, images of sensations, images of feelings, registered in the subconscious – which become objective, which come up to the surface and become objective. Thus they give the exact picture of what is within.

For instance, if you have the feeling or thought that someone is wicked or ridiculous or does not like you, in short, ideas of this kind – generally all this comes up in dream, but here you are not asleep and you have the dream! – they come to play the game you have thought of; what you have thought of them comes back upon you in their form. So this is an indication: for those who see happy, amiable, beautiful images, this means that within, everything is going on quite well (vitality), but for those who see terrifying or evil things, or things of that sort, it means that the vital is not pretty.

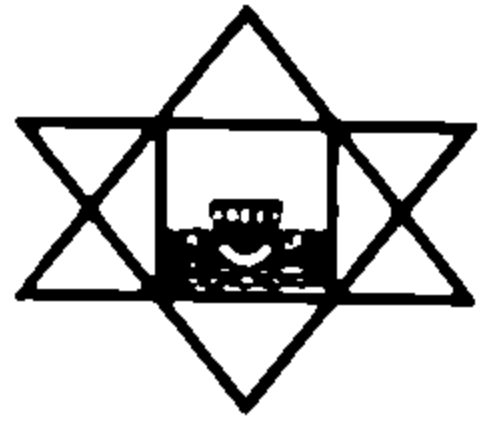
FASTING



The idea of giving up food is a wrong inspiration. You can go on with a small quantity of food, but not without food altogether, except for a comparatively short time. Remember what the Gita says, "Yoga is not for one who eats in excess nor for one who abstains from eating altogether." Vital energy is one thing – of that one can draw a great amount without food and often it increases with

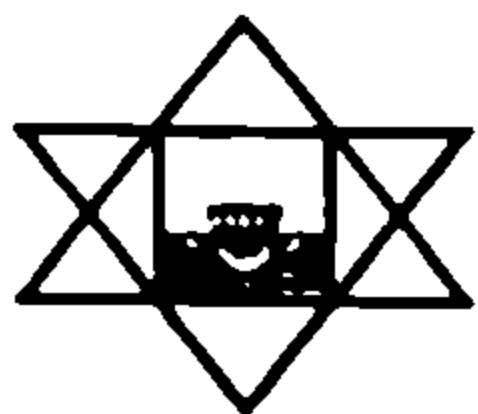
fasting; but physical substance, without which life loses its support, is of a different order.

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It is a fact that by fasting, if the mind and the nerves are solid or the will-force dynamic, one can get for a time into a state of inner energy and receptivity which is alluring to the mind and the usual reactions of hunger, weakness, intestinal disturbance, etc., can be wholly avoided. But the body suffers by diminution and there can easily develop in the vital a morbid overstrained condition due to the inrush of more vital energy than the nervous system can assimilate or co-ordinate. Nervous people should avoid the temptation to fast, it is often accompanied or followed by delusions and a loss of balance. Especially if there is a motive of hunger-strike or that element comes in, fasting becomes perilous, for it is then an indulgence of a vital movement which may easily become a habit injurious and pernicious to the sadhana. Even if all these reactions are avoided, still there is no sufficient utility in fasting, since the higher energy and receptivity ought to come not by artificial or physical means but by intensity of the consciousness and strong will for the sadhana.

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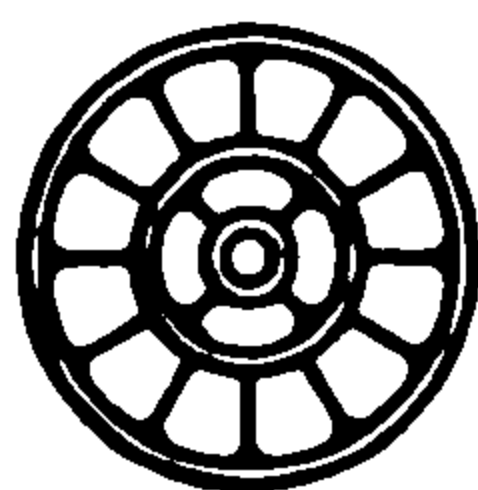
The transformation to which we aspire is too vast and complex to come at one stroke; it must be allowed to come by stages. The physical change is the last of these stages and is itself a progressive process.

The inner transformation cannot be brought about by physical means either of a positive or a negative nature. On the contrary, the physical change itself can only be brought about by a descent of the greater supramental consciousness into the cells

of the body. Till then at least the body and its supporting energies have to be maintained in part by the ordinary means, food, sleep, etc. Food has to be taken in the right spirit, with the right consciousness; sleep has to be gradually transformed into the yogic repose. A premature and excessive physical austerity, Tapasya, may endanger the process of the sadhana by establishing a disturbance and abnormality of the forces in the different parts of the system. A great energy may pour into the mental and vital parts but the nerves and the body may be overstrained and lose the strength to support the play of these higher energies. This is the reason why an extreme physical austerity is not included here as a substantive part of the sadhana.

There is no harm in fasting from time to time for a day or two or in reducing the food taken to a small but sufficient modicum; but entire abstinence for a long period is not advisable.

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How does fasting produce a state of receptivity?

It is because usually the vital being is very closely concentrated on the body and when the body is well fed it takes its strength from the food, its energy from the food, and it is one way... it is obviously almost the only way; not the only one, but the most important in the present conditions of life... but it is a very tamasic way of absorbing energy.

If you think about it, you see, it is the vital energy which is in either plants or animals, that is, logically it is of an inferior quality to the vital energy which should be in man, who is a slightly higher being in the gradation of the species. So if you draw from below you draw at the same time the inconscience that is below. It is impossible to eat without absorbing a considerable amount of inconscience; this makes you heavy, coarsens you; and then

if you eat much, a large amount of your consciousness is absorbed in digesting and assimilating what you have eaten. So already, if you don't take food, you don't have all this inconscience to assimilate and transform inside you; it sets free the energies. And then, as there is an instinct in the being to recuperate the energies spent, if you don't take them from food, that is, from below, you instinctively make an effort to take them through union with the universal vital forces which are free, and if one knows how to assimilate them one does so directly and then there is no limit.

It is not like your stomach which can digest only a certain amount of food, and therefore you can't take in more than that; and even the food you take liberates only a little bit, a very small quantity of vital energy. And so what can remain with you after all the work of swallowing, digesting, etc.? Not much, you see. But if you learn... and this indeed is a kind of instinct, one learns instinctively to draw towards himself the universal energies which move freely in the universe and are unlimited in quantity... as much of these as you are capable of drawing towards you, you can absorb – so instinctively when there is no support from below which comes from food, you make the necessary movement to recuperate the energies from outside, and absorb as much of them as you are capable of doing, and sometimes more. So this puts you in a kind of state of excitement, and if your body is very strong and can bear being without food for a certain length of time, then you keep your balance and can use these energies for all kinds of things, as for example, to progress, to become more conscious and transform your nature. But if your physical body doesn't have much in reserve and grows considerably weak from not eating, then this creates an imbalance between the intensity of the energies you absorb and the capacity of the body to hold them, and then this causes disturbances. You lose your balance, and all the balance of

forces is destroyed, and anything at all may happen to you. In any case, you lose much control over yourself and become usually very excited, and you take this excitement for a higher state. But often it is simply an inner imbalance, nothing more. It sharpens the receptivity very much. For example, precisely when one fasts and no longer takes the energies from below, well, if you breathe in the odour of a flower it nourishes you, the perfume nourishes you, it gives you a great deal of energy; but otherwise you do not notice it.

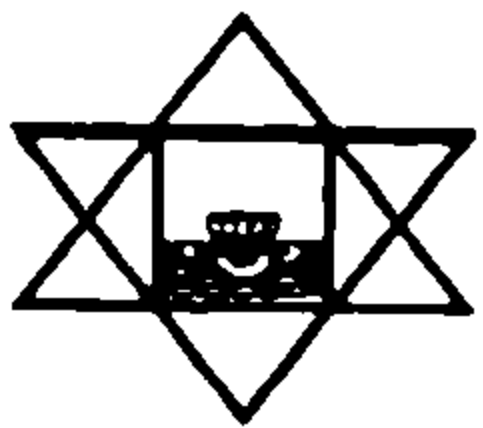
There are certain faculties which get intensified, and so one takes that for a spiritual effect. It has very little to do with the spiritual life except that there are people who eat much, think much about their food, are very deeply absorbed in it, and then when they have eaten well – and as I say, they must digest it, and so all their energies are concentrated on their digestion – these people are dull in mind, and this pulls them down very much towards matter; so if they stop eating and stop thinking about food – because there is one thing, that if one fasts and thinks all the time that he is hungry and would like to eat, then it is ten times worse than eating – and can truly fast because they think of something else and are occupied with something else and are not interested in food – then that can help one to climb to a slightly higher degree of consciousness, to free himself from the slavery to material needs. But fasting is above all good for those who believe in it – as everything. When you have the faith that this will make you progress, is going to purify you, it does you good. If you don't believe in it, it doesn't do much, except that it makes you thin.

There was... Maeterlinck – you know the books of Maeterlinck, I think; you must have read *The Blue Bird* and others. He was a very fat man, and as he had a sense of beauty, becoming fat upset him very much. So he had decided to fast once a week;

one day in the week he did not eat, and as he was an intelligent man he did not bother about food; he wrote, he worked hard on that day, and that kept him reasonably well and in an elegant form; and from that point of view it was very useful to him.

This is the surest result: if one doesn't eat one grows thin; so if one is too fat and wants to grow thin, it is a good means. But on condition that one doesn't pass the day thinking of food, because then, as soon as one stops his fast, he dashes for it and eats so much that he gets back all that he has lost. In fact, the best thing is not to think about it but to regulate one's life automatically enough not to need to think of eating.

FOOD AND PHYSICAL TRANSFORMATION



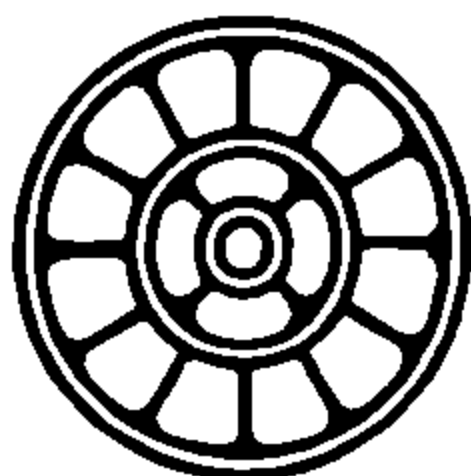
Another difficulty that the transformation of the body has to face is its dependence for its very existence upon food and here too are involved the gross physical instincts, impulses, desires that are associated with this difficult factor, the essential cravings of the palate, the greed of food and animal gluttony of the belly, the coarsening of the mind when it grovels in the mud of sense, obeys a servitude to its mere animal part and hugs its bondage to Matter. The higher human in us seeks refuge in a temperate moderation, in abstemiousness and abstinence or in carelessness about the body and its wants and in an absorption in higher things. The spiritual seeker often, like the Jain ascetics, seeks refuge in long and frequent fasts which lift him temporarily at least out of the clutch of the body's demands and help him to feel in himself a pure vacancy of the wide rooms of the spirit. But all this is not liberation and the question may be raised whether, not only at first but always, the divine life also must submit to this necessity. But it could only deliver itself from it altogether if it

could find out the way so to draw upon the universal energy that the energy would sustain not only the vital parts of our physicality but its constituent matter with no need of aid for sustenance from any outside substance of Matter. It is indeed possible even while fasting for very long periods to maintain the full energies and activities of the soul and mind and life, even those of the body, to remain wakeful but concentrated in Yoga all the time, or to think deeply and write day and night, to dispense with sleep, to walk eight hours a day, maintaining all these activities separately or together and not feel any loss of strength, any fatigue, any kind of failure or decadence. At the end of the fast one can even resume at once taking the normal or even a greater than the normal amount of nourishment without any transition or precaution such as medical science enjoins, as if both the complete fasting and the feasting were natural conditions, alternating by an immediate and easy passage from one to the other, of a body already trained by a sort of initial transformation to be an instrument of the powers and activities of Yoga. But one thing one does not escape and that is the wasting of the material tissues of the body, its flesh and substance. Conceivably, if a practicable way and means could only be found, this last invincible obstacle too might be overcome and the body maintained by an interchange of its forces with the forces of material Nature, giving to her her need from the individual and taking from her directly the sustaining energies of her universal existence. Conceivably, one might rediscover and re-establish at the summit of the evolution of life the phenomenon we see at its base, the power to draw from all around it the means of sustenance and self-renewal. Or else the evolved being might acquire the greater power to draw down those means from above rather than draw them up or pull them in from the environment around, all about it and below it. But until something like this is achieved or made possible we have to go back to food and the established material forces of Nature.

In fact we do, however unconsciously, draw constantly upon the universal energy, the force in Matter to replenish our material existence and the mental, vital and other potencies in the body: we do it directly in the invisible processes of interchange constantly kept up by Nature and by special means devised by her; breathing is one of these, sleep also and repose. But as her basic means for maintaining and renewing the gross physical body and its workings and inner potencies Nature has selected the taking in of outside matter in the shape of food, its digestion, assimilation of what is assimilable and elimination of what cannot or ought not to be assimilated, this by itself is sufficient for mere maintenance, but for assuring health and strength in the body so maintained it has added the impulse towards physical exercise and play of many kinds, ways for the expenditure and renewal of energy, the choice or the necessity of manifold action and labour. In the new life, in its beginnings at least, it would not be necessary or advisable to make any call for an extreme or precipitate rejection of the need of food or the established natural method for the maintenance of the still imperfectly transformed body. If or when these things have to be transcended it must come as a result of the awakened will of the spirit, a will also in Matter itself, an imperative evolutionary urge, an act of the creative transmutations of Time or a descent from the transcendence. Meanwhile the drawing in of the universal energy by a conscious action of the higher powers of the being from around or from above, by a call to what is still to us a transcending consciousness or by an invasion or descent from the Transcendence itself may well become an occasional, a frequent or a constant phenomenon and even reduce the part played by food and its need to an incidence no longer preoccupying, a necessity minor and less and less imperative. Meanwhile food and the ordinary process of Nature can be accepted although its use has to be liberated from attachment and desire and the grosser indiscriminating appetites and clutch at the

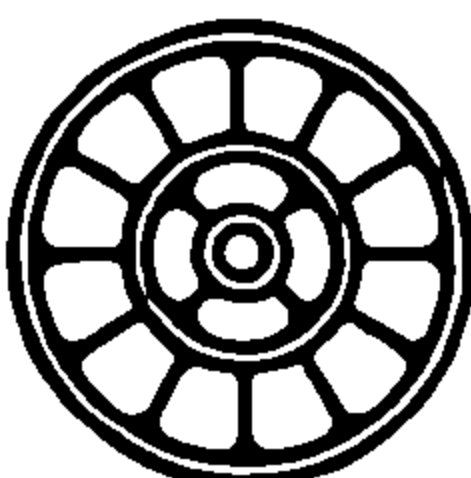
pleasures of the flesh which is the way of the Ignorance; the physical processes have to be subtilised and the grossest may have to be eliminated and new processes found or new instrumentalities emerge. So long as it is accepted a refined pleasure in it may be permitted and even a desireless ananda of taste take the place of the physical relish and the human selection by likings and dislikings which is our present imperfect response to what is offered to us by Nature. It must be remembered that for the divine life on earth, earth and Matter have not to be and cannot be rejected but have only to be sublimated and to reveal in themselves the possibilities of the spirit, serve the spirit's highest uses and be transformed into instruments of a greater living.

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When animality will drop off, the absolute necessity of food also will drop off. And there will probably be a transition where one will have less and less purely material food. For example, when you smell flowers it is nourishing. I have seen it, you nourish yourself in a more subtle way.

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"It is indeed possible even while fasting for very long periods to maintain the full energies and activities of the soul and mind and life, even those of the body, to remain wakeful but concentrated in Yoga all the time, or to think deeply and write day and night, to dispense with sleep, to walk eight hours a day, maintaining all these activities separately or together and not feel any loss of strength, any fatigue, any kind of failure or decadence...."

The description Sri Aurobindo gives here of the possibility of a

prolonged fast while maintaining all activities, is a description of his own experience.

He is not speaking of a possibility but of something he has done. But it would be a great mistake to believe that it is an experience that can be imitated in its outer appearance; and even if one managed to do it by an effort of will, it would be perfectly useless from the spiritual point of view, if the experience has not been preceded by a change of consciousness which would be a preliminary liberation.

It is not by abstaining from food that you can make a spiritual progress. It is by being free, not only from all attachment and all desire and preoccupation with food, but even from all need for it; by being in the state in which all these things are so foreign to your consciousness that they have no place there. Only then, as a spontaneous, natural result, can one usefully stop eating. It could be said that the essential condition is to forget to eat – forget, because all the energies of the being and all its concentration are turned towards a more total, more true inner realisation, towards this *constant*, imperative preoccupation with the union of the whole being, including the bodily cells, with the vibration of the divine forces, with the supramental force which is manifesting, so that this may be the true life: not only the purpose of life, but the essence of life, not only an imperative need of life, but all its joy and all its *raison d'être*.

When that is there, when this realisation is attained, then to eat or not to eat, to sleep or not sleep, all this has no longer any importance. It is an outer rhythm left to the play of the universal forces as a whole, finding expression through the circumstances and people around you; and then the body, united, totally united with the inner truth, has a suppleness, a constant adaptability: if food is there, it takes it; if it isn't there, it doesn't think about it.

And so too with all things.... This is not life! They are modes of existing to which one adapts oneself without giving it any thought. This gives you the feeling of a kind of blossoming, as a flower opens on a plant, a sort of activity which does not come from a concentrated will but is in harmony with all the forces around you, a way of being which is adapted to the circumstances you live in, which have absolutely no importance in themselves.

There comes a moment when, free from everything, one needs practically nothing, and one can use anything, do anything without this having any real influence on the state of consciousness one is in. This is what really matters. To try through outer gestures or arbitrary decisions which come from a mental consciousness aspiring for a higher life can be a means, not a very effective one but still a sort of reminder to the being that it ought to be something other than what it is in its animality – but it's not that, it's not that at all! A person who could be entirely absorbed in his inner aspiration, to the point of not giving any thought or care to these external things, who would take what comes and not think about it when it doesn't, would be infinitely farther on the path than someone who undertakes ascetic practices with the idea that this will lead him to realisation.

The only thing that is truly effective is the change of consciousness; it is the inner liberation through an intimate, constant union, absolute and inevitable, with the vibration of the supramental forces. The preoccupation of every second, the will of all the elements of the being, the aspiration of the entire being, including all the cells of the body, is this union with the supramental forces, the divine forces. And there is no longer any need at all to be preoccupied with what the consequences will be. What has to be in the play of the universal forces and their manifestation will be, quite naturally, spontaneously,

automatically, there is no need to be preoccupied with it. The only thing that matters is the constant, total, complete contact – constant, yes, constant – with the Force, the Light, the Truth, the Power, and that ineffable delight of the supramental consciousness.

REFERENCES – FOOD

Booklet

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| c | SABCL Vol. 24, p. 1467 | 9 | MCW Vol. 8, pp. 209-10 |
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| b | SABCL Vol. 24, pp. 1473-74 | 24a | MCW Vol. 11, p. 29 |
| 8a | MCW Vol. 14, p. 270 | b | MCW Vol. 9, pp. 116-19 |

N.B. Abbreviations: SABCL – Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library

MCW – Mother's Collected Works

NKGCW – Nolini Kanto Gupta's Collected Works

The quotation in the last line of the Introduction is from 'White Roses'.