

Mother's Chronicles
book three

MIRRA THE OCCULTIST

by
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*To pull her out of that tomb
was somehow our ambition.*

Sujata -- Satprem April 30,1984

A Word With You, Please!

Welcome, friends! Once more I invite you to share in the exploits of Mother. I could whet your appetite for adventure by hinting at some of the strange episodes to come, but I shall refrain.

I imagine that you have already met me. But just in case this is our first meeting, let me add that it was as a nine-year-old child that I met Mother for the first time and have loved her ever since.

It was with my father Prithwi Singh Nahar and my brother Abhay that I went to Sri Aurobindo and Mother. My father was in his late thirties and already knew a great deal about the inner life and assorted subjects, as his natural inclination was towards spirituality.

It was in 1924, when he was in his mid-twenties, that he came under the influence of Thakur Anukulchandra (1888-1969). Thakur's life, from the day of his birth, is said to have been full of miracles. It is recounted that his wet-nurse thought the room in which he had just been born had caught fire, and she ran to call the baby's grandmother. She came and saw it was a strong light emanating from the newborn babe. Thakur was the founder of 'Satsang,' a group to which people from all walks of life were attracted, irrespective of their creeds: Buddhists and Christians, Jains and Jews, Hindus, Muslims...

For Father that was the beginning -- so far as I know -- of several crucial experiences, including the awakening of the *Kundalini*, the 'Serpent Power.'

Under the shade of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, the base of his sadhana became stronger and broader. He had many beautiful experiences with the opening of the inner sight and inner hearing. Sri Aurobindo explained the meaning of those visions and sounds in letters to Father.

My mother, Suhag Kumari, had several visions of gods and goddesses, and after her death. Father became interested in the 'spirit-world.' Sri Aurobindo wrote him letters explaining the logic of the psychic phenomena. I have taken a small portion from a long letter of his as Prologue.

You will, however, relish a journey with Mirra to the mysteries of an unusual, if not bizarre, nature, where the past presents itself and the future reveals itself. For, as the title of the book suggests, our journey will lead us into occultism.

"A brief period," said Mother. Yes. But that period laid the cornerstone of her life's work. The knowledge that Mirra then acquired from Theon was to serve Mother as the springboard to attain the unborn Truth.

So now I shall not keep you waiting any longer.

Turn the page and read on!

Prologue

"The direct power of mind-force or life-force upon matter can be extended to an almost illimitable degree," wrote Sri Aurobindo on 24 October 1938 to Prithwi Singh Nahar. "It must be remembered that Energy is fundamentally one in all the planes, only taking more and more dense forms, so there is nothing *a priori* impossible in mind-energy or life-energy acting directly on material energy and substance; if they do they can make a material object do things or rather can do things with a material object which would be to that object in its ordinary poise or 'law' unhabitual and therefore apparently impossible."

Then in the same letter speaking about the 'origination of matter,' Sri Aurobindo says, "But it is a fact that Agni is the basis of forms as the Sankhya pointed out long ago, i.e. the fiery principle in the three powers radiant, electric and gaseous (the Vedic trinity of Agni) is the agent in producing liquid and solid forms of what is called matter."

I. A Downright Atheist

"I was a downright atheist. Up to the age of twenty,- the very idea of God made me furious." Hearing Mirra, God in his heaven must have laughed in his beard.

He had other ideas about this young lady who said, "I believed in nothing but what I could touch and see." Mirra's hands were now to touch immaterial things, and the eyes she had so meticulously trained were now to become doors through which world after world would come bursting into sight.

God was ready with his cataract.

The floodgates were to be unlocked by Theon.

The rush of experiences would have swept anybody else off his feet. But Mirra was a young woman with both her feet on the ground. Mother told Satprem, "I don't think there's anyone more materialistic than I was, with my practical common sense and positivism.... The explanations I asked were always down-to-earth, and it seemed obvious to me that there's no need of any mystery, nothing of the sort -- you explain things materially."

Indeed, if you want inner experiences without becoming unbalanced, you need to stand on a solid base. Mirra was well equipped. "I had the most solid base -- no imaginings, no mystical atavism: my mother was very much an unbeliever and so was my father. Consequently, it was very good from an atavistic viewpoint -- positivism, materialism." But she did have a rare thing. "Only this : from my infancy, a will-to-perfection in any field whatever. A will-to-perfection and the sense of a limitless consciousness -- no end to one's own progress, or to one's capacity or to one's scope. This from my infancy." She had also another thing from her infancy, remember? "The feeling of a Light above the head, which began when I was very young, at the age of five, along with a will-to-perfection. The will-to-perfection... oh, whatever I did had always to be the best I could do."

However, at the same time, the outward person" could easily have said, 'God? What's this foolishness! He does not exist.' Mentally, an absolute refusal to believe in a 'God'."

This refusal stemmed from a sort of misunderstanding. "Up to the age of twenty-five or so, I knew of no other God than the God of religions, the God as men have made him, and I would not have him at any price. I denied his existence, but with the certainty that if such a God did exist, -- I detested him."

But the real God -- the Divine -- could no longer bear this estrangement from that rebellious Sweetness. "My return to the Divine came about through Theon, when I was first told, 'The Divine is within, there,'" Mother tapped her breast. "Then at once I felt, 'Yes, this is it.'"

Who was Theon, that mysterious person? How did Mirra come to know about him and his teaching?

It was from Louis M. Themanlys, Matteo's college friend, that Mirra first heard about Theon and the Cosmic Philosophy.

Themanlys was a writer, with several books to his credit. His wife, Claire, was also at home with a pen. Claire's brother, Jacques Blot, was an artist. Both the families lived in Courseulles, in Normandy. Situated about eighteen kilometres from Caen, where fierce fighting took place in 1944 between the Allied armies and the German forces of occupation, Courseulles is a resort town on the shores of the English Channel where the Seulles flows into it. It was on D-Day, 6 June 1944, that the Canadian Army landed in Normandy -- Courseulles-sur-mer being the spot.

To the great rejoicing of the two families, the Theons often spent a part of the year at the residence of the Themanlys.

It seems it was in a Parisian bookstore, Librairie Chacornac, Quai St. Michel, in the Quartier Latin -- well-known for its students, and its old bookshops much frequented by those who take a keen interest in the science of the occult -- that Louis first came across an issue of *The Cosmic Review*. Whereupon he sent a letter to Theon enclosing a nominal subscription to the Cosmic publications. Then he met the Theons on one of their visits to France. It was only in 1907 that Louis and Claire visited Tiemcen, in Algeria, where the Theons lived. The young couple stayed there for three months, from April to June. It

was then that Madame Theon told them one day how, as soon as she first held Louis's letter in her hands, she had informed Theon about the role Louis was to assume.

Her eyes had penetrated the future, because Themanlys really devoted his pen and speech to the furtherance of the Cosmic Philosophy. Thrice a week, and for a number of years, he spoke extempore on this Philosophy. The gatherings were held at Passy, N°54 Rue Nicolo, where the family lived. Passy of the 16-th arrondissement is a posh locality of Paris. It is studded with parks.

In 1977 Satprem took me with him to France. Very apt, I felt, for it was my first flight overseas and I was going to Mother's country of birth. I was excited at the prospect of seeing some of the things she had looked at, knowing at first hand some of the places she had known and told us about, and walking where she had walked. How very lucky I was! And my cup of happiness brimmed over when a relation of Satpiem's and his great admirer, Madame Carmen Baron, welcomed us to her beautiful apartment in Paris. The Luxembourg Gardens -- where Mirra had gone so often for her evening walks -- are at a stone's throw from there. Was I thrilled!

One day, Satprem and I went to Passy to see another intimate friend of ours. We took the subway. It was my first ride in a metro and, had Satprem not pulled me away in time, I would have been squashed right there by the closing doors! Our friend, Y.L., showed us the Roland Garros stadium, where the greats of tennis fight for the French Open crown. The Parc-des-Princes nearby, with its football grounds and cycle-racing tracks, is a crowd-puller. The Hippodrome d'Auteuil must be mentioned, because we believe that that is where Mirra met her Red Indian friend, from Buffalo Bill's team, when she was eight or so. In addition, on the periphery of the locality lies the Bois de Boulogne where little Mirra went for walks with her father, her small hand tucked in the large fist of the Turk.

Well then, not surprisingly, like homing birds, the Agenda tapes had flown straight to the locale so much frequented by Mother. For it was in Y.L.'s flat that the complete set of the rescued magnetic tapes containing Mother's talks with Satprem -- *Mother's Agenda* -- was lodged. Our friend showed us how well she had kept the tapes after bringing them from India. But that is another story, and as fascinating as any thriller. I hope she will one day, soon, tell it all.

It seems likely that through Matteo, Mirra and Louis already knew each other and that Louis was aware of her thirst for true knowledge. In which case, Louis would not have lost much time in telling his friend's sister about Theon and his teaching. Now, Mother never told us when exactly that was; she always put it between 1902 and 1904. We are inclined to think it was late 1903 or even in the course of 1904. She did say once that her first contact with the inner Divine -- through Theon's teaching -- was established when she was around twenty-five. That is the only given pointer we have. Which again would indicate 1903 as the year when Mirra first heard about the inner Divine. And "I rushed headlong like a... like a cyclone."

Mother was telling Satprem one day about her body. "I was reared by an ascetic, a stoic; my mother was a woman like a bar of iron, you know..." who had dinned into the ears of her two small children that "one is not on earth to have a good time... and the only satisfaction to be got out of life is in doing one's duty." Mother added appreciatively, "A splendid education, my child! Splendid. I am infinitely grateful to her.

"My body has never asked for fun or well-being or anything else. 'That's life,' it said, 'and you just have to take it as it is, that's all.' So that's why when I first met someone who told me it could be otherwise -- I was already past twenty -- I said, 'Oh, really? Is that so?'" Mother laughed. "And then when he told me all about Theon's teachings and the 'Cosmic Life' and about the inner God and a new world that would be a world of beauty and, at least, of peace and light... well, I rushed into it headlong."

After a moment she went on, "But even at the time I was told: It depends upon YOU alone, not upon circumstances -- above all, don't blame circumstances. You must find it in yourself, the transformative element is within you. And you can do that wherever you are, even in a cell at the bottom of a hole.' The groundwork was already done, you see, since the body never asked for anything."

Soon Mirra discovered the Fount of Life. She "obtained a conscious and constant contact with the Divine Presence."

So that was done.

Mirra now sought a rational explanation to the mass of experiences she had had from her childhood. She found many in Theon's teaching, and could at last say, "Ah, I am not mad!" ,

As she became more interested in the Cosmic Movement she began to involve herself in it. How? Lectures or speeches? No. Not Mirra. Abstract theorizing held no appeal to her. She always liked to come to grips with matter. Her involvement, therefore, was practical: she took in her charge the publication of the Cosmic Philosophy's mouthpiece, the French periodical, *La Revue Cosmique*.

The Cosmic Review was a monthly. In it Theon expounded his philosophy, but the greater part was contributed by Madame Theon. "It was dictated in English by Theon's wife while she was in trance," said Mother to Pavitra and Satprem one day in 1960. In those days she met Satprem in Pavitra's office on the first floor. "And there was a woman there, she too English, who claimed to know French like a French-man. She would say, 'I never use a dictionary, there's no need of a dictionary.' And then she would turn out such translations! She made all the classical mistakes in translating the English words that should not be ,, translated that way." Mother was referring to Miss Teresa, secretary and companion to the Theons. "Then that was sent to me in Paris for correcting. It was literally impossible."

Even a gap of almost sixty years had not dimmed Mother's memory the least bit. "There was this The-manlys, my brother's collegemate, who wrote books; but he was lazy-spirited and opposed to work! So then he passed this job on to me; for my part, it was impossible, you couldn't do a thing with it. But I attended to everything -- I found the printer, corrected the proofs -- the entire work, for a long time."

Sometime later Mirra did the translations as well. And she asked for clarifications from Theon who promptly replied. Just for fun, here is an example. Posted from Tlemcen, the card was addressed to Madame Mirra Alfassa, c/o M. Themanlys, Les Verveines, Courseulles-sur Mer, Calvados, La France. It read,

Facsimile of a cover of 'The Cosmic Review'

20.7.05

Do not trouble to write about the name of the *plant* which will go by its latin & botanical known name.

Affely

Aia A.

Mirra received this postcard on 24 July 1905. Thus her collection of postcards was greatly swelled by those she received from Tierncen, "almost two hundred."

Mother gave a rough outline of the magazine's contents. "They were stories, narratives -- an initiation given under the guise of stories. It contained a lot of things, a lot. Madame Theon knew a lot of things. But it was presented in such a way that it was unreadable."

Mother smiled whimsically. "I also wrote a thing or two -- experiences I had noted down. That's why I would like to get those issues back, because they were rather interesting. I related some of my visions to Madame Theon and she explained them to me. So I would put the vision's narrative and its explanation. Because the symbolism was there, it was readable and interesting." These visions appeared in *The Cosmic Review* from 1906 to 1908, under the title, 'A vision.' There were other articles also by her, but unsigned.

Pavitra asked Mother, "What was this *Chronicle of Ki*?"

"Not KI, but chi, because he was the founder of China!" Mother revealed. "Those things were fantastic! The story was almost childish, you know, but it contained a world of knowledge. Madame Theon was an extraordinary occultist. That woman had incredible faculties, incredible."

Mirra's French rendering of the *Chronicles of Chi* was applauded by Theon himself. From Oran, in Algeria, he posted a card, addressed to Madame Mirra Alfassa, 46 Grande Rue, Bernieres-sur-Mer, Calvados, La France.

Tierncen, Algerie

August 25-th 1905

Your transcription of the "Chron of Chi" is full of life and of liveliness. Merci. The termination of the brochure is worthy of our mutual friend, and cannot fail to be of great use to the Cause *we ALL love and serve TOGETHER*. All blessing be (through your intermediary, child of mine) on those who love you. We shall meet ere long to sing the old English refrain - - "Oh! that will be joyful"! Affectionately,

Aia Aziz (Theon)

2. The Cosmic Tradition

They met 'ere long.'

By that time Mirra had read every available scrap of the Cosmic Philosophy. "Theon called it 'The Tradition'." She drank and she drank at this fount of knowledge. It seemed to her that she had long thirsted for something which was now being given to her in abundance. And she just could not get enough of it.

"You know," said Mother to Satprem, "the 'Cosmic' had quite an interesting action in my life. I was completely against 'God.' The European notion of God was utterly repulsive to me." She added picturesquely, "You see, the idea of God sitting placidly in his heaven, then creating the world, and next looking pleasurably at it, and later telling you, 'How well done it is!' 'Oh,' I said, I won't have that monster!" And naturally, at the same time, that prevented me from having any experience. But with the 'Cosmic Teaching' about the inner god -- Theon's key idea was this: the inner god (Mother touched her breast), the one who is inside each of us -- "brrf!" She made a gesture as if walls crumbled. "The experience was stunning. I am very grateful to him for it. That was the means; by following his instructions and seeking within my being, behind the solar plexus, I found. I found it, I had an experience... an absolutely convincing experience.

"I had this experience before I came here. I had the experience before coming, before knowing Sri Aurobindo. So it was as though three-fourths of the work were done.... I didn't have the mental knowledge -- my mental knowledge was nothing remarkable -- but it's not necessary to the experience. If you are sincere, you get the experience without thinking -- you don't need to think. But you have to be sincere."

What exactly was this Cosmic Tradition?

"An initiation given under the guise of stories," said Mother.

One day Satprem read aloud to Mother a few lines from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri* (Book X, Canto 2).

"Not only is there hope for godheads pure;
The violent and darkened deities
Leaped down from the one breast in rage to find
What the white gods had missed: they too are safe;
A Mother's eyes are on them and her arms
Stretched out in love desire her rebel sons."

He was on the point of putting a question to her, when Mother forestalled him.

"What did you want to know?" she said with a big smile. "What the white gods have missed?"

Mother laced her fingers together. "But I also remember that when I read the Tradition -- before I met Sri Aurobindo..." Leaving her sentence unfinished she gazed into space. "It was like a romantic novel, a romance, in a word quite an episodic story of the creation of the world, but how very evocative! That is where I got the first hint of the universal Mother's . first four emanations, when the Lord delegated his creative power to the Mother. And it was identical with the ancient Indian tradition, but told almost like a nursery tale, anyone could understand it -- it was an image. Like a movie picture, and very vivid."

Many times Mother recounted the story of the Tradition, but each time with a slight variation, which depended on the subject she wanted to deal with and on her audience of the moment.

Right in the early fifties, a youngster wanted to know, "Where do gods come from?"

"There is a very ancient lore which narrates that," Mother readily replied. Then she addressed her brood, "I am going to tell it to you as it is told to children. That way you will understand."

We listened with rapt attention to her narrative.

"One day, 'God' decided to put himself forth, to objectify himself, in order to have the joy of knowing himself in detail. So, at first he emanated his Consciousness, instructing it to bring into being a universe. This Consciousness began by emanating four Beings, four individualities who really were wholly superior beings, of the highest Reality. These were: the Being of Consciousness, the Being of Love (or rather of Ananda), the Being of Life, and the Being of Light and Knowledge. But consciousness and light are the same thing. We have: Consciousness, Love and Ananda, Life, and Truth -- that's the right word, Truth. And, of course, they were supremely powerful Beings -- you can well imagine! In this lore they are called the First Emanations, in other words the first formations. But each one became very much aware of its quality, its power, its capacity and its possibility, and at once forgot in its own way that it was only an emanation and an incarnation of the Supreme."

The joy of knowing himself...

We sat up straighter. Listening to Mother was always full of the pleasure of the unexpected.

"So, this is what happened.

"When Light or Consciousness separated itself from the Divine Consciousness -- that is, when it began to think itself as the divine consciousness and that there was nothing else than itself -- suddenly it became darkness and unconsciousness.

"And when Life thought that the whole life was in itself and that there was no other life than its own, and that it was not at all dependent on the Supreme, than Life became death.

"And when Truth thought it contained the whole truth and that there was no other truth than itself, this Truth became falsehood.

"And when Love or Ananda was convinced that it itself was the supreme Ananda and that there was nothing else than itself and its bliss, it became suffering.

"That is how the world that ought to have been so beautiful became so ugly."

Our eyes were riveted on Mother's face.

"Then, when the Supreme Consciousness -- you may call her the Divine Mother, if you like -- saw that, she was very much bothered, you see. She told herself, 'Really, it is not a success!' Then turning to the Divine, to God, the Supreme, she asked Him to come to her succour.

"She said, 'Look at what has happened. Now, what is to be done?'

"He said, 'Begin again. But contrive not to make such independent Beings! They must remain in contact with you, and, through you, with me.'"

Mother now replied to the youngster's question.

"Thus she created the gods who were quite docile, were not so conceited, and who began the creation of the world. But as the others had come before them, the gods encountered them at each step. Thus it is that the world changed into a ground of battle, of war, of strife, of suffering, of darkness and all the rest of the caboodle. And to make each new creation the gods had to fight with the others who had set out before them. The others had preceded them and had rushed into matter; *they* made all this disorder, and the gods had to repair all the disorder.

"There, that's where the gods came from. They are the Second Emanations."

Actually speaking, those original four rushing into matter had lost no time in peopling the world exponentially with their progenies. All of them thrive on conflict and have occupied every layer of the material consciousness. "Those four personalities," said Mother, "made innumerable emanations, they in turn made innumerable emanations, which made formations. Thus there are millions upon millions upon millions of them. And between them they got into a certain habit and have the logic of persevering in it; and they keep on not wanting any other rule than their own to govern. In India, they are called 'Asuras,' the beings of darkness. It is logic that makes them so. They began by going wrong, they continue."

However, she added happily, "Now, I must say that there are some that are changing their minds."

"Mother," another young fellow asked, "the first four who changed, was it by chance or wilfully?"

"No. What is chance?" Mother retorted.

"It is also narrated -- so the story goes on, or rather begins -- that the Divine wanted his creation to be a free creation. He wanted that whatever came out of him should be absolutely independent and free in order to be able to join him again in freedom and not under constraint. He didn't want them compelled to be faithful, compelled to be conscious, compelled to be obedient. It was imperative that they do it spontaneously, through knowledge and through conviction that it was much the better way. So, this world was created as a world of total freedom, of freedom of choice. Thus, at every moment, each one has the freedom of choice -- but along with all the consequences. If you choose well, good; but if you choose badly, well, what happens will happen -- that's what happened!"

We gulped.

"The Divine emanated himself, as though he were looking at himself -- instead of being in a static state of inward concentration where everything is unmanifest, he projected it out of himself 'to see,' as though he wanted to see everything that was in him -- in other words, infinite possibilities. So everything

was possible. It happened like this, it could have happened differently. Besides, there's nothing to show that alongside our universe as it is, there do not exist other universes so different that they bear no relation with one another." Isn't there a hint of science fiction there? "It can very well be that our universe is not the sole exteriorization of the Divine. Ours is as we know it; there may be others in a much less deplorable state than this one!"

In this way, through her simple stories. Mother tried to acquaint her youthful audience with profound philosophical theories.

The audience was youthful not particularly agewise -- some were fully grown men -- but rather childish in its comprehension. It was this precisely that differentiated Satprem from the rest of us. She could talk to him about any and every subject under the sun -- and even about unknown suns -- and always meet with a response of comprehension. "In order to speak, I must have a receptive atmosphere."

Let us then be in that congenial company. After telling Satprem substantially the same story with slight variations, into which we need not go. Mother specified about the first four, "Instead of receiving indications for action from Him, that is, doing things in proper order, each one took off independently to do as it pleased. They were conscious of their own power, they could act and they acted. They forgot their Origin." It is due to this initial oblivion that they changed. "And instantly they were thrown headlong into what became Matter. According to Theon, the world as we know it is the result of that. And that was the Supreme himself in his first manifestation."

Therein lies the power, the force of the first borns, the Asuras.

"And once the world has become like that, become the vital world in all its darkness, and they from this vital world have created Matter, the supreme Mother sees," sparks of merriment danced in those great eyes, "the result of her first four emanations and she turns to the Supreme in a great entreaty :

" 'Now that this world is in such a dreadful state, it has to be saved! We cannot just leave it, can we? It has to be saved, the divine consciousness must be given back to it. What to do?'

"And the Supreme says, 'Thrust yourself into a new emanation of the ESSENCE of Love, down into the most material Matter.'

"That meant plunging into the earth -- the earth had become a symbol and a representation of the whole drama. 'Plunge into Matter.' She plunged into Matter. And that became the primordial source of the Divine within material substance. And from there -- as is so well described in *Savtrt* -- *she* begins to act as a leaven in Matter, raising it up from within."

Sri Aurobindo and Mother termed this essence of Divine Presence in matter, the 'psychic flame.'

"And at the same time that she plunged into the earth, there was a second series of emanations, the gods, to inhabit the intermediary zones between Sachchidananda and the earth. But these gods," her suppressed merriment came rippling out, "well, great care was taken to make them perfect, so they wouldn't give any trouble! Only they are a little," she crinkled her nose, "a little too perfect, aren't they? Yes, a bit too perfect -- they never make mistakes, they always do exactly as they are told. In short, rather lacking in initiative." She half corrected herself, "They do have some, but... I don't know how to put it. These gods have always seemed to me -- not those described in the Puranas here, they are different... well, not so very different! But the way Theon presented them, they were much like a bunch of marshmallows! It's not that they had no power -- they had a lot of power -- but they lacked that psychic flame."

The Indian scriptures say that even the gods, if they want to progress, must take human birth. Otherwise they remain unchanged in their typical worlds.

Incidentally, the Puranic gods, though not as meek as a nun's hen, do tend to be ninnies. The slightest setback at the hands of the Asuras, and they run to Grandfather Brahma to be pulled out of their predicament.

Mother's reference to the Puranas may be puzzling to those unfamiliar with Indian mythology. There are eighteen major Puranas and as many minor ones. They were written at different epochs. The earliest one is attributed to Vyasa, the author of the epic *Mahabharata*, which would take us back several thousand years; a few were composed during the first millenium A.D. Etymologically, the word *purana*

means ancient or old. To the discerning mind a deal of lost' Indian history is woven into the fabric of these books that cover such a vast period of time.

The Puranas give mythical accounts of creation. They expound the theory of spiritual evolution. Stating that the material world is not an integral totality, but only a grade in a gradation, they describe through parables and fables how the powers belonging to the whole and involved within its matter, descend into it "from the higher gradations of the system to set free their kindred movements here from the strictness of material limitation," as Sri Aurobindo put it. And the higher powers -- the gods -- always fall foul of the Asuras.

As for the stories from the Tradition, "They are not to be taken as concrete truths, they are simply first-rate images," Mother told Satprem. "Through them I really got hold, very concretely, of the truth of what caused the world's distortion.... The essence isn't evil, but the functioning is faulty.

"The words are so childish that if you tell this story to intelligent people, they look pityingly at you; but it gives such a concrete grasp of the problem! It helped *me* a lot."

A slow smile spread across her face. "It was written in English and I am the one who translated it into French -- into horrid French, perfectly horrid, because I put in all the words Theon had dreamed up. Then again, what words! He made a detailed description of all the faculties latent in man, and it was remarkable -- but with such barbaric words! You can make up new words in English and get away with it, but in French it's utterly ridiculous. And there I was, very conscientiously putting them all in! Yet in terms of experience, it was splendid. It really was an experience -- it was the account of Madame Theon's experiences in exteriorization. She had learned to do what Theon' taught me also -- to speak while you are in the seventh heaven: the body goes on speaking, rather slowly, in a low voice, but it works quite well. She would speak and a friend of hers, another English woman who was their secretary -- I think she knew shorthand -- would note it all down as she went along. And afterwards it was made into stories, told as stories. It was all shown to Sri Aurobindo and it greatly interested him. He even adopted some of the words into his own terminology.

"The divisions and subdivisions of the being were described down to the minuets detail and with such perfect precision! I know, because I did the experience again, I did it on my own, without any preconceived ideas, the very same: going out of one body after the other, one' body after the other, and so on twelve times, and my experience -- apart from certain quite negligible differences, doubtless due to differences in the receiving brain -- was exactly the same."

3. Theon

They met.

It was in 1905. In autumn, it would seem, when the Theons were on a visit to France during October and November.

Surely Mirra waited that moment with an intense eagerness. She must have felt that she already knew him -- through hearsay of course, but mainly through what she had read of his writings. Was he not the one who opened wide to her the gates of knowledge? Would he be, by chance, the 'Krishna' she saw in her dream-visions about a year ago?

"When I met him," Mother said, "I saw that he was a being of great power. He bore a certain likeness to Sri Aurobindo. Theon was rather tall, about the same height as Sri Aurobindo -- not a tall man, of medium height -- and lean, slim, with quite a similar profile." Theon had a wide forehead, a moustache that mingled with his beard, and wavy, auburn hair that fell onto his shoulders; he had fine and sensitive hands.

However, Mirra, who had all the shades of vibrations at her fingertips, could not be taken in by Theon's great power. "But I saw, or rather I felt that Theon was not he whom I had seen in my vision, because when I met him he didn't have that vibration. Yet it was he who first taught me things, and I went and worked at Tiencen two years in a row."

After a slight pause, she added, "But this other thing was always in the background, in my consciousness."

Mother told Satprem, "He was handsome. Have you seen his photo?"

Satprem shook his head.

"No? Oh, I must show it to you." It was some ten years later, when an exhibition of Mother's paintings and drawings was held (in 1970, I think), that we finally saw the sketch she had done of him.

"He was handsome. A man around sixty -- between fifty and sixty."

He normally "wore a long purple robe that wasn't at all like the dress in my vision."

His background? "He was European. He was either a Pole or a Russian, I am not sure. But the impression I got is that he was more certainly a Russian, of Jewish descent, and that he was forced to flee his country. He never said anything about this to anyone, it's only an impression.... He never said who he really was, or where he was born, or his age. Nothing."

All about him was shrouded in mystery. Even his name. "He had two assumed names. He had adopted an Arab name when he took refuge in Algeria -- I don't know for what reason -- after having worked with Blavatsky and founded an occult society in Egypt. After that he came to Algeria; and there he was first called 'Aia Aziz' -- a word of Arabic root, meaning 'the beloved'; and then, when he began setting up his *Cosmic Review* and his 'Cosmic Group,' he called himself Max Theon, in other words, the Supreme God (!), the greatest God! And nobody knew him by any other names than these two: Aia Aziz or Max Theon."

But Mirra had picked up one reliable piece of information. "Theon was a Jew, although he never mentioned the fact. It was made known by the Tiencen officials; when he arrived he had to tell them who he was. He never talked about it and had changed his name. They said he was of Jewish origin, but they never could say whether he was a Pole or a Russian. Or else, the person who told me never knew."

Understandably Mirra was more interested in Theon's teaching than in his antecedents. It was the Knowledge that he could give which mattered to her. And he gave. And she soaked it all up.

However, Matteo's collegemate, Louis Themanlys, along with his wife Claire and son Pascal were able to dig up other stray bits of information on Theon's life before he became known in France. Thus a few gaps can be filled up. But it is the sleuthing of our friend Patrice Marot that unshrouded much of the mystery that surrounded Theon. Patrice's notes of his quest, which took him to two continents, make absorbing reading; for he had to find his way through the decades of dust that had settled on the trail of Theon.¹ We, of course, need not go into all that, but will limit ourselves to what concerns Theon directly.

Theon was born on 5 August 1847, exactly one century before India's independence from the British rule.

Of his parentage we know practically nothing. But it appears that he frequently mentioned his mother to the exclusion of any other member of his family, including his father. This may well be due to the profound admiration he felt for her because she had chosen for him a life of consecration. This was symbolized by Theon's long hair, never once touched by any pair of scissors.

It is also on record that before he founded the Cosmic Movement, Max Theon was associated with the mysterious H.B. of L. (Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor or Light). In 1873, Theon, then just twenty-six, was made its Grand Master; the Scottish philosopher Peter Davidson was the Order's frontal Chief. Blavat-sky, Olcott, Barlet and many others were its members. But in 1877 Blavatsky and Olcott severed their relation with the H.B. of L. It is known that Blavatsky's first Master was the magus Paulos

¹1. Jackie Semenoff, a relation of Claire's, deserves a big thank you for supplying us with some precise information.

Metamon, whom she had met in Asia Minor in 1848 and again in Cairo in 1870. Metamon was either a Copt or a Chaldean. Many people, including Barlet, believed that "Dr. Max Theon was the son of 'the old Copt.'"

Much of the above is speculation, most of which can now be set at rest once for all. Our Patrice dug up Tierncen's census of 1911, found in a register kept in the National Archives at Aix-en-Provence, France, Overseas section. This is how it is inscribed:

Saf-Saf road, Suburb of Tierncen

Theon, Louis-Maximilien, born on: 5-th August 1847; at

Warsaw

Nationality: Austrian²

Family Status: Head of the household. Widower

Profession: None

Max was exceptionally young when he mastered different occult lores and became proficient in occultism. He spoke several languages with ease, and was adept at many crafts. A diversity of subjects interested him -- scientific or artistic or sociological. He could always hold his own against the experts in any line.

A rebel at heart he, like Mira Ismalun, abhorred limitation. Any limitation. With the vast knowledge at his command, he soon found out the limitations of the H.B. of L. At the time of Blavatsky's and Olcott's dissension, he too became a dissenter, resigned from his post of Grand Master and broke completely with the H.B. of L. in Egypt.

He left Egypt and went to England.

With his refinement, his aristocratic bearing, he became a much sought-after guest in London's high society. Very quickly he gained a reputation almost matching that of the Count of Saint-Germain -- in the Court of Louis XV -- who claimed to be several centuries old. Theon never made any such claims. But rumours about him flew around at a great pace. Some spoke of his earthly immortality, others said he was the son of a Russian Prince, and so on and so forth. Dr. Theon's enigmatic personality aroused everybody's curiosity, but he took good care never to satisfy it.

From one person's gaze, however, he could not hide his real identity. She was an young English poetess. It was in one of the parties that he met her. His keen eyes noted her calm and luminous face. Their first handclasp was like thunder and lightning, revealing to them in a flash their deep-seated harmony of being.

We do not know when exactly Theon landed in England after leaving Egypt, but by May 1884 Max and Alma knew each other well enough to go to theatre together. Not in a twosome, though -- the strict Victorian code of morals forbade it -- they were chaperoned by Teresa.

Then, on 21 March 1885, Max and Alma were married.³

²1. It may seem strange to the modern reader to see Theon, born in Warsaw, giving his nationality as Austrian. History books say that Poland has a chequered political history. In the last couple of centuries it was parcelled up by its three greedy and powerful neighbours, Austria, Russia and Prussia, each grabbing in turn what it could and when it could. The many Polish attempts at independence proved abortive. The uprisings were heavily repressed, which caused large-scale emigration to other Western countries.

³1. The certificate of their marriage, as well as other documentary-evidence, in particular that of Madame Th[^]on's death, was very kindly provided to us by Mr Christian Chanel, magistrate in Lyons, France, who is preparing a doctoral thesis on Max Theon and the Cosmic Philosophy.

The marriage between Louis Maximillian Bimstein, Doctor of Medicine,⁴ and Mary Chrystine Woodroffe Ware, was solemnized at the Register Office, in the District of Westminster, County of Middlesex. One of the two witnesses was Augusta Roife, who is none other than the devoted Teresa.

Theon's father is listed as: Judes L. Bimstein, Rabbi.

Alma's father as: William J. Ware (deceased), Gentleman.

The three of them went to live in N^o11 Belgrave Road, St. John's Wood, Marylebone, which was Alma's residence.

⁴2. A few particulars given in the certificate, such as Theon's and Alma's ages, possibly too Theon's stated profession of 'Doctor of Medicine,' appear rather doubtful. In all likelihood, Theon disliked any inroads into his privacy and said whatever his fancy dictated on the spur of the moment.

It would seem that Alma and Teresa were friends from their convent days at Claydon, Suffolk. The latter remained a lifelong companion of the former.

Teresa, when she turned forty, in July 1885, was allowed a year's trial under Theon.

By and by, Theon began holding seances. Soon, however, the couple realized that England was not a place where they could pursue unhindered their exploration of the lost knowledge. So the next year they went to the Continent. It was on March 9, 1886, that the three crossed over to France and reached Paris. They spent a few days there sightseeing, before embarking on a tour of exploration. They soon found a house to live in. And in November -- 14-th to be exact -- Theon began his seances in France. But after several trials of living in one part of France or another, they realized their error: what they really needed was a change of continent. Therefore in December 1887, the Theons left France for Algiers. Three weeks later Teresa -- to say nothing of the three dogs! -- joined them in Oran. After several months' search they finally found a place in the suburbs of Tlerncen. They acquired, in Madame Theon's name, naturally, a large villa on a hillside with extensive grounds. It took them about one year to make the place livable. Thus it was that on May 1, 1889, they came to live in Zarif. It was to become their base. They lived there many years with their devoted English secretary, Miss Teresa.

"According to a legend, Tlerncen's origin goes back to a remote past. Moses visited it. Solomon stayed in it. Egyptian sorcerers, skilled in witchcraft, made it their chosen town. "⁵

The greatest spiritual sages in India have always been careful in selecting the site which was to become the SEAT of their attainment. Pavitra told me that the renowned French archeologist Jouveau-Dubreuil found evidence that it was on the exact spot where the great Rishi Agastya and his spouse Lopamudra had made their arduous endeavour of digging through to the "Sun dwelling in the darkness" that Sri Aurobindo and Mother established THEIR seat. Thus the work begun in the Vedic times saw its completion -- and more -- in this twentieth century.

⁵1. *Oran-Tlerncen, Sud-Oranais* (1902), by Commandant de Pimodan.

4. The Human Fathers

It was around the turn of the century that the Theons decided to found the Cosmic Movement.

The Cosmic Review -- intended for the "study and re-establishment of the original Tradition" -- was to become the Movement's mouthpiece. Its first editor was Charles Barlet⁶; and Theon, under the name of Aia Aziz, was its Director.

Theon declared that his wife was the moving spirit behind this idea. Thus, it was thanks to Madame Theon that all the science of the occult that Theon had accumulated could be put into practice.

"He said he had received initiation in India," Mother disclosed to Satprem. "He knew a little Sanskrit, and was thoroughly versed in the Rig-Veda. Well then, in some way, he developed a tradition which he called the 'Cosmic Tradition.' He claimed to have received it -- I don't know how -- from a tradition anterior to that of the Cabala and the Vedas."

Mother herself was deeply interested in the Vedas and made a thorough study of Sri Aurobindo's *The Secret of the Veda* and the many Vedic hymns he had translated.

One day, from my laboratory, I saw Mother going towards Pavitra's office to give Satprem one of the regular interviews. Often, on her way to him, she would stop to give me a smile or a pat. Not that day. She seemed intent on some thought, her eyes fixed on the flowers she held in her hand. Satprem had barely closed the passage door behind her when she began, "I have brought you a whole discourse!"

Handing him a flower, she said: "First, the goal of the Vedas -- Immortality. That was their goal -- the Truth that led to Immortality. Immortality was their ambition. Only I don't think it was physical immortality. But that's not certain/because they do speak of the 'forefathers' and this refers to the initiatory tradition preceding the Vedas and preceding the Cabala; and there they speak of immortality on earth, the earth transformed -- Sri Aurobindo's idea."

This is what Sri Aurobindo wrote: "I had already seen that the central idea of the Vedic Rishis was the transition of the human soul from a state of death to a state of immortality by the exchange of the Falsehood for the Truth, of divided and limited being for integrality and infinity. . . . Man rises beyond the two firmaments, *rodasi*. Heaven and Earth, mind and body, to the infinity of the Truth, and so to the divine Bliss. This is the 'great passage' discovered by the Ancestors, the ancient Rishis."

Mother mulled over this question. "The text of the Vedas makes it plain, for example, that the 'forefathers' they remembered were men who had realized immortality upon earth." She added in an aside, "Who knows, they may still be alive! They had the same concept of things as Sri Aurobindo."

When Sri Aurobindo studied the Vedas in the original Sanskrit, he found that many of his own experiences tallied with those described in them. "My first contact with Vedic thought," he wrote in the *Arya*, "came indirectly while pursuing certain lines of self-development in the way of Indian Yoga, which, without my knowing it, were spontaneously converging towards the ancient and now unfrequented paths followed by our forefathers." As he began to unravel the knot of the Vedic imagery, he found "positive references to the human Fathers who first discovered the Light and possessed the Thought and the Word and travelled to the secret worlds of the luminous Bliss." Further studies of the more important passages, in which this great discovery of the human forefathers is hymned, made him find there "the summary of that great hope which the Vedic mystics held ever before their eyes; that journey, that victory

⁶1. F. Charles Barlet was the nom de plume of Albert Fauchoux (1838-1921). Among many of his activities, Barlet was also the Director of the magazine *L'Etoile d'Orient* ("The Eastern Star"). Prof. Charles Barlet, Bachelor of Law, was President of the Eastern Esoteric Centre of France, member of several scientific societies and the author of a number of books on astrology, occultism, etc. He was a member, often a founding one, of numerous occult or esoteric groups and societies, both French and international.

is the ancient, primal achievement set as a type of the luminous Ancestors for the mortality that was to come after them. It was the conquest of the powers of the circumscribing Night, Vritras, Sambaras and Valas, the Titans, Giants, Pythons, subconscious Powers who hold the light and the force in themselves, in their cities of darkness and illusion, but can neither use it aright nor will give it up to man, the mental being. Their ignorance, evil and limitation have not merely to be cut away from us, but broken up and into and made to yield up the secret of light and good and infinity. Out of this death that immortality has to be conquered. Pent up behind this ignorance is a secret knowledge and a great light of truth; prisoned by this evil is an infinite content of good; in this limiting death is the seed of a boundless immortality. Vala, for example, is Vala of the radiances, his body is made of the light, his hole or cave is a city full of treasures; that body has to be broken up, that city rent open, those treasures seized. This is the work set for humanity and the Ancestors have done it for the race that the way may be known and the goal reached by the same means and through the same companionship with the gods of Light. At the beginning of all human traditions there is this ancient memory. It is Indra and the serpent Vritra, it is Apollo and the Python, it is Thor and the Giants, Sigurd and Fafner, it is the mutually opposing gods of the Celtic mythology; but only in the Veda do we find the key to this imagery which conceals the hope or the wisdom of a prehistoric humanity."⁷

⁷I. *The Secret of the Veda.*

Mother continued. "The other tradition, which Theon said was the origin of Cabala -- he said both the Cabala and the Vedas originated from it -- also held the same concept of divine life and a divine world as Sri Aurobindo: that the summit of evolution would be the divinization of everything objectified, along with an unbroken progression from that moment on. As things are now, we go forward and backward, again forward and backward. But then the backward movement won't be necessary -- there will be a continuous ascent. This conception was held in that ancient tradition." She added as an afterthought, "Sri Aurobindo hadn't yet written anything when I met. Theon, who told me very clearly about it. Theon had written all kinds of things -- not philosophy, it was all stories, fantastic stories! Yet this same knowledge was behind them. And when asked about the source of this knowledge, he would say that it antedated both the Cabala and the Vedas -- he was well-versed in the Rig-Veda."

5. Pralaya

"I was taught the history of occult traditions by Theon," said Mother.

In the Cosmic Tradition, as developed by him, "there were many things -- Madame Theon was the clairvoyant and it was she who got the visions, she was excellent -- but many things, which I myself had seen and known before meeting them, were then corroborated."

One such confirmation pertained to the original Tradition which had separated into two branches, the Vedic and the Cabalistic. "I have memories -- these are always *lived* things for me -- very clear memories, very precise, of a time which was assuredly MUCH prior to the Vedic times and to the Cabalistic or the Chaldean traditions."

Mother's eyes seemed to be turning inwards seeing those antediluvian days.

"So personally, I am convinced that there was, in fact, a Tradition prior to these two traditions, and which contained a knowledge very close to an integral knowledge. For a fact, there is a similitude in the experiences. When I came here and expressed to Sri Aurobindo certain things I knew from an occult standpoint, he always told me that they were in conformity with the Vedic tradition. As for certain occult practices, he told me that they were fully Tantric. At that time I knew nothing, absolutely nothing of the Veda or the Tantra."⁸

All the different traditions treat the common theme of the creation and its destruction. "The traditions tell you that a universe is created, then it is withdrawn into *pralaya*, then a new one comes."

'Pralaya' is an Indian term meaning universal dissolution -- the apocalypse. The Indian Scriptures say that the universe is an unfoldment (Creation) from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous (Distortion) and back to the homogeneous again (Pralaya or Dissolution).

Interestingly, ages ago, there in Central America, the Mayan civilization had arrived at a similar idea. Like the Indians the Mayans too believed in the cycles of creation and destruction; according to them four earths have already been destroyed and the present one will suffer the same fate one day. Another conception they had was that there are nine layers below the earth and thirteen above it. I take it to mean that 'man' has emerged but recently upon earth -- an idea which rejoins Theon's, "Man has just begun to get out of its swaddling-clothes and away from the society of the bullock and the ass."

Traditionally, however, a Creation consists of four cycles, each again comprising four 'yugas' or ages. Between two yugas there is a twilight period. A cycle starts with Truth in its fullness, the *Satya Yuga* or the Age of Gold. The *Treta* comes next, when the degradation has begun and the age has lost one third of the Truth. It is followed by *Dwapara*, when Truth and Falsehood hold equal sway to begin with, but Truth continues to lose ground. The *Kali*, the Iron Age, throttles the remaining Truth, and the cycle is closed. The increasing twilight is finally a total darkness. Darkness strangles earth's breast. It is stark night. Man's mind has become the handmaiden of his lowest instincts. Man is de-mented. It is the time of little bodies unclean,' as says the *Vishnu Parana*⁹. The creation is rotted to its core. Time for the deliverance. Time for pralaya. Out of the apocalypse, phoenix-like, a new creation emerges.

⁸I. The Tantras are the manuals not only of Hindu worship and rituals, but of its occultism.

⁹1. The *Vishnu Parana*, which was recorded in about the third century A.D., says many other interesting things about the Kali Yuga: "In the Kali Yuga, the kings will not take care of their subjects, and yet they will steal riches from their, subjects on the pretext of collecting taxes. People will be haunted by famine, taxes and sickness. . . . The clouds will bring forth very little water and seeds will grow poorly . . . and every caste will become almost like the Shudra [labourers]. . . . But notwithstanding all these defects, the great virtue of the Kali Yuga is that the spiritual progress man accomplishes with great, ascetic efforts in the Satya Yuga he can accomplish" with very little effort in the Kali Yuga."

The Puranas state that the duration of each yuga is indirect proportion to the diminishing Truth¹⁰. As a result, man's life-span diminishes also. In addition, they say that with the declining Truth man's stature too declines. Man's height, which is fourteen cubits in Treta, is reduced to seven cubits in Dwapara, and goes down to four and a half cubits in Kali. Sri Aurobindo portrays this beautifully and the narrative sparkles with his underlying humour.

"There is a story about Revati," Sri Aurobindo said one evening to his disciples. "Her father, King Revat, wanted to get her married and wished to consult Brahma, the Creator, about it." King Revat was the king of Kushasthali on the Arabian Sea; it is over its ruins that in another age Krishna built his Dwaraka. Revat lived in Treta Yuga when men mingled freely with gods. Princess Revati accompanied her father. "So he went to the Brahmaloaka and he was entertained with a song by an Apsara. After the song was over Brahma asked about the object of his visit. Revat asked about his daughter's marriage and suggested certain names. Brahma said all those people had already died! While he was listening to the song some ten thousand human years had passed and all was changed! The father asked Brahma what was to be done. He said, 'Well, Krishna and Balaram and others have gone down to humanity, you may go and give your daughter to Balaram.'

"So, Revati was married to Balaram. When she came to Balaram after marriage, he looked up to her as she was very much taller than himself. He said to himself, 'How am I to manage this?'

"He then did one thing; he took his plough and applied it to her shoulder and then pressed down with great force till she was brought down to his size." Sri Aurobindo concluded his story, "And then they lived happily ever after!"

The Indian lore gives a detailed description of the universal dissolution. Briefly, the signs announcing a pralaya are as follows. At first, a prolonged period of acute drought sets in; all the trees and shrubs, all vegetation is destroyed. The Sun becomes sevenfold and rides seven chariots. The seven suns spread out in their rays drinking up the waters of the oceans, burning away the entire earth, together with its mountains and seas and continents. The separately burning fires come closer and closer until they become one single fire. Its flames consume the universe, consume the four worlds,¹¹ consume all creation. The earth looks like an iron fireball. That is when, issuing from the solar ring, nets of clouds cover the skies. Awesome are these varicoloured clouds. At each instant their breasts are torn asunder by blinding flashes of lightning and split by deafening crashes of thunder. But there are no ears to hear, no eyes to see. The old creation is dissolved. To begin anew? Under new skies? Under what stars? Then like elephant trunks, the clouds spout torrents of water for ages of ages. The apocalyptic fire is finally extinguished. The earth looks like 'the world of waters wild.'

"You see," Mother explained to Satprem, "according to Theon, the world was created and destroyed -- creation and pralaya -- six times. And each time a particular attribute was manifested. But as this attribute could not fulfil itself, the world was 'swallowed up' again. Well then, we are the seventh time, and the attribute is Equilibrium."

Actually speaking, "he had enumerated all the successively manifested aspects. And what a logical sequence it was!" Mother said with unstinted appreciation. "Extraordinary. I have kept it somewhere, don't remember where."

¹⁰1. The *Vishnu Parana*, which was recorded in about the third century A.D., says many other interesting things about the Kali Yuga: "In the Kali Yuga, the kings will not take care of their subjects, and yet they will steal riches from their, subjects on the pretext of collecting taxes. People will be haunted by famine, taxes and sickness. . . . The clouds will bring forth very little water and seeds will grow poorly . . . and every caste will become almost like the Shudra [labourers]. . . . But notwithstanding all these defects, the great virtue of the Kali Yuga is that the spiritual progress man accomplishes with great, ascetic efforts in the Satya Yuga he can accomplish" with very little effort in the Kali Yuga."

¹¹1. Earth, heaven, nether and mid-air.

Theon had gone on to develop the idea after naming them. "Turn by turn, the seven attributes of the manifestation organized the world. The organization of this seventh period is noted down in the first chapter of the Genesis, whose masterly succinctness contains an ocean of knowledge. The seven days of the so-called creation stretch over immense epochs," he said. "Creation is meaningless, and the word 'created' -- brought out of nothing -- was never written in these monuments of thought. It is a matter of forming, of bringing order out of the primeval chaos, and this work belongs to Elohim, the divine Formator, a work man must help, pursue, accomplish."

A am Destruction

Theon seems to be echoing an ancient Indian idea. For, "The Indian Scripture affirms in its doctrine that there is no such thing as an absolutely first creation, the present universe being but one of a series of worlds which are past and are yet to be."¹²

However, an interesting point emerges which is perhaps applicable to all early Scriptures. To our modern way of thinking, they appear obscure and unintelligible. But, "The incoherencies of the Vedic texts," wrote Sri Aurobindo, "exist in appearance only, because the real thread of the sense is to be found in an inner meaning." That thread found, "the expression of the hymns becomes just and precise and sins rather by economy of phrase than by excess, by overpregnancy rather than by poverty of sense"¹³. The Mystics shrouded their thought in the veil of concrete myth and poetic figures, because they knew that the True Knowledge was unfit, perhaps even dangerous to the ordinary human mind, or in any case liable to perversion and misuse, if revealed to the vulgar and unpurified spirit.

At all events, we have six creations and six pralayas behind us. "We are in the seventh, the last," said Mother. "The world will find a new equilibrium -- a superior equilibrium -- not static, but progressive. In other words, there will be an unlimited progress in equilibrium and harmony."

It was several years later, when describing to Satprem an experience she had just had, that Mother remarked, "And I have understood why Theon said that we are in the days of 'Equilibrium.' It means that when there is equilibrium between all these innumerable points of consciousness and their opposites, the central Consciousness is found."

Mother, whose consciousness was one with the central Consciousness, and indwelled equally the innumerable points of consciousness and their opposites -- "My centre is everywhere. Be very careful," she once cautioned Satprem -- could easily recall the memories of previous pralayas. "In the subconscious, there is the memory of previous pralayas. Well, it's this memory that always gives you the impression that everything is going to be dissolved, everything is going to crumble." She considered the problem, "But looking at it in the true light, it can only be a lovelier manifestation! Theon told me this was the seventh and the last. I told Sri Aurobindo what Theon said. Sri Aurobindo concurred, for he said, "This one will see the transformation towards the Supermind."

Sri Aurobindo always gives us hope. "The Iron Age prepares the Age of Gold," he said. His portrayal of the present and the future is both luminous and crystalline.

"It comes at last, the day foreseen of old,
What John in Patmos saw, what Shelley dreamed,
Vision and vain imagination deemed,
The City of delight, the Age of Gold.
The Iron Age is ended. Only now
The last fierce spasm of the dying past
Shall shake the nations, and when that has passed
Earth washed of ills shall raise a fairer brow."¹⁴

¹²1. *The Serpent Power*, by Arthur Avalon (Sir John Woodroffe).

¹³1. *The Secret of the Veda*.

¹⁴1. *In the Moonlight*.

6 The Earthly Paradise

While 'the last fierce spasm of the dying past' is shaking the nations, let us take a glance backward at Earth's maidenhood. And for that our best recourse is Mother.

Mother, who had lived everywhere and in all times, had an assortment of inscribed tablets in her Memory's halls. Everything there was well documented and docketed. No cobwebs hung in any corner or recess where the tablets were neatly stacked. And there we find one tablet, untouched by time, which pertains to the earthly Paradise.

One morning in 1961, Satprem asked, "Is it true, Mother, that an earthly Paradise existed?"

"From a historical viewpoint," she replied, "not psychological but historical, if I take stand on the grounds of my memory... Only, I can't prove it -- nothing can be proved, and I don't think any truly historical proof has come down to us, or, at any rate, it hasn't been found yet. But going by my memories..." Mother folded her hands on her lap, shut her eyes and went in search of her memories. "Certainly, at one period of the earth's history, there was a kind of 'earthly Paradise,' in the sense that life then was perfectly harmonious and perfectly natural. I mean, the manifestation of Mind was in accord -- was still in complete accord -- and in total harmony with the ascending march of Nature, without any perversion or deformation. That was the first stage of Mind's manifestation in material forms."

She unlocked the doors of the Halls and began reading aloud from the inscriptions.

"Because this much I know," Mother was now sure of her ground, "I know for having lived it, that when the passage from animal to man -- a very obscure passage, but of which more or less convincing traces have been found -- was adequate, when the result was plastic enough, there was a Descent, there was a mental descent of human creation. They were beings. . . it was a double descent, that was precisely its peculiarity, double -- male and female -- it wasn't one single being, it was two who descended. Those beings lived an animal life in Nature, but with a mental consciousness, without, however, any disaccord with the general harmony. All the memories are perfectly clear about a spontaneous animal life, absolutely natural, lived in Nature. A marvellously beautiful Nature, strangely similar to the nature in Ceylon and in tropical countries -- water, trees, fruits, flowers. . .

She seemed to be listening to the music of a great orchestra.

"That spontaneous, natural and harmonious life -- very harmonious -- was extremely beautiful, luminous and easy! A harmonious rhythm in Nature. In short, a luminous animality."

Mother's relationship with Nature is of old standing, it seems!

"That's how we began."

How well she remembered that beginning!

"I still see it, the image is still fixed in the memory. It had nothing to do with mental civilization and development. It was a blossoming of force, of beauty in a spontaneous and natural life, like animal life, but with a perfection of consciousness and power greatly exceeding what we now have. In point of fact, with a power over all surrounding Nature, over animal and vegetal and mineral nature, a direct handling of Matter which men don't have -- they need intermediaries, material instruments, while that was direct. And it was not thought, not reasoning, but spontaneous." Mother made a gesture to indicate the will's direct radiation over Matter.

"That life was, yes, a truly superior life in a natural setting, and of such an extraordinary beauty and harmony! But I don't have the feeling that it was -- how to express it? -- something known. And no idea at all that there were other beings upon earth and you had to mind them, or 'demonstrate' to them; nothing of the sort, absolutely nothing of mental life, nothing. A life like... like a pretty plant or a fine animal, but with an inherent knowledge of things, fully spontaneous and effortless -- an effortless life, purely spontaneous. I don't even have the impression that there was any question about eating. I don't remember it. But the point was the joy of Life, the joy of Beauty -- there were flowers, water, there were

trees, animals, and everything was friendly, spontaneously so. And no problems! There were no problems to be solved, nothing at all -- one lived!"

She who carried an incredible burden of problems, sighed.

"Certainly an uncomplicated life."

She sat deep in thought for several minutes. Then she said, "But it's far, far away in other times. For there wasn't the least bit of sensation that one had sprouted from below. One had as though fallen there, simply, to amuse oneself."

The faraway look in her eyes faded slowly. "It must have been before the first man produced by Nature. Not after. Before."

Traditions say that the first human pair materialized through an occult process. "That is to say, beings belonging to higher worlds built or formed a body of physical matter by a process of concentration and materialization; it wasn't that the lower species progressively brought forth a body which was the first human body."

Mother with her spiritual and occult knowledge was in a good position to discount, or rather rectify one current theory that the form precedes the consciousness and permits it to manifest. "It is absolutely certain that the conception precedes the manifestation and expression. And all those who have had a direct contact with the past, had the memory of a kind of human prototype -- far superior to the present humanity -- who came on earth as an example and a promise of what humanity will be like when it reaches its acme."

Mother switched the focus to another point on the canvas. "How long did it last? It's hard to say. My memory is of a life where the body was perfectly adapted to its natural surroundings, the climate to the needs of the body, the body to the demands of climate."

Mother wondered again, "How long did that period last? I am unable to say. Because I recollect also an almost immortal life. It seems that it was through some sort of evolutionary accident that the disintegration of forms became necessary for progress."

Are we then doomed for ever and a day to this rotten system formed by that 'accident'? Perhaps not. Sri Aurobindo and Mother say different. "Basically," she said, "when a body will be formed as the result of an ideal and an increasing development, a body with enough stuff and possibilities, enough potentialities, there is a good chance that an abrupt Descent by a supramental form will take place, just as happened with the human form."

In a very short time Mirra was to see this future form. But that will come in its own place.

Her eyes fell on a brilliant crimson canna in a vase. I often arranged a vase of flowers on Mother's interview days with Satprem. "Ah, there were many flowers just like this one in the landscape of that earthly Paradise -- red, and so beautiful!"

She leaned back in her chair, placed her fingertips together and closed her eyes. "I have a recollection of that life, for I relived it when I first became conscious of the life of the entire earth. But I can't say how long it lasted or what area it covered -- I don't know. I only remember the condition at the time, the state of being, how the material Nature was, and how the human form and human consciousness were; and also this type of harmony with all the other elements of the earth. There was a kind of spontaneous knowledge of how to use Nature's things, the qualities of plants, fruits, and all that vegetal nature could offer. And no aggressiveness, no fear, no contrariety or friction, and NO perversion. The mind was pure, simple, luminous, uncomplicated.

"It was certainly with the progress of evolution, the march of evolution, when the mind began to develop FOR and in itself, that all complications, all deformations began. So much so that this story of Genesis that seems so childish does contain a truth. The old traditions like Genesis were similar to the Vedas in that each letter was the symbol of a knowledge ; it was a pictorial resume of a traditional knowledge, just as the Veda contains a pictorial resume of the knowledge of its time. But additionally, even the symbol had a reality in the sense that there was truly a period when life upon earth -- the first manifestation of mentalized Matter in human form -- was still in complete harmony with all that preceded it. It was only later that..."

She left her sentence in mid-air to again scrutinize the landscape. "And where did it take place? . . . From certain impressions, but these are only impressions, it would seem that it was in the vicinity of either this side of Ceylon and India or the other side, I don't exactly know." Mother waved her arm towards the Indian Ocean, to indicate either west of Sri Lanka and India or to the east between Sri Lanka and Java. "Although certainly the place no longer exists; it must have been engulfed by the sea. I have a very clear vision of the place and a consciousness of that life and its forms, but I can't give precise, purely material details. Did it last for centuries, did it. . . ? I don't know. To tell the truth, when I was reliving those moments I wasn't curious to look at the details -- one is in another frame of mind where there is no curiosity about material details; all things turn into psychological facts. The forms were human. But I can't say I remember... for instance, if I were asked whether or not there were nails at their fingertips, I wouldn't know! It was very supple and very luminous. At any rate, the forms were humanlike. But it was... it was something so simple, luminous, harmonious, far removed from all our usual preoccupations with time and place."

She mused for a while. "Repeatedly, under different circumstances, and no few times, a similar memory came back to me -- not exactly the same scene and the same images, no. Because it wasn't something I was viewing but a life I was living. During a certain period, by day or by night, in a particular state of trance, I was rediscovering a life I had lived. And I was fully aware that that life was the flowering of the human form on earth -- the first human forms able to incarnate the divine Being from above. This was the first time I could manifest in a particular terrestrial form, an individual form -- not a general life but an individual form -- that is to say, the junction between the higher Being and the lower being was made for the first time, through the mentalization of this material substance. I have lived that several times, and always in a similar setting and with quite a similar feeling of SUCH joyous simplicity, without complexity, without problems, without all these questions. There was nothing of all that, absolutely nothing! It was the blossoming of a joy of life -- nothing but that -- in a universal love and harmony; flowers, minerals, animals, all got along together perfectly."

Verily, as Sri Aurobindo addressed her, the young maiden was the

"Mystic Miracle, daughter of Delight,
Life, thou ecstasy..."

"It's only a LONG time afterwards that things began to go wrong," stated Mother, "long after -- but this is a personal impression -- probably because certain mental crystallizations were necessary, inevitable for the general evolution, so that the mind might prepare itself to move on to something else. That was when... ugh, it seems like a fall into a pit -- into ugliness, darkness! Everything became so dark, so ugly, so difficult, so painful. Really... really the sense of a fall, a brutal fall, oh!" Mother swiftly brought down her arm to show a rapid fall.

"For the earth it probably happened like that, all at once; a sort of ascent, then the fall. But the earth is a tiny concentration. Universally, it's something else."

She lapsed into silence, then broke it to disclose : "The recollection of those times is preserved somewhere in the terrestrial memory, in the region where all the memories of the earth are inscribed." She also indicated that there are people who can make contact with this region.

After pondering some more, she said: "Theon also used to say that man was born perfect, but had taken a tumble. Evidently, these things can always be explained symbolically. Take the explanation of man's 'exile' from Paradise, Theon explained it like this: When the Being, the hostile Being, assumed the status of the Supreme Lord vis-a-vis the terrestrial realization, it wasn't to his liking that humanity should progress mentally, thus gaining a knowledge which would enable it to stop obeying him! That is Theon's occult explanation."

"And what does the serpent represent physically?" Satprem asked, thinking no doubt of the original sin!

"Why," exclaimed Mother, "it is the vibration of evolution!"

"I don't mean symbolically," he explained, "but physically, materially -- the animal."

"It's a tremendous concentration of vitality," she replied. "Energy -- a progressive energy, an energy of motion."

"But why does the animal always give us this evil feeling?" he asked.

"Christians say it is the spirit of evil," she answered. "But all this is mere incomprehension.

"Theon always told me that the true interpretation of the biblical story -- about Paradise and the serpent -- 'was that man wanted to pass from the state of animal divinity, like the animals, to the state of conscious divinity, through a mental development. And this is what is meant symbolically when one says that they ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge."

Does anybody know whether the apple from the Tree of Knowledge the serpent gave to Eve and the apple Newton saw fall, were not one and the same?

"The Tree of Knowledge," Mother said to Satprem, "symbolizes this kind of knowledge -- no longer divine, you follow; the material knowledge that resulted from the sense of division is what began to spoil everything. And Sri Aurobindo fully agreed with this. He used to tell me the same thing: that the mental evolutionary power is what led man to knowledge, a knowledge of division. Besides, it's a fact that with the sense of Good and Evil, man became conscious of himself. Naturally this spoiled everything and he couldn't stay; it was his own consciousness that exiled him from Paradise. He could no longer stay."

As Satprem sat listening to her, spellbound, Mother went on. "As for the serpent -- Theon always said that it was irised, meaning that it had all the colours of the prism -- it was not at all the spirit of evil; it was the power of evolution, evolution's force and power. And naturally enough, it's this evolutionary power that made them taste the fruit of knowledge." Which infuriated Jehovah. "Because it enabled man to become godlike by the power of an evolution of consciousness. That's why he drove them away from Paradise."

"Was man then banished by Jehovah or by his own consciousness?" asked a perplexed Satprem.

"Beg pardon! Theon always maintained that the 'Serpent' wasn't at all Satan, but the symbol of evolution -- Theon was wholly pro-evolution -- evolution in a spiral; and the earthly Paradise, on the contrary, was under the domination of Jehovah, the great Asura who claimed to be unique -- who wanted to be the only God. For Theon, there is no one and only God, there is the Unthinkable. It's not a 'God'."

Then Mother said in a slow thoughtful voice, "But this stems from his Jewish background, it seems to me.

"And for the Jews, it's the Unthinkable, whose name must not be uttered. It is uttered only once a year, on the Day of Atonement -- I think that's what it's called. The word is *Yahveh*, and should not be uttered. The prayers speak of 'Elohim,' and the Hebrew word Elohim is plural, meaning 'the invisible lords.' So, for Theon, there was no one and only God, but solely the Unthinkable Formless; and all the invisible beings who claimed to be one and only gods were Asuras."

7. Judaism

What exactly did Mother mean by Theon's Jewish background'? To understand it in some measure let us refresh our memory about Judaism.

Judaism is one of the oldest extant religions of mankind. The history of the Jews is one of strife and persecution. Judaism's main persecutors have been its two daughters: Christianity and Mohammedanism. These quarrelsome sisters do not forget to equally quarrel among themselves.

Concerning the persecution of the Jews, Sri Aurobindo spoke of a "Cabalistic prophecy," according to which "when the Jews will be persecuted and driven to Jerusalem, then the Golden Age shall come."

He also pointed out that "the contribution of the Jews towards the world's progress in every branch is remarkable." Indeed the Jewish race has produced not only prophets like Elijah or philosophers like Spinoza (1632-77), but also the greatest of our modern scientists, Albert Einstein (1879-1955), born one year after Mirra. Besides, my acquaintances of that race are all people of refinement.

Like the Hindu Puranas, the old Hebrew books such as the Talmud are full of parables and allegories. Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, similarly gives the account of the Creation, of the Deluge; and it has familiarized us with the story of Adam and Eve, and the cause of their fall from Paradise.

Noah was the tenth male descendant from Adam and the grandson of Methuselah -- the grand old man who is said to have lived 969 years! The Great Flood, that historical cataclysm, occurred during Noah's time. He had received the divine command to build an Ark, in which he and his family and all animals in pairs escaped the Deluge -- a striking similarity with the Indian Manu. Historians set the date somewhere around 3000 B.C. for this Deluge, which washed away the Indus Valley civilization and marked a break in the Mesopotamian.

We do not know how many marvellous civilizations thus disappeared suddenly, leaving unrecorded in history their artistic achievements, their social and political organizations. And even their scientific achievements, as in the case of the lost Atlantis. History is full of shadows and lacunae, and maybe the sole traces left are "the most primitive races, who appear so very akin to animals that one wonders if there really is any difference!" as Mother said. A great big black hole gapes at us. Curiously enough, she even said, "We had wonderful civilizations like those that left a sort of occult memory, for example, of a continent joining India to Africa and of which no traces remain... unless some human races are the remnants of that civilization."

We said 'curiously enough' because was Mother referring to *Lemuria* or to *Gondwanaland*? But the megacontinent Gondwanaland, which, according to the theory of continental drift, once included Australia, India, Africa, South America and Antarctica, drifted apart in the Jurassic (mid-Mesozoic) or some 180 million years ago; while the separation of peninsular India from Southern Africa, rifting Lemuria, an elongated land mass that formerly occupied the Indo-Madagascan area, is supposed to have occurred early in the Tertiary, which, say geologists, began 65 million years ago. In any case, they also say that 'man' appeared on earth only in the early Quaternary, that is, two or three million years ago.¹⁵ So!!! Who really knows what happened ? And when ? The paleontologists digging up fossils and taking

¹⁵And 'modern man,' according to archeologists, is supposed to have appeared some 40,000 years ago, which leaves very little time for the 'wonderful civilizations' mentioned by Mother or the 'previous cycle of civilisation' of which Sri Aurobindo saw a vestige in the first, so-called 'primitive' stage of our own cycle. However, recent archeological findings in Israel (reported in February 1988 in the science journal Nature) seem to indicate that the 'age' of modern man will have to be revised to about 100,000 years. This is still hardly enough, but archeology being itself relatively new-born, we can safely predict that it will go on pushing the date of modern man's appearance further back into the past.

their time about it? Or the occultists who are able to establish a direct contact with the region where earth's memories are recorded? We do not know. Will—can—some earth scientists enlighten us?

During our long digression the Flood waters must have receded. Let us then see how the Semitic peoples were faring in West Asia.

After the Deluge, many nomadic tribes roamed the West Asia region. Abram, of an Aramaean nomadic family, became its head on the death of his father. From Ur, the Chaldean capital, he led his kinsmen to the land of Canaan, Palestine. Coming as they did from the other side of the Euphrates, Abram and his household became known as 'Hebrews,' from a root meaning 'the other side.'

The Patriarch's name, Abram, was changed on his circumcision to Abraham, 'the father of many.' His grandson Jacob, after an experience of wrestling with an angel, was renamed Israel, 'he who wrestles with God.' Ultimately the descendants of the Abra-hamic family came to be known by this name. It was Jacob who was the progenitor of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Jacob's immediate descendants migrated to Egypt, where they fell on bad days. How Moses led the Exodus of the enslaved Hebrew tribes out of Egypt¹⁶, how he welded the various tribes into a confederation during their forty years of wandering, receiving on the way the Ten Commandments on top of Mount Sinai -- "And to think Moses climbed up there to hear that banality!" exclaimed Mother -- how Joshua completed Moses' task of reaching the Promised Land, is doubtless among the best adventure stories to be found in the Old Testament. But the arrival in the Promised Land was by no means the end of the Israelites' tormented history, for they had to contend for long with hostile peoples and conditions. This eventually compelled the Twelve Tribes -- ruled so far by 'judges' -- to set up monarchy (around 1025 B.C.). The first chosen king, Saul, was followed by David and his son, Solomon. It was David who conquered Jerusalem and made it the national capital. And it was Solomon who built the first Temple there during his forty years' reign (971-931 B.C.). That glorious period was short-lived. For upon Solomon's death ten tribes seceded, formed the Kingdom of Israel, which was conquered by the Assyrians (in 722 B.C.), and lost their identity. They are counted as the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. The other two formed the kingdom of Judah, which was conquered by the Chaldeans (in 586 B.C.) who started the Diaspora -- the dispersion of the Jews from Palestine -- which the Romans completed in the first century A.D.

The Hebrews were on the road again. They were to be bounded from place to place, fugitives from the very countries they had enriched. Theon too had to flee his native country as we have already seen.

Left with perhaps too little time for art and science, the Hebrew genius found its expression best in its philosophy and literature. The Old Testament is universally known; we have already mentioned the Talmud; and among scores of other works equally deserving of mention, we must single out the Zohar, which embodies the teaching of the Cabala. In the Cabala, whose constituent elements are mysticism and philosophy, is enshrined the Jewish mystic lore, striving to fathom the mysteries hidden behind every word and letter of the Holy Writ. 'Cabala' means 'tradition,' implying that the teaching was originally handed down orally from generation to generation. It is more than likely that much of the deep knowledge preserved in the Cabala came from the Hebrews' prolonged contact with ancient Egypt, and, to an even greater extent, Chaldea. But as is well known, oral tradition is always a light that is obscured. This too was no exception. Received from the remote past, this Jewish mystic thought was committed as secret doctrine to a privileged few in the eleventh century. Theon did not always agree with the secrecy. He said one day, "We are working to deoccultize the occult."

Theon, the excellent gardener that he was, had culled many seeds from the Cabala and cross-fertilized them with others from various ancient traditions, such as the Vedas which he knew so well, to develop his Cosmic Tradition. For instance Theon's idea of the 'inner Divine,' which caused a revolution in young Mirra, is common to the Vedic system, which posits the heart as the chief centre of

¹⁶1. The Exodus is supposed to have begun in 1447 B.C., which would make Moses a contemporary of Sri Krishna. And peculiarly enough, just when Krishna led the exodus of his Yadava tribe from Mathura to Dwaraka, seemingly Moses did the same with the Jews in the Middle East.

consciousness, and to the Cabala, which lays great stress on the *Shekma* or the all-pervading Divine Presence in man and the universe, regarded as the key to man's mission of restoring the original harmony between man and God, or between Matter and the Divine -- a sharp contrast to the transcendent and wrathful Yahveh.

The Hebrew word of four consonants, YHWH (HE IS THAT HE IS), representing the incommunicable name of God, is termed Tetragrammaton. The name is uttered by the Jews "only once a year," said Mother, "on the Day of Atonement." Called Yom Kippur, it winds up the ten days of Penitence which begin with the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah -- which can mean 'the birthday of the world' or "when mankind passes in judgment before the heavenly throne."

It is therefore not surprising that the Hebrew race excelled as a law-giver -- take Moses and his Ten 'Thou Shalt Nots'! Although for the Cabala the role of man on earth is "to renew the unimpeded flow of Divine Love," the watchword of exoteric Judaism is rather Justice. God, in it, is basically depicted as the Judge of mankind, and not its Lover as in Hinduism. Perhaps it was also against this sense of severity that Christ rebelled?

Christ? He brings us back to Mother and Theon. She said in a laughing voice, "He used to call Christ, 'that young man'!"

Vast as was Max Theon's reservoir of knowledge yet he knew God only as the Master of man; I doubt he had any conception of God as man's 'infinite Lover' as said Sri Aurobindo. "Theon had no idea of the path of *bhakti*, none whatsoever," said Mother. "The idea of surrender to the Divine was absolutely alien to him. Yet he did have the idea of the Divine Presence, here in the heart centre, of the immanent Divine, and of union with That. And he said that it was by uniting with That and letting That transform the being that one could attain this divine creation and the earth's transformation."

Mirra dipped time and again in his wide and profound occult waters and came up with so many treasures! "Theon was the first to give me the idea that the earth is symbolic, representative -- symbolic of universal action concentrated to allow the divine forces to incarnate and work concretely. I learned all this from him."

Theon was a great teacher, and he taught Mirra a multitude of things. But that Love Incarnate had to wait for her coming to India to learn what the Indians mean by *bhakti*, the dedicated love which is unafraid of even perpetual hell for the sake of the Beloved. I have often wondered if this concept is not uniquely Indian. The idea is best embodied in the story of Radha, the Milk-Maid, and Krishna, the Cowherd.

My story opens at a time when Sri Krishna was already an established leader of men. And like all leaders he too was not spared headaches. So, it is no wonder that once, when Narada called on him in Dwaraka, he found Krishna lying with his eyes closed and a face dulled by pain. Narada, who was more accustomed to seeing a scintillating Krishna, was worried.

"What ails thee, Lord?" he inquired.

"I have a bad headache, Narada," answered Sri Krishna.

"Lord," asked Narada, "what can be done to cure thy headache?"

"If you can procure some dust from the feet of a human or a god, and apply it on my head, then only will my headache get cured," informed Narayana.

"I shall try, my Lord," said Narada, "and see whether I can succeed or not."

It did not occur to Narada, who always boasted of his own devotion to Krishna, to there and then take some dust from his own feet and apply it on the head of his worshipped One. No.

At any rate, he who "stands for the expression of Divine love and knowledge" was willing enough to take the trouble of travelling the two worlds for Narayana's sake. First he went to the abode of the gods, explained to them the situation, and asked if any one among them was ready to comply with his request. The gods were scandalized. "How can it be, Narada?" said all the denizens of heaven. "Dust from our feet on Narayana's head? What a great sin! Why, it will mean eternal sojourn in hell! Don't you know it?" One and all, the gods declined.

So then the demigod Narada descended from gods' heaven to men's earth. He landed in Brindaban, for he knew the genuine love of the Gopis for their Playmate. Bethinking himself of Radha, he went straight to her. He made no attempt to hide anything from her and spoke about the failure of his mission to gods.

Radhika listened silently to his tale. Then she asked,

"Is it absolutely certain, O Debarshi, that foot-dust will cure Govinda's headache?"

"Yes, Radha, that is certain," Narada assured her. "But if you give it you will have to sojourn in hell For eternity."

"Well, I am ready," replied the Milk-Maid. "What does it really matter -- even if it means living "eternally in hell -- if HIS headache is cured?"

8. The First Visit

July 14, 1906.

It was the early hours of the morning. A distinguished-looking gentleman stood on the station platform, waiting for the train from Oran to come in. He was dressed in a white robe because of the day's coming heat. His long, wavy auburn hair framed the aristocratic face and fell to the shoulders. A soft breeze played hide and seek in his long beard. A lean figure, and although actually of medium height, he nonetheless gave an impression of being tall.

A cloud of smoke in the distance signalled the train's arrival. It came nearer and nearer, and the engine chuffed more and more loudly. The train ran alongside the platform, slowed down and stopped. Doors swung open. A vision of beauty, momentarily glimpsed framed in a window, stepped out. Our waiting gentleman came forward to meet his guest. Theon greeted Mirra.

Yes, it was Mirra. She had mastered the theoretical and had now come to learn the practical. One exciting event follows another when she comes to spend a few months with the Theons. There isn't one uneventful day from the time of her arrival.

Mother asked Satprem, "Do you know how he received me when I arrived there? That was the first time in my life I had travelled alone, and the first time I had crossed the sea. Then there was a fairly long train ride between Oran and Tierncen. In short, I managed rather well -- I got there."

In those days there were two maritime companies operating the sea route France-Algeria and back. Each ran a weekly service. The port of departure was Marseilles. The ship weighed anchor between twelve noon and four in the afternoon. It went straight to Oran -- Algeria was then a French colony -- without calling at any other port. The passengers had ample time to rest and sleep and enjoy themselves on that cruise, since the steamboat covered the distance of 525 nautical miles (or 972 kilometres) in about forty hours.

We imagine that on this, her first voyage across the Mediterranean, Mirra, leaning on the ship's rail, had gazed at the dazzling sea. It looked strewn with myriads of splinters of glass that reflected the sunlight, shifted, changed the pattern of light. Did she, with her trained eyes, see myriads of sea-nymphs playing joyously among the waves?

After a cruise of two nights and a day, the ship docked at Oran in the early hours of the morning -- between 4 and 6 a.m. Then there was a full day's wait in the town. The train for Tierncen left at night. The railroad was 166 kilometres long and the train took about six and a half hours to reach its destination. From Oran it had rolled for a long time in the plains of Cheliff, as on a multi-coloured carpet, before chugging up the mountain. Set incongruously in an Arab dream, Tlemcen's little station must have jarred on a sensitive traveller like Mirra, seeming as it did like a blunder transported from some Parisian suburb. But the town itself presented another picture. Situated at an altitude of 800 metres or so, in the foothills of pink cliffs rising sheer and forming its enchanting backdrop, Tierncen was like an Arab song. Its bracing air, its one minaret standing among white or pink houses, its large-eyed men who moved about proudly, and its women in burnoos-white shadows walking with real feet adorned with silver anklets- were all like the diverse voices forming an enchanting chorus.

"He met me at the station. We set off by car for his place, as it was a little far away." The distance was about one kilometre.

The country road was bordered with sunny fields. The car slowly climbed up the slopes of the Atlas mountain. "Finally we reached his estate a marvel! It spread across the hillside, dominating the entire valley of Tierncen. ".Through Mother's eyes the scene came alive for us. The immense estate which began from the plains sloped up almost to the top of the hill.

Zarif, the abode of the Theons, was a beautiful terraced garden.

"We arrived from below and had to climb up some wide pathways to get up there. I said nothing- from a material point of view it was truly an experience.

The path got narrower between big, sprawling fig-trees. The car stopped a little further on. The visitor got down and walked up some steps to reach the front courtyard, situated above a square basin which was always filled with water from a perennial spring.

"When we came in sight of the house, he stopped. 'That's my house.'

"It was red! Painted red!" Mother's eyes widened at the recollection.

"And he added, 'When Barlet came here, he asked me, Why did you paint your house red?'"

Mother broke off to explain, "Barlet was a French occultist who had put Theon in touch with France, and was his first disciple. This Barlet was Edouard Schure's contemporary, a bit older. I met Schure, by the way, he was rather hollow."

After this short explanation, she went on, "There was a gleam of mischief in Theon's eyes, coupled with a somewhat sardonic smile. I told Barlet, Because red goes well with green!"

Mother smiled, "At once I began to understand the gentleman."

Their path lay through a garden. "We continued on our way uphill, when suddenly, without any warning, he wheeled around, planted himself in front of me and said, 'Now you are at my mercy. Are you not afraid?'"

"Just like that. So I looked at him, smiled and told him, I am never afraid. I have the Divine here in my heart.' Well, he really went white."

Even in 1972, some sixty-five years later, the imprint remained clear on the retina of her mind's eye. "It struck me, I never forgot it," said Mother. "I was absolutely conscious and calm. I remember we were walking in his huge estate; we were going up towards the house on foot, and I told him," she raised her index finger, " 'My psychic being governs me -- I am afraid of nothing.' Well..." Mother made a gesture which showed Theon starting as if he had been burned.

"I acquired that psychic consciousness just before leaving for Tierncen. And it grew stronger there."

Theon turned on his heels and silently led Mirra to the house. As the visitor entered, she was met by a small woman dressed in a red, flowing dalmatic. It was Madame Theon, waiting to receive Mirra. The older woman's blue eyes lit up at the sight of the younger one, for what she saw was beyond compare.

* * *

Zarif, where Mirra was to stay for three months -- from 14 July to 15 October to be exact -- was Theon's property on the road to the Cascades. The building was set against a green sloping hillside. It looked down on the road and the far-off town. Painted coral red, resembling somewhat a Moorish manor, the house rose in tiers of small courtyards and terraces, covered or open, from where the eye could see clear to the distant horizon. From the house and from the garden equally, the view to the west stretched to where Tierncen stood out, then beyond to the valleys and the plains that extended away to the faraway sea -- which, it was said, could be glimpsed on a clear day. To the east also the eye could see a good ways off to where the Atlas mountain's crisscrossing peaks lay. But behind, the mountain formed a high background, like a barrier standing almost perpendicular and ending down at the road to the caves, the springs and the vast lawns of Zarif which were shaded by centuries-old olive trees behind the house. From there, as the house was built on a hillside, the top floor could be reached through the large doors of the sitting-room which opened on to the lawns. But the windows of the guest-room overlooked the yard in front. Laid in mosaic, the courtyard was surrounded by high walls set with ogival doors decorated with huge amphores. The waters in the square basin sang ceaselessly below the yard. The spring was reputed to be miraculous. The Arabs, who came and went freely on certain paths, stopped to bathe their feet in its water.

A little beyond the top left of the park was the shrine of an ancient marabout, Sidi Boumedine. He had lived there a long, long time ago. Over seven hundred years back a mosque was built over the site, and it has some fine mosaic works. The pilgrims came every day by the top road to burn special incense on the Mohammedan hermit's tomb; that scent mingled with those of the roses.

The rose garden of Zarif! It was a masterpiece by Aia Aziz. He took care of the whole estate, but the rose garden engaged his special attention. The best varieties of roses were planted by him, selected and grafted, made to bloom -- the rarest of roses vied with each other in exuberant profusion and charm.

Under his expert care, fruit-bearing trees--cherry and apple and pomegranate, to name a few -- flourished. And, of course, the sizable vegetable garden was a treat. As he worked with Nature he studied her and she became a fecund book yielding up to him her rich secrets. He was wont to say that "everything depends on the plane one has attained and the width of one's horizon; for the worm in the radish, the radish is its whole cosmos -- most people live like the worm in the radish."

The dexterity of his hands was not limited to gardening alone. He was a skilled workman, proficient as a mason, as a house painter, a locksmith or a carpenter, as the need arose. He was fond of repeating that all the sages in ancient times knew and practised a manual craft; it reposes the mind, and also it forces one to some degree of precision. He would add: One must come into direct contact with matter, which can be had only through work. "You know the story of the Initiate, who refused to impart knowledge to the young aspirant who would not cultivate his garden? There is a profound teaching in the story."

With the long, fine fingers his hands played the piano. He sang songs and practised other arts. His sensitive hands made him a talented sculptor. But he was most clever with his hand in fashioning his cigarettes, which he did with disconcerting rapidity.

Theon was a man of many moods: whimsical, gay or depressed, brilliant or forceful. In contrast, Madame Theon was full of a serene dignity, unruffled and equable. "Madame Theon was an extraordinary occultist," said Mother. "That woman had incredible faculties, incredible." Theon, for his part, always admitted that effectively it was owing to these amazing faculties his wife possessed that they could reach the lost or the as-yet-unexplored regions of knowledge.

And Mother, on her side, whenever she referred to Madame Theon -- it was always 'Madame' Theon -- spoke with a note of admiration, of regard, of respect. But let Mother herself tell about her memories of Tiencen.

9. Madame Theon

"I shall tell you about Madame Theon." Mother addressed her class of very young children. As there was no bar to their elders listening to her, many of us attended these 'classes.'

"Madame Theon was born in the Isle of Wight," began Mother. "She lived in Tierncen with her husband who was a great occultist. Madame Theon herself was an occultist with great powers, she was a remarkable clairvoyant and had mediumistic faculties. Her powers were of an exceptional order. She had received an extremely thorough and rigorous training, and could exteriorize, that is to say, from her material body she could go out in a subtle body, in full consciousness, and do this twelve times in a row, up to the extreme limit of the world of forms -- on which I shall speak to you later when you can better understand what I am talking about. Just now I will recount a few small incidents which I myself saw when I was in Tierncen, as well as a story she narrated to me."

Mother gathered the reins of her thoughts. "The nature of the incidents is more external, but very amusing.

"She remained almost always sunk in a trance, but so well had she trained her body that even when in a trance -- that is, when one or more parts of her being were exteriorized -- her body had a life of its own and she could walk about and even attend to certain chores. She worked a lot, because she was able to speak freely in her trance and describe what she was seeing, which was noted down and out of which a teaching was formed, which, by the way, was published. On account of all this and the occult work she was doing, often she was tired, in the sense that her body was tired and it needed to restore its vitality very concretely.

"Now one day when she was particularly tired, she said to me, 'You shall see how I am going to recover my strength.'

"She had plucked from her garden... It wasn't a garden, it was an immense estate with centuries-old olive trees, fig trees as I have never seen elsewhere; it was a marvel, on a mountain slope, beginning from the plains and extending almost halfway to the top. In this garden there were many lemon trees, orange trees... and grapefruit. Grapefruit flowers smell even nicer than orange blossoms. The flowers are big like this, and she knew how to extract the essence herself -- she had given me a bottle of it. Well, she had plucked a large grapefruit, big like this, big and ripe, and she lay down on her bed and put the grapefruit on her solar plexus, here, like this, holding it in both her hands. She lay down and rested. She didn't sleep, she rested.

"Come back in an hour,' she told me.

"I returned after one hour.... And the grape-fruit was as flat as a pancake. Which shows that her power to absorb vitality was such that she had absorbed all the life of the fruit and it had become limp and quite flat. I saw this myself." Mother challenged her audience, "Try it yourselves, you'll never succeed!" A burst of laughter was the only response she got.

"Another time, and it's even more amusing..." she paused considering how to proceed. "But first let me tell you a little something about Tierncen, for probably you don't know about it. Tierncen is a small town in southern Algeria, almost on the edge of the Sahara. The town itself is built in a valley encompassed by a circle of mountains, not very high but higher than hills all the same. The valley is fertile, green, superb. The population over there consists mainly of Arabs and rich merchants, in any case the town is very -- it *was*, I don't know what it's like now [in 1957], I am speaking to you of things that happened at the beginning of the century; very prosperous merchants lived there and, from time to time, they came to visit Theon. They knew nothing, they understood nothing, but they were greatly interested.

"One day, towards evening, one of them turned up and began putting questions, ridiculous moreover. So Madame Theon said to me, 'You will see, we shall have some fun.'

"In the verandah of the house there was a big table used for dining, a very big table really, quite wide, with eight legs, four on each side. It was massive, you know, and heavy. Chairs had been arranged at some distance from the table for receiving the man. He sat at one end, Madame Theon at the other; I

was seated on one side, as was Mr Theon. All the four of us were there. Nobody was near the table, we were all at quite a distance. Well then, he went on asking questions, as I said rather ridiculous ones, on the powers one could acquire, what one could do with 'magic,' as he termed it. She looked at me, uttered not a word and kept very still. Suddenly I hear a cry, a cry of fright. It was the table that had started moving, and with almost a heroic movement was charging down on the poor man who was seated at one end! It went and struck him. Madame Theon hadn't touched it, nobody had touched it." Mother let her words sink in. "She had simply concentrated on the table and, you see, with her vital power she had made it move. At first the table had wobbled a little, like this, then it began moving slowly, then suddenly, as with a single bound, it threw itself on that man, who left never to return!" We thoroughly enjoyed the man's discomfiture.

"She also had the power of dematerializing and rematerializing objects. But she would never say anything -- she didn't boast, she never said, 'I am going to do this,' she didn't say anything -- she did it quietly. She didn't attach much importance to these things, knowing that they only went to demonstrate that there were other forces than the purely material ones.

"When I went out in the evening -- towards late afternoon I used to go walking with Mr Theon to see the countryside, to walk in the mountains, to neighbouring villages -- I locked my door; it was my habit, I always locked my door. Madame Theon rarely went out, for the reasons I have told you, because most of the time she was in a trance and liked to stay at home. But when I returned from my walks and opened my door -- which was locked, consequently nobody could have entered -- I always found on my pillow a sort of small garland of flowers. These flowers grew in the garden, they are called 'Four o' Clocks'¹⁷. We have them here, they open in the evening and have a wonderful smell. A whole alley was full of them, with big bushes, high like this. The flowers are remarkable, I think it's the same thing here also, on the same bush there are different coloured flowers: yellow, red, mixed, purple. The small flowers are like... like the Blue Bells¹⁸; n-no, rather like the Morning Glory¹⁹, but that is a climber while those are bushes -- we have them here in the gardens. She always tucked some behind her ears, because of the nice smell. Oh, it smells delicious! Well then, she used to take a walk in the alley, between the large bushes which were this high, and she would cull the flowers; and then, when I returned the flowers were in my room!" We were lost in Mother's narrative and before the full import of her words could sink in she continued. "She never told me how she did it, but well, certainly she didn't enter my room.

" 'Weren't there flowers in your room?' she once asked me.

"I replied, 'Yes. Oh, yes!'

"That's all. So then I understood that *she* had put them there."

Mother glanced at her spell-bound audience and took a deep breath. "I could tell you many stories, but I shall end with one she told me, which I didn't see myself."

She closed her eyes as if to get a better picture. "As I was telling you, Tierncen is almost next to the Sahara and it has a desert climate, except in the valley where a never-drying river flows and makes the whole land very fertile. But the mountains were absolutely arid. Only in the plots held by agriculturists did something grow. Now, Theon's park, the big estate I mean, was, as I told you, a marvellous place. Everything grew there, every imaginable thing, and in magnificent proportions. Well, she related to me -- they had been there for a very long time [seventeen or eighteen years] -- that five or six years earlier, I think, it had been considered that these arid mountains could cause the river to dry up one day, so it would be better to plant trees there. And the Administrator of Tierncen had given orders to

¹⁷1. *Mirabilis*. Also known as 'Marvel of Peru.' Mother gave it the significance: "Solace == The blessings the Divine grants us."

¹⁸1. *Campanula*: "Joy's Call = It is modest and rarely makes itself heard."

¹⁹2. *Ipomoea* or *Convolvulus*: "Artistic Taste = Is pleased with beautiful things and is itself beautiful."

plant trees on all the neighbouring hills, a wide cirque of hills, you know. He had said that pines should be planted, because in Algeria maritime pine grows very well; and they wanted to try it out. Now, for some reason or the other -- through an oversight or a whim, nobody knows! -- instead of ordering pines they ordered firs! Fir-trees belong to northern climes, and are not at all trees of desert lands. And these fir-trees had been very scrupulously planted. Madame Theon had seen this and, I think, wished to make an experiment. It so happens that after four or five years those firs had not only sprouted but had become magnificent, and when I myself went to Tiencen the mountains all around were entirely green, magnificent with trees.

"You see, these aren't pines, they are firs," she told me.

"In fact, they were firs." Mother asked the children, "You know that firs are Christmas trees, don't you?" They said Yes in unison.

"They were firs. Then she narrated to me that after three years, when the firs had grown big, suddenly, one day, or rather one December night, just as she had gone to bed and put out the light, she was woken up by a very slight noise -- she was very sensitive to noise. She opens her eyes and sees something like a moonbeam -- there was no moon that night -- lighting up a corner of her room. Then she perceived a little gnome there, like those one sees in the fairy-tales of Norway or Sweden, Scandinavian tales. A small little fellow, with a big head, a pointed cap and pointed shoes, he was dark green, with a long white beard, and fully covered with snow.

"So she looks at him -- her eyes were open -- she looks at him and says, 'Why... Eh, but what are you doing here?'

"She was a little troubled, for in the room's warmth the snow was melting and making a puddle on the floor.

"Whatever are you doing here?'

"Whereupon he smiled his most amiable smile at her and said, 'But we have been beckoned with the firs! The firs, they call the snow. They are trees of snowy lands. As for me, I am the Lord of the Snow, so I have come to you to announce that... we are coming. We are called, we are coming.'

"Snow? . . . But we are next to the Sahara!"

"Ah! You should not have put firs!"

"Finally she told him, 'Listen, I don't know whether what you are telling me is true or not, but you are making a mess of my floor, off with you!'

"So off he went. The moonlight was gone with him. She lit a lamp, since there was no electricity. She lit a lamp and saw... a small puddle of water where he had stood. Therefore it wasn't a dream, it really was a little being who had made the snow melt in her room. And the next morning, when the sun rose, it rose over snow-covered mountains. That was the first ' time. Nobody had ever seen that in the country.

"From then on, every winter -- not for long, just for a short time -- all the mountains are covered with snow."

Mother looked at the expectant faces before her, but smilingly shook her head. "That's my story."

10. What Happened at Tlemcen

That was Mother's story to the children. "

Naturally enough, her stories covered wider grounds when she could talk freely to Satprem. She retold him the stories about the Lord of the Snow, about the musical toad, and other tales of Tlemcen.

Towards late afternoon Mirra went walking with Theon to explore the neighbourhood. But when one day he took her to visit the ancient marabout's tomb, he put her in an embarrassing situation and had his little revenge on her.

"We used to go for walks in the nearby countryside to see the tombs," said Mother to Satprem. "It was entirely a Muslim country, and the Muslim tombs are guarded by certain people (I don't remember now what they are called in Arabic). But there's always a sage, like the Indian fakirs here, to guard the tombs, a sort of semi -priest responsible for the upkeep of the tombs. Pilgrims go there as well. Theon was friendly with one particular sage, and would always converse with him -- that's when I would see the mischief in Theon's eyes -- and speak to him of one thing and another. One day, Theon took me along. I should have been fully covered, you know, to conform with those Muslims over there, but I always went out in a kind of kimono!" This remained her dress even when she went to the markets. "Theon spoke to him in Arabic; I didn't understand what he said but the sage rose, bowed to me very ceremoniously and went off into another room. He returned with cups of sweetened mint tea -- not teacups, they put it in special little glasses -- extremely sweet tea, almost like mint syrup. The sage looked at me. I was obliged to take it..." Mother stopped abruptly, and Satprem sensed that there was a sequel to this story but that she didn't want to say anything more.

We think the incident occurred at Sidi Bourne-dine, where the present guardian of the tomb is the grandson of the sage who offered Mirra the mint tea.

At any rate, it was not for nothing that "there were all kinds of stories in the countryside, terrible stories," about Theon.

He inspired fear and awe in the local Arabs.

They were awed by his power which healed their sick almost immediately; no matter if three days or three months later the healed one fell sick again. The neighbourhood Arabs venerated him and, among themselves, called him 'the Marabout.'

We can surely term her stay at Tlemcen a thrilling mystery in which Mirra is constantly confronted with bizarre situations. "One day I shall find Theon's photo and show it to you. He is there with a big dog he called 'Little Boy.' A dog that could exteriorize! It would dream and go out of its body! This dog had a kind of adoration, for me. I should mention that at a fixed time in the afternoon I always went into a trance -- I had meditation followed by trance. When it was over I would go out walking with Theon and the dog always came with us; he usually came to fetch me in my room. One day I was lying on a divan, in a trance, when I felt his cold nose thrust into my hand in order to wake me up. I open my eyes... no dog. Yet I had positively, distinctly felt his cold nose nuzzling my hand to wake me up. Well, I got ready, went down the stairs, and who did I find on the landing? My dog, in a deep slumber, he too in a state of trance! He had come to me in his sleep to wake me up. Then, when I reached the landing he woke up, gave himself a shake and trotted off."

Zarif: Mirra at her window and 'Little Boy' in the courtyard

She added musingly, "It was an interesting life."

And how!

"Extraordinary occurrences which go outside the ordinary course of physical Nature," as Sri Aurobindo puts it, became everyday occurrences at Zarif. When the eight-legged table flung itself upon the unfortunate Arab merchant with nobody within touching distance, one could have perhaps called it magic. But the apport? When Mirra regularly found flowers on her bed in a locked room? Or when she regularly heard the gong ringing by itself to announce meal times? Or when Madame Theon's slippers...

"But it was a very interesting world," Mother said pensively. "Really, I saw there... Well, once you left you would ask yourself, 'Have I been dreaming?'" She rubbed her eyes. "It all seemed so fantastic."

Then she briefly explained how supranormal happenings can become normal ones. "You see, when people themselves are in this occult consciousness, everything is possible; it creates an atmosphere where ALL, but all is possible. What to our European common sense seems impossible, is all possible." Certain mediums -- not necessarily yogis -- have a native 'psychic' faculty which gives them power over matter. It is the faculty of being able to identify themselves with everything, even with inanimate objects.

"I saw it with Madame Theon. She would will a thing to come to her instead of going to the thing herself; when she wanted her sandals, instead of going to fetch them, she made them come to her." Satprem blinked. Mother smiled and went on, "She did this through her ability to radiate her matter -- she exercised a will over her matter -- her central will acted upon matter anywhere since she was there."

Sri Aurobindo explains further. "Obviously a layman cannot do these things, unless he has a native 'psychic' (that is, occult) faculty and even then he will have to learn the law of the thing before he can use it at will."

Madame Theon, who had 'a native psychic faculty,' had thoroughly learned the law of the occult.

It was now Mirra's turn to do the same. And the adventures she had! And the friends and admirers she picked up! Little Boy, the dog, was not alone in his admiration for her. Remember "the big toad, all warty -- going poff, poff, poff!" whose admiration for Mirra's music was unbounded? Whenever she played the piano he would come hopping in and listen raptur-ously, his eyes bulging, then say 'poff!' and hop away when she stopped. That too was in Tiemcen. Why, she even charmed serpents there! Before that, however, she had to tackle some unforeseen problems that had ensued when she encountered the furious Naja, otherwise known as Cobra de Capello. Apart from telling Mirra that serpents symbolized the evolution, Theon had also told her that they were, of all the animals, the most sensitive to hypnotic or magnetic power. "If you have this power in you -- the magnetic power is a power of the most material vital -- you can very easily gain a mastery over serpents," Mother explained to Satprem, who till then heartily detested those creatures. "All those who love snakes have it and with it make the snakes obey them. That's how I got out of my scrape with the Naja in Tierncen. Do you know the story?" Satprem nodded. He vividly remembered Mother telling him some years previously how she had extricated herself from that situation.

"There were centuries-old olive trees in Theon's estate. I would sit under one of them every day at noon to meditate. Yes, it was hot at high noon, but the heat never bothered me. Quite the contrary. Now, one day, I was deep in my meditation when I began to feel uneasy. So then I open my eyes. And what do I see? About two metres away in front of me, standing erect and swaying its hood, is a Naja, hissing furiously at me. You know 'Naja'? They are like the Nagas here, the Hooded Cobra, and so poisonous! Their poison is deadly. So there was this Naja, swaying its expanded hood and hissing for all it was worth. At first I didn't understand why the serpent was so enraged. Then I remembered that just behind me there was a hole in the tree. I must be sitting here barring its way to its hole,' I thought. 'But what's to be done now?' I was in a quandary. Any movement, be it ever so slight, would instantly make it strike me." Theon's counsel leapt to her mind. "Mark you, I didn't have any fear. I just sat still and stared fixedly at its eyes, and exerted my will-force to the utmost. Gradually the hissing softened, then stopped altogether. After some time, slowly, very slowly I drew away my legs, first one then the other. But all the while I kept my Fixed stare on it and steadily exerted my will. At last the venomous snake suddenly lowered its hood, and quickly turning round jumped into the nearby pool."

"Phew!" Satprem let out his pent-up breath.

"When, later, I told Theon about this incident, he confirmed my surmise. 'We all know that the snake lives there,' he told me. 'After its bath it wanted to go to its hole, but found you barring its passage. That's why it was so angry.'

"Then looking quizzically at me, he added. If you want to make it your friend, give it some milk.'

"I did!" said Mother flatly.

That, in substance, is what Mother had told Satprem previously.

This time, after that passing reference to it, she went on, "After this incident there was another, when I helped a cat to defeat a little asp -- they have asps there, like Cleopatra's, very dangerous.... The cat was a big russet angora, who, at first, began playing with the asp, then, of course, became furious. The asp kept jumping at him and the cat -- it was extraordinary, I watched this for over ten minutes -- the cat leapt aside so swiftly that the asp just missed him. And as it darted by, the cat struck at it with all his claws out, scratching it each time. The other lost its energy little by little. And at the end... I stopped the cat from eating it, for it was sickening."

Thereafter she had two royal visits. First, the King of the Cats came and conferred on Mirra the power over his species.

And the second visit... "Well, one night, after these two episodes, I was visited by the King of the Serpents. He wore a superb crown on his head -- symbolic of course, but anyway he was the spirit of the species. He had the appearance of a cobra. He was... he was splendid!" said Mother admiringly. "A formidable beast, and... splendid! He came to see me and said he wanted to make a pact with me -- I had demonstrated my power over his species, so he wanted to come to an understanding.

"All right,' I said, 'what do you propose?'

" 'I not only promise that serpents won't harm you,' he replied, 'but that they will obey you. Only, you must promise me something in return: never to kill one of them.'

"I thought it over and said, 'No, I can't take this pledge, because if ever one of yours attacks one of mine -- a being that depends upon me -- my pledge to you would not, could not, stop me from defending him. Although I can assure you that I have no bad feelings! And no intention to kill -- killing is not on my programme! But I can't commit myself, otherwise it would restrict my freedom of decision.'

"He left without replying, so the status quo remains."

Mother recounted another encounter she had with a serpent, this time in Pondicherry.

"But several experiences I have had make clear my power over snakes -- not as much as over cats; with cats it's extraordinary!

"Long ago, I often used to take a drive and then get down somewhere and walk. One day after my walk, I got back into the car and was just about to drive away -- the door was still open -- when, exactly from the spot I had just left, a fairly large snake came out. It was furious. Belligerently it came and headed straight towards the open door, ready to spring at me. Luckily I was alone, neither the driver nor Pavitra were there, otherwise... The snake came on and when it had got quite near, I looked closely at it and said, 'What do you want? Why have you come here?'

"There was a pause. Then it fell down flat and was gone. I didn't make any movement, only spoke to it, 'What do you want? Why have you come here?' You know, they have a way of suddenly falling down, going limp, and prrt! Gone!"

11. The Hidden Meaning

Between her various adventures, Mirra was discovering a host of other things.

She was already proving in practice what Sri Aurobindo was to write later. "The theory of traditional knowledge is perfectly rational and verifiable by inner experiences, and it imposes itself if we admit the supraphysical and do not cabin ourselves in the acceptance of material being as the only reality."

Under the able tutorship of Max Theon, Mirra the apt pupil was learning. She learned how to go in and out of the supraphysical worlds at will. She learned the art of materialization and dematerialization. She even learned how to move objects from a distance. In a letter, Sri Aurobindo refers to "an experience in which the Mother being in Algiers appeared to a circle of friends sitting in Paris and took up a pencil and wrote a few words on a paper. She signed her name and even moved an object. Having satisfied herself that it was possible she did not develop it any further. That was at a time when she was practising occultism with Theon in Algeria.... Theon was a great occultist; his wife was still more so." He added, "That paper was here even the other day."

Sri Aurobindo further explains that "tremendous vital force is necessary to move an object at a distance." His briefest comment reveals so much! "The SLAVS as a race are psychically more sensitive but generally they do not control these occult forces. The Jews, having a long-standing tradition about these powers, seem to know the way of mastering them. Theon, the Mother's first teacher, had great powers and knew how to use them. Sometimes these powers are gifts²⁰."

Madame Theon was amply gifted with this power. And between Theon and Theona (as Teresa called her), Mirra was given a complete training. They trained her to differentiate between smell and smell, between colour and colour, between light and light, between . . . Each smell, each colour, each light indicated to her its home. She learned to go straight to the heart of things and discover their motive power. Among her multitudinous discoveries was one in which she found that 'the essence of Love' which had plunged down into Matter had established its Presence everywhere and in everything.

"Even in things, in objects," she told us, "even in stones there is a strange receptivity which stems from this Presence. Also, stones have a spontaneous sense of what is higher, nobler, purer; and although unable to express it in any way, they feel it and are variously affected by it."

We have all heard about famous pearls and diamonds -- such as the Blue Hope Diamond, the Eye of Buddha, the Kohinoor, etc. -- being carriers of curse; behind each there is a trail of blood, of intrigue and assassination.

Mother observed additionally that if one knows how to go about it, some stones -- gems mainly -- can be 'charged'; they can accumulate a force, preserve it and pass it on. Other stones can serve as a link, or carry messages, while yet others can be used to predict things -- like the 'crystal' of the fortuneteller. To function, these things naturally demand a competent person with a special ability. A few stones are remarkable for the power of protection they can hold. "Amethysts are great accumulators of protective power which really protects the wearer." But the Presence is more easily discernible in "rock crystals, which form such magnificent designs of such total harmony," precisely owing to "this central Presence."

Colours. Lights. All possible subjects were included in Mirra's study.

"All lights," wrote Sri Aurobindo, "are indications of a Force or Power." Mirra, whose inner vision was as vivid as her actual sight, could now determine the plane from which a particular light emanated, as well as its action, by the light's colour. Later, Mother and Sri Aurobindo made a detailed

²⁰1. *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, by A.B. Purani.

organization of this notion -- the gradation of consciousness beginning from material Nature right to the Supreme, shown by different coloured lights.²¹

But that was later. For the moment, Mirra the artist was glad to be able to better appreciate the hidden sense in colours. However, what really delighted her -- she who "loved mathematics very much" - - was to discover that numbers were not mere digits and a mental toy, but carried profound meanings in themselves.

Once upon a time, Satprem, to whom numbers were mere lifeless ciphers, needed a big quantity of paper to draw a Tantric diagram -- 72 times a day and for three times 72 days -- so he broached the matter to Mother. In the ensuing conversation she unravelled the diagram's connotation and by the same stroke gave him the key to the underlying meaning of numbers. From then on he began to take an interest in them.

"Wait! Look under there if by chance there's a box or something," she said, pointing to the heap of heterogeneous things under a window-ledge. "We'll see."

Satprem pulled out a box.

"It's all yellowed. Does it matter?" she asked.

"It'll soak water!" he objected. "You see, because I write with chandanam²² mixed with water, using a twig of 'Divine Love 1'²³

"Without any cotton-tip? Without anything?"

"Yes, without anything," he nodded. "Only a twig which I whittle into a pen."

"Are the designs small?"

"The image is a rectangle divided into three squares, with numerals and letters -- one Sanskrit letter," he amended. "Quite a toil, you know!"

"Seventy-two a day I My little child!" Mother laughed commiseratively. "I must find something...."

"When I come out of it, I feel dazed," he said tiredly.

"But that's what these Tantriks want!" She knew it. "They want to stupefy you. ..."

"You understand, for two hours I have to squat over all those sacred scribblings," he said ironically.

His bitterness was quite understandable. For alongside this Tantric work, Satprem had to get ready the text for the Ashram's *Bulletin*, a bilingual quarterly. This work consisted in selecting with Mother the English texts of Sri Aurobindo's and then translating them into French; add to it choosing and reading out to Mother her own various texts, and as most of the time these were taken from her talks and conversations, he had to transcribe them from the recorded tapes and render them comprehensible to the readers. This apart, he had to transcribe from the tapes his own twice-weekly interviews with Mother which she called her *Agenda*. And what a tape-recorder he had! My gosh! So old that he used to turn the spools by hand. You may well imagine the rest. And to top it all, there was his book *The Adventure of Consciousness* on which he was still working.

"But tell me," she inquired, "wouldn't you have the right to sit in a chair, at a table?"

"I don't know," came the glum reply.

"Why not?" Then dwelling on this point for some time she concluded, "What's required is to have the inner attitude."

²¹I. Sri Aurobindo's letter on 'Lights' and *Mother's Agenda* (specially the conversation of 18 May 1963), will give the reader some inkling on the subject.

²²1. Sandalwood paste.

²³2. Pomegranate.

"Exactly," he said, "the inner attitude. I feel this new work as an empty and mechanical thing."

"Don't you feel each word as you write it?" Mother raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"They are numerals. Numerals and just one Sanskrit letter," he said drily. "Well, you can't say there's much soul in numerals, can you?"

"Will you describe it, that I may see?" she asked encouragingly.

As it was difficult to describe the design verbally, he said, "I'll write it out for you," and sketched the diagram.

The first thing Mother did was to tot up the figures. "Did you add them up? No? In every direction it adds up to 72.... Nine is the number for 'birth'."

"It's to be done 72 times for 72 days and three times over."

"And 72 comes to 7+2 which make 9," she put in.

"This Sanskrit letter is HRIM," he volunteered. He was getting interested.

"This is one of the three seed sounds," she revealed. "I don't recall now, but each of them represents one aspect of the Mother."

"Sujata told me it's Mahalakshmi."

"I was hesitating between Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati."

Mother sat in a reverie where figures shimmered, then came into focus on her mind's screen. "It is clearly taken as a symbol of the gestation of the New Birth, the second birth, the divine birth. That's certain." Then she asked abruptly, "He said 72 days?"

"Three times 72 days. A little over eight months,²⁴ that is."

"Just so," she nodded her agreement. Then said smilingly, "It is... it's the work of gestation for the birth of the Divine Consciousness."

"And seven -- 7 + 2 -- is interesting. 7 stands for realization; 2 is dual -- a dual realization. And if you put the two together, you get the number of gestation."

She explained. "You see, Mahalakshmi is the Divine Mother's aspect of love.... It is to prepare the earth for receiving the Supreme's manifestation, which is the manifestation of His Victory."

"Thus seen, the diagram becomes clear -- comprehensible and even comprehensive. It has content."

The conversation continued. Mother went on to give content to some numbers. I am adding a few more from my own notes.

2 = Dual

3 = Sachchidananda (Sat + Chit + Ananda)

4 = Manifestation

5 = Power

6 = New Creation

7 = Realization

8 = Infinite

9 = Gestation or Birth

10 = Sign of external expression, or, something established, a static perfection

11 = Progress, or, a Beginning

12 = Mahashakti's figure, or, the Perfection of the Creation

²⁴1. Actually a little over seven months. Satprem and calculation I Never have I met anybody as uncalculating as he I

12 = 4+8= Manifestation of the Infinite
18 = Consciousness in its effort towards a material realization
18 = 10+8 = an established Infinite
18= 9+9= Dual Creation
18 =12+6= an extremely remarkable something
22 = Power of money
30 = Manifestation of Sachchidananda
36 = Union of Sachchidananda with the Creation
42 = Dual manifestation of the Supreme and Nature
48 = Manifestation of the Infinite.

Mother also pointed out that any double-digit figure could have several meanings depending upon the numbers that went to make it. Such as 12 or 18.

Then she herself began to draw the diagram containing the numerals and the Sanskrit letter. "Let's see if I remember my Sanskrit," she mused aloud. "I have spent my time forgetting everything. I used to write my Sanskrit as I write French. All forgotten."

As she completed the design, she said, "There. Now it has a life, you understand? It has a life."

She had automatically written the symbols in their proper order -- it is from this order that a Tantric diagram derives its real power. Then she pored over it for a long time, and suddenly exclaimed, "Why, there's a music!" And Mother hummed the air. Luckily Satprem was ready with his recorder and could tape it.

"There." She repeated, "But it is full of meaning, pulsating with meaning."

"But where," Satprem's curiosity was aroused, "does the meaning of numbers come from?"

"This deep meaning of numbers," Mother replied, "I got it in Tierncen, in the Overmind." Overmind, in Sri Aurobindo's terminology, is the realm of the higher Gods. "It was above, just above the realm of the gods. It was there that the numbers took on a living meaning for me; not a mental game -- a living meaning."

Then there was a flashback of a fifty-year-old memory. "That is where Madame Theon recognized me, because of the twelve pearls in a formation over my head. She told me, 'You are That, because you have this. Only That can have this!'"

Mother's laugh rang out. "It was as far removed from my thought as possible. Thank God!"

You are That

12. The Valley of the False Glimmer

It was not only the crown of twelve pearls over Mirra's head that Madame Theon saw. Her seeing included, among others, those two Guardian Angels who always hovered near Mirra -- and even upbore her and gently set her down on the flint stones in Fontainebleau when, as she was racing ahead of the other children, she had sailed into the air and fallen from a height of about three metres. And not a scratch to show for it!

Mirra related to the Theons many of her personal experiences. That of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice was one. She had gone there with her mother. In the Dungeon she had relived a scene from a past life wherein she was strangled and thrown out into the canal. "I related all this to Theon and Madame Theon, and he too remembered one of his past lives there, during that very period. In fact, I had seen in Venice a portrait that was the spitting image of Theon! The portrait of one of the doges. Absolutely -- it was a painting by Titian -- it was absolutely Theon! his portrait, you know, as if it had just been done."

But she was really keen on understanding her night experiences, for they had left her puzzled. And the Theons were able to give her the key to the riddles of her 'dreams.' Take the mystery of the Being who promised her things in abundance. "When I was a child," said Mother to Satprem, "around twelve, I knew nothing about spiritual things, my family lived in a completely materialistic atmosphere. But once, I saw something in a dream: a Being coming to me, a woman, and telling me, 'You will always have in abundance whatever you need.' It was Nature, material Nature, the same Being I have always seen afterwards. And it's true, it's perfectly true," Mother smilingly swept her arm in a wide arc which included the room, the laden table, the piled up objects on the carpet, and every corner full to overflowing.

"Later on, when I met Theon, he explained it to me. But at the time I knew nothing at all; it wasn't a figment of my imagination, it came unbeknown to me, unasked for: 'You will always have in abundance whatever you need.' It's true!" She laughed her infectious laugh. Let us recall the time when Mirra the artist was so hard up that she had to paint her patent leather boots; and how, when she wanted one petticoat "much in fashion" then, to go with her gown, she got FIVE!

The experiences that came to her "massively from my infancy," came "just like that, without my seeking them, wanting them or understanding them, without doing any sort of discipline, nothing -- absolutely spontaneous. And they kept on coming and coming and coming." It was only "from the time I met Theon that it all got explained -- I saw it all clearly, I understood and organized it."

It was her sleep that Mirra organized impeccably. Indeed, none could beat Mother where the subjects of sleep and dream were concerned. On one occasion when Satprem complained to Mother about his bad nights, she shed much fresh light upon sleep, then proceeded to say, "There would be many interesting things to tell about sleep, because it is one of the things I have studied the most." Indeed, over the decades during which she trained her sleep, the number of nights when Mother could not drill it was minimal. "To speak of how I became conscious of my nights. I learned this from Theon. And now that I know all these things of India, I realize what a REAL expert Theon was."

So was Mother. Thus she could at once refute somebody who stated to her, "If somebody kills you in a dream, it doesn't matter, since it is only a dream!"

"Sorry!" she riposted. "As a rule, you are sick the next day, or some time after. It is a warning. I knew a person who was attacked on the eye in a dream, and who really lost one eye a few days later.

"I myself have happened to dream about getting blows on my face. Well, upon waking up in the morning, I had a red mark on the spot, on the forehead and the cheek. A vital wound to somebody will inevitably result in a physical wound. I was struck vitally. It comes from within. Nothing and nobody touched anything at all from outside."

This vital world is the land of the Life Heavens on the one hand: "Just imagine, for example, that you are very tired and need to rest," Mother said to Satprem who always needed to take rest after his night's sleep! "If you know how to exteriorize yourself and enter consciously the vital world, you can find there a region similar to a miraculous virgin forest where all the splendours of a rich and harmonious

vegetation are assembled, with such magnificent mirrors of water and an atmosphere so filled with this living, vibrant vitality of plants!"

Mother frequently went there for a walk. Once, she met Prahlad, who had died some time back. He was the son of Dr Agarwal, the ophthalmologist. "Two days ago," she related to Satprem in October 1968, "the day before yesterday, I went for a stroll in a forest of the vital.... My little child, it was beautiful! Oh, a magnificent forest, and then such a well-kept forest, so clean! Oh! It was fine. A truly magnificent place, truly magnificent." Her expression showed how breathtakingly beautiful it was.

"Well then, I suddenly see a youngish Pralhad there, a mere lad, coming towards me and telling me, 'I don't know, can't find the religion.'" She mimicked his despairing tone of voice. Then laughingly said, "So I told him, 'You don't need any religion!'"

"He said, 'Oh, there is another man here who also can't find a religion.'"

"And that was Benjamin!" He was a football player in Nolini's batch; a Pondicherian Christian, Benjamin yet lived in the Ashram where he did a part of the tailoring work for the inmates; he died in 1963. I remember how, during the war years, he and Moni²⁵ used to entertain us with French patriotic songs.

Mother continued, "I said, 'He is an idiot! He doesn't need to find a religion!'" She laughed again, struck by the incongruity of the situation. "There you are.... Benjamin lost in a marvellous forest -- it's beautiful, you know -- because he can't find a religion! And Pralhad looking for a religion!"

Then Mother wished to send a comforting word to Prahlad's grieving mother, "Be consoled, Prahlad is in a very nice place!"

She remarked, "He was very well. He was very well dressed." In life the boy used to be dressed rather slovenly.

"Oh, how ridiculous it all is!"

After a silent contemplation Mother said again, "Oh, what a beautiful forest, my child. Trees as I have not seen except in Japan. Trees like columns, rising straight, planted in rows, superb! Pale green grass, light, so very light. Grass on the ground; air, lots of air; and at the same time there are only trees -- a forest. Not thick, not smothered." She saw the forest again in her mind's eye.

"Well then, in this superb place, instead of rejoicing, the imbecile," Mother assumed a wailing voice, "I don't know what happened to me, I have no religion!" She laughed outright.

"Then I told him, 'But you should rejoice! No religion.... You are in a place much finer than all the religions.'"

She said anew, "There is such a life there, such a Beauty, so much richness and plenitude that you wake up full of force, together with an absolutely marvellous feeling of energy, even if you have remained there but one minute."

She added in her precise way, "There are regions like that -- not very many, but some."

"The vital world is a world of extremes. If, for instance, you eat a bunch of grapes in the vital world, you are so nourished that you can remain thirty six hours without feeling hungry." Because grape is the fruit of life.

One day this happened in our presence. Mother was seated in her chair and we were on the carpet in front of her. Silence reigned in the room. Mother's eyes were wide open, but I could see that she was deep in contemplation; Satprem also was in meditation. Then suddenly Mother spoke to him. "Somebody has just brought from both sides at once," she made a gesture to her right and left, "one dish of grapes and another dish of grapes, like this. There was one for you and one for me." A being from the Vital had brought them. He was like me, I dare say, always happy to be able to serve Mother.

"Those grapes" -- quite frequently the vital world's food -- "are of incomparable beauty. There were two bunches; one was big, the other not so big. I don't know for whom was the bigger one, and for

²⁵1. Moni or Suresh Chakraborty was a revolutionary from Bengal. He came to Pondicherry in 1910 with a letter from Sri Aurobindo to arrange a residence for him.

whom the other? They were brought on both sides: one was on a dish, the other on a square of white paper. I assumed that the one on the square white paper was meant for me.

"Pretty! Beautiful! Grape that turns golden, you know -- transparent and golden -- when it ripens. Grape big like this." Her index and thumb were about five centimetres apart.

We, of course, had seen neither the being nor the bunches of grapes! Mother added, "When one is asleep, that is, when the body is in a state of trance, one can eat. You can feel the taste when you are outside the body. And it's very nourishing, it gives strength. I don't know how many times I have happened to eat... and mostly grapes.... Such grapes!"

"A world of extremes." And how! You can find there not only the Life Heavens but the Valley of the False Glimmer as well. It is a dangerous world. "Only a trained occultist with the infallible tact born of long experience can guide himself without stumbling or being caught through the maze," wrote Sri Aurobindo. Mirra, as we know, was certainly a trained occultist and much more. Even otherwise "Mirra is born free" as said Sri Aurobindo. Her unbound soul could, like the proverbial swan,²⁶ separate milk from water. She easily discerned the real nature of this zone; and with the' sunlight of her clear vision dispersed its shimmering mists and fogs.

"On the other hand," said Mother, "there are many unpleasant places in the vital world where it is better not to go. You can also run into things, enter places that will wrest all the energy from you in a minute, and at times leave you sick or even disabled.

"I knew a woman who, from an occult point of view, was absolutely exceptional, and a similar accident befell her in the vital world. While trying to tear away from the beings of the vital world someone to whom she was attached, she received such a blow on the eye that it made her blind in one eye." Mother was referring to Madame Theon.

It is not for nothing that this zone is called the Valley of the False Glimmer. Sri Aurobindo describes it in *Savitri*.

"It lends beauty to the terror of the gulfs
And fascinating eyes to perilous Gods,
Invests with grace the demon and the snake."

As Satprem read this to Mother, "Charming!" she exclaimed sarcastically.

"It's absolutely the characteristics of the vital, that which Theon called, 'the nervous world'."

But with all his knowledge and power Theon was unable to prevent the accident to his wife's eye. "Theon couldn't even protect her!" After more than sixty-five years Mother still felt bitter about it. That is why, when Satprem asked her if the kind of power over matter the Theons possessed would not be useful to her, she replied categorically, "No use -- NO use whatsoever." Occult power is a truncated power. It is not the almighty power.

All the same, as Mother observed once, knowledge of the occult can be useful; much can be gained by knowing those worlds. She who had to work constantly in them knew the dangers that lurked in the vital world, for example. When people 'die' they have to cross through this Valley of the False Glimmer to go beyond to other worlds. Many, most, get caught in its maze and never make it through.

"These things are very interesting," she told Satprem.

"They must form part of the work for which I have come on earth. Because even before meeting Theon, before knowing anything, I had experiences at night, certain types of night activities caring for people who had just left their bodies -- and with a knowledge (although I didn't know the process nor did I seek to know): but I knew exactly what had to be done and I did it. I was about twenty.

²⁶1. Swan or *Harnsa*: liberated soul, in Indian symbolism. And, curiously enough, Mother's signature resembled a swan with outspread wings, and the dot on the i, she told me, was the eye of the Consciousness.

"As soon as I came upon Theon's teaching -- even before meeting him personally -- and read and understood all kinds of things I hadn't known before, I began to work quite systematically. Every night, at the same hour, my work consisted in constructing between the purely terrestrial atmosphere and the psychic atmosphere a sort of path of protection across the vital, so that people wouldn't have to pass through it -- for those who are conscious but don't have the knowledge it's a very difficult passage, infernal. It is infernal. I was preparing this path -- it must have been around 1903 or 1904, I don't exactly remember -- and doing this work for months and months and months. All sorts of things happened during that time, all sorts, ex-tra-ordi-nary things. Extraordinary. I could tell long stories....

"Then when I went to Tierncen, I told Madame Theon about .it. 'Yes,' she told me, 'it is part of the work you have come on earth to do. All those with even a slightly awakened psychic being who can see your Light will go to your Light at the moment of dying, wherever they may die, and you will help them to pass through.'

"And this is a constant work. Constant. It has given me a considerable number of experiences concerning what happens to people when they leave their bodies. I've had all sorts of experiences, all kinds of examples. It's really very interesting."

But something left her puzzled. "I have had all sorts of experiences," Mother said, "for so many, so many years. For about sixty years, constantly I have aided people who are said 'to die.' Constantly. Well, there are almost as many cases as there are people.... At least twice it happened to me -- in this very existence -- 'to die,' as people call it; and both times the experience was different, although the apparent fact was the same. What I was asking myself today is: Would what is called 'death' be, by chance, a multitude of different things?"

15. Two Angry Cocks

What with this, that and the other, time imperceptibly slipped by. It was already a full month that Mirra had been in Zarif when Henri Morisset came to join her. That was on August 17. He went sightseeing with Mirra and Theon.

There were, and still are, many picturesque spots around Tierncen. For example, the Cascades d'EI Ourit are seven kilometres from the town and the road to them skirted Theon's park; a metal bridge that still clings to a mountain-side is said to have been constructed by none other than Eiffel! Another notable place they went to was the Cork Forest -- the 'Forest of Ahrif ' to give it its local name. It was some 30 kilometres away on a motorable road. Teresa, who sometimes joined the group, went this time with the other three, in spite of knowing what an unreliable driver Theon was! He rarely returned, without upsetting the cab or the car he was driving. So, when they returned safe from their outing, she noted the event in her diary: "September 13, 1906 -- Went with Theon & M. & Madame Morisset to the Cork Forest."

Teresa's diary, ²⁷ its pages yellowed with age, has numerous entries; she kept in it a record of the comings and goings and doings of Theon and Theon a and their guests.

Madame Theon, however, rarely went out with them. Her occult work left her too tired, as Mother said. Besides, when Mirra looked out of her window in the morning, she would often perceive a figure wrapped in a red shawl, for Madame Theon was prone to colds. Seated in a corner of the courtyard, she was already at work -- writing. She wrote and she wrote. One felt her attention fully absorbed in an inaudible voice, as though she were taking a dictation. Unless, of course, she was writing down what her inner eyes were seeing in other worlds. Be that as it may, when she passed away, she left behind her more than 12,000 written pages, according to Pascal Themanlys.

Her own work with Theon was generally done after lunch.

The nature of Alma's work made her retiring. But her goodness of heart made her fond of the simple local folk, and she comforted them when they poured out their sorrows to her.

It is likely that Henri, as an artist, was much taken with the view the countryside presented and the colourful locals. But it is almost certain that he was less taken with Theon. Mother, while talking to Pavitra and Satprem about Madame Theon, recalled an episode figuring the above two.

"Madame Theon was an extraordinary occultist. She was a small woman, fat, soft almost, giving you the impression that if you were to lean against her, it would melt! I remember once... I was there in Tierncen with Andre's father -- a painter, an artist -- who had come to join us.

"Now, Theon was wearing a dark violet robe. So Theon told him, 'This robe is purple.'

"The other one replied, 'No, in French it is not purple, it is violet.'

"Theon bristled, 'When I say purple, it is purple!'

"When suddenly a flash came out of my head: 'No, it's too ridiculous!' I didn't utter a word, you know, but it came out of my head -- I saw the flash.

"Madame Theon got up, came and stood behind me. Neither of us had spoken a word. The other two were glaring at each other like angry cocks. Then she put my head on her breast -- I had exactly the feeling of sinking into eiderdown!

"Well then," Mother continued, "never in my life have I felt such peace, never. It was absolutely luminous, and soft... such a peace, you know, so soft, so tender, so luminous. Next, she bent over my ears and murmured, 'You must never argue with your master!' I wasn't the one who was arguing!

²⁷I. With the kind permission of Jackie Semenoff, we were able to procure some relevant data from this diary.

"She was a wonderful woman, wonderful.

"But he... well."

Teresa noted in her diary, "October 15, 1906: Mr and Mme Morisset left."

* * *

The Morrissets returned to France.

Mirra continued translating Madame Theon's work for the *Cosmic Review* and getting the magazine printed. Only this time, that is, from 1906 onwards, Mirra herself became one of its regular contributors. "I also wrote a thing or two. ..."

She went on with her life of artist on the one hand, and on the other she busied herself with a group she had already formed with a small number of like-minded men and women -- people, who, in spite of the dazzling triumphs of physical Science, believed "it was a mistake to think that we live physically only," as said Sri Aurobindo. The group was named 'Idea' and it assembled once every week or every fortnight in the house of one member or another, including the Morissets' Atelier at 15 rue Lemercier. The meetings were held at night. Generally philosophical ideas were discussed. The subject for the meeting was often decided beforehand and the members read out their papers. Apart from this, Mirra also noted down special happenings which occurred during 'the meetings. Thus we have *Un Chef*²⁸ ('A Leader'), describing the visit of a Russian revolutionary in January 1907.

Andre Morisset never forgot how he had peeped at the on-going meeting one night. He had stationed himself at the top step of the stairway which went down from the bridge to the Atelier. Though the five-to six-year-old boy understood nothing he listened. He was discovered and ran back to bed. Next morning his mother told him that there was no need to get up from his bed and go there to see what was happening. "You have only to get out of your body and come." Mirra explained to her son that a human being is not limited to his physical body alone, but can go to other places and see what is going on. We don't know what the child understood, but it struck him as so extraordinary that he remembered it till the end of his days.

²⁸1. Later published in *Words of Long Ago*.

14. Satan

Mother was deploring the lack of mental qualities in the Ashram children. "These children don't understand Sri Aurobindo's irony," she told Satprem. "Happily, on this point of humour, there was a meeting of Sri Aurobindo's mind and mine," she said. "They read prosaically," she moved her palm in the air in a gesture of superficiality. "Strangely enough, it's the same phenomenon when they read Anatole France."²⁹ And Anatole France, read without understanding his irony, is abominably commonplace.

"They don't grasp the irony.

"Sri Aurobindo had it. He understood the irony of Anatole France so well, he had this same thing - so subtle, so refilled."

Indeed, except perhaps for two or three, there was a real dearth of 'refined,' that is, clear-thinking minds in the Ashram. Yet, time and again, Sri Aurobindo laid stress on this quality. "One of the most fundamental requisites for the search of the Truth," he declared, "is a critical reason, almost a cynical mind which tears off the mask and refuses to accept current ideas, thoughts and opinions. It is a kind of solvent. Man must have the courage to see the Truth as it is without any deception about it. Shaw³⁰ has got that critical mind to a great extent and we find the same in Anatole France."

And here is Sri Aurobindo on Anatole France.

Dilip Kumar Roy once sent Sri Aurobindo a quotation from Anatole France's *Les Dieux ont soif* (*The Gods Are Thirsty*): "Either God would prevent evil if he could, but could not, or he could but would not, or he neither could nor would, or he both would and could. If he would but could not, he is impotent, if he could but would not, he is perverse, if he neither could nor would he is at once impotent and perverse; if he both could and would why on earth hasn't he done it, Father?"

Then in his characteristic way Dilip added, "I send this to you as I immensely enjoyed the joke and am sure you would too, hoping you would have something to fend it off with."

Dilip was right. Sri Aurobindo thoroughly enjoyed the joke and, what's more, didn't forget to fend it off. "Anatole France is always amusing whether he is iron-ising about God and Christianity or about the rational animal man or Humanity (with a big H) and the follies of his reason and his conduct.

"But I presume you never heard of God's explanation of his non-interference to Anatole France when they met in some Heaven of Irony, I suppose -- it can't have been in the heaven of Karl Marx, in spite of France's conversion before his death. God is reported to have strolled up to him and said: I say, Anatole, you know that was a good joke of yours; but there was a good cause 'too for my non-interference. Reason came along and told me: "Look here, why do you pretend to exist? You know you don't exist and never existed or, if you do, you have made such a mess of your creation that we can't tolerate you any longer. Once we have got you out of the way all will be right upon earth, tip-top, A-1; my daughter Science and I have arranged that between us. Man will raise his noble brow, the head of creation, dignified, free, equal, fraternal, democratic, depending upon nothing but himself, with nothing greater than himself anywhere in existence. There will be no God, no gods, no churches, no priestcraft, no religion, no kings, no oppression, no poverty, no war or discord anywhere. Industry will fill the earth with abundance, Commerce will spread her golden reconciling wings everywhere. Universal education will stamp out ignorance and leave no room for folly or unreason in any human brain; man will become

²⁹1. Anatole France (pseudonym of Jacques Anatole Thibault -- 1844-1924), French novelist, received the 1921 Nobel prize.

³⁰1. George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), Irish dramatist, received the 1925 Nobel prize. His views on the Jewish-Christian God are strikingly similar to Anatole France's. He dubbed Christianity 'Crossianity.'

cultured, disciplined, rational, scientific, well-informed, arriving always at the right conclusion upon full and sufficient data. The voice of the scientists and the experts will be loud in the land and guide mankind to the earthly paradise. A perfected society; health universalised by a developed medical science and a sound hygiene; everything rationalised; science evolved, infallible, omnipotent, omniscient; the riddle of existence solved; the Parliament of Man, the Federation of the world; evolution, of which man, magnificent man, is the last term, completed in the noble white race; a humanitarian kindness and uplifting for our backward brown, yellow and black brothers; peace, peace, peace, reason, order, unity everywhere." There was a lot more like that, Anatole, and I was so much impressed by the beauty of the picture and its convenience, for I would have nothing to do or to supervise, that I at once retired from business -- for, you know that I was always of a retiring disposition and inclined to keep myself behind the veil or in the background at the best of times. But what is this I hear? It does not seem to me from reports that Reason even with the help of Science has kept her promise. And if not, why not? Is it because she would not, or because she could not? Or is it because she both would not and could not? Or because she both would and could, but somehow did not? And I say, Anatole, these children of theirs, the State, Industrialism, Capitalism, Communism and the rest have a queer look; they seem very much like Titanic monsters armed, too, with all the powers of Intellect and all the weapons and organisation of Science! And it does look as if mankind were no freer under them than under the Kings and the Churches!! What has happened? -- or is it possible that Reason is not supreme and infallible, even that she has made a greater mess of it than I could have done myself?!! Here the report of the conversation ends; I give it for what it is worth, for I am not acquainted with this God and have to take him on trust from Anatole France."

Sri Aurobindo clarified, "The conception of the Divine as an external omnipotent Power who has 'created' the world and governs it like an absolute and arbitrary monarch -- the Christian or Semitic conception -- has never been mine; it contradicts too much my seeing and experience during thirty years of sadhana."

And for Mother that 'God' in the manner of Anatole France was inadmissible. "It made me, if I may say so, a complete atheist in my childhood." However, when Mirra read Anatole France she was also greatly interested, because she was struck by the similarity between his view and Theon's idea on the Jewish-Christian God. "He was an Asura who wanted to be the 'one and only God,' that's why he became the most terrible despot imaginable," Mother said quoting Theon. "That's what Anatole France said too I now know that Anatole France hadn't read Theon's store; but where did he pick that up? I don't know. It's in *The Revolt of the Angels*. He says that Satan is the God and Jehovah, the 'one and only God' is the monster. And when the angels wanted Satan to become the only God, he perceived that he was immediately taking on all the failings of Jehovah! So he refused. He said, 'No-no.thank you very much' It's admirable story. And in exactly the same vein as than Theon said. As it happens, that was the first thing I asked Anatole France." She interrupted herself to day to Satprem, I told you once that I met him. Common friends took me to him. The first thing I asked him was, Have you ever read the Tradition?' 'No' he told me. I explained to him why I had asked and he was interested. He said his source was his own imagination. But he had caught the idea... intuitively "

She referred again to Sri Aurobindo. "'Very good' he would have said while reading *The Revolt of the Angels*. 'True, which of the two should we believe? Jehovah or the rebellious Angel who wanted to take his place?'

Then, as an associated recollection crossed her mind, Mother said, "Do you remember I once told you I had clothed a vital Being in a body?"

"Is that Being still alive?" Satprem queried. "Who was it?"

"I have spoken of this before," she replied. "I recounted the story of the revolution in China, and how this Being left me, saying ..." Mother did not complete her sentence. "It was just five years before the Chinese revolution. I have told the story." She repeated, "I know I told it. But it was never noted down."

She explained, "I used to dictate. Theon had taught me to speak while in trance -- that is, he had taught my body to express itself -- and I would tell him everything I was doing while doing it. And he never noted any of it down. I suspect he did it on purpose-he had no wish to make revelations. So it's

totally lost." There was a tinge of regret in her voice. "But had it been noted down hour by hour, minute by minute, it would have made an extraordinary scientific document on the occult. He never noted it down."

"But this vital Being clothed in a body," Satprem brought Mother back to his earlier question, "did he live on earth for any length of time?"

"No, never."

"Never?"

"He stopped at the subtle physical -- he himself refused to go any further." She now disclosed his identity. "It was Satan, the Asura of Light, who, in cutting himself off from the Supreme, fell into Unconsciousness and Darkness -- I have told the story many times. But anyway, when I was with Theon, I called that Being up and asked him if he wanted to come into contact with the earth. It's worth mentioning that it was the first born's central being. Of course, he had millions of emanations in the world, but this was the central being in person. He agreed to be clothed in a body. Theon wanted to keep him there with him: 'Don't let him go,' he told me. I made no reply. This Being told me he didn't want to be more material than that and it sufficed -- you could feel him move the way you feel a draught, it was that concrete.

"And he said he was going to set in motion the Chinese revolution. I am going to organize a secret society to set in motion the revolution in China,' he told me. 'And mark my words, it will happen in exactly five years.' And he gave me the date.

"I noted it down. And EXACTLY five years later, it happened.³¹ Afterwards I met people coming from China, who told me it had all been the work of a secret society. They told me about it because that society used a certain sign, and instinctively I made that sign without knowing about it while one of them was speaking to me." Mother put one fist on top of the other. "'Ah, you are one of us,' that person said to me. I didn't answer. Then he told me everything."

It would seem that revolutionaries were attracted to Mirra like fireflies to a lamp. Is it to be wondered at? Surely not. For was she not Revolution incarnate? Apart from Sri Aurobindo and Mother who else has striven to revolutionize evolution itself? Do we know anyone?

"But, you know," Mother said pensively, "it's really interesting because the exact date was given. In exactly five years the revolution will take place,' he told me. He knew it before he left. 'And that,' he said, 'will be the beginning, the first terrestrial movement heralding the transformation of...'" She elucidated, "Theon didn't use the word *supramental*, he used to say 'the new world on earth.'"

This episode had remained embedded in her mind, half-forgotten perhaps after a gap of fifty-six years. For she said again, "But I did note that down. I had forgotten the whole story in between, because I now live constantly in the Becoming. But I have recaptured it."

She added firmly, "And all the disbelief in the world can't contradict that piece of evidence."

Where was that piece of evidence?

"The note itself was stolen from me while I was moving to a new house.

"Two things were stolen: that note and the Mantra of Life -- I told you about that. And I suspect that it was an occult theft, not an ordinary one; because people didn't even have an inkling of the value of those papers, which had no interest for most people.

"Well, till we *meet* again, my child." With a smile and a swish of her gown she was gone.

However, another time she gave some extra news about these four great Asuras. As always, her explanation to Satprem was fuller than her hint to the children some years before.

³¹1. In 1905, Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) made a loose alliance with other anti-Manchu groups and formed the TONGMENGHUI, which was the direct ancestor of KUOMIN-TANG. After several abortive uprisings the Revolt of October 1911 was crowned with spectacular success -- and exactly five years earlier, in October 1906, Mirra was in Tiencen.

"The first one," she said, "whom religions call Satan, the Asura of Consciousness, was converted and has worked -- is still working. The second" -- Love and Ananda -- "annulled himself in the Supreme."

That leaves two. In occultism one of them is designated as the 'Lord of Death' and the other as the 'Lord of Falsehood' -- he, however, proclaims himself the 'Lord of Nations.' Frankly speaking, nations are puppets in his hands. "Effectively, it's he who has directed the whole course of world events during the last few centuries," said Mother.

In any case, before he left for China, Satan cautioned Mirra. "When that Asura of Consciousness made his surrender and was converted, he told me, 'I have billions of emanations and these will go on with their own lives, but their root, their source has now run dry.' How much time will it take to exhaust it all?" Mother wondered. "Whatever has already spread out keeps going and follows its karma."

I too wonder. Isn't their karma completed after eighty years? For, I do seem to smell billions of rotting fish floating dead on the surface of the sea.

At any rate, Mother consoled us twenty-seven years ago. "We can't say. But the source has dried up, and that is an extremely important thing."

Satan's setting in motion the revolution in China was an important milestone in history, as was President J.F. Kennedy's assassination. "There are landmarks of that kind.... I told you, you remember, how that great Asura -- who in fact was the first born, and for whom I built a subtle body -- had said he was going to China and that China's revolution -- a long time ago! -- would signal the beginning of the work of terrestrial transformation. Those things are like milestones on a road, and the Chinese revolution was like the first milestone which opened up the road. Well, Kennedy's assassination pertains to those signs, it's one of the landmarks. I have been told this."

This was in November 1963. Then the next year on 15 October, Nikita Khrushchev was removed from his twin posts of USSR's prime minister and First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. Mother said it was "a VIOLENT regression." Later she clarified. "But I was counting on Kennedy, not without reason, for he gave his assent to join Russia for establishing peace upon earth. The talks had started and they had seized the opportunity of China's aggression against India. The other one in Russia who had responded, Khrushchev, isn't dead because he left in time!" As for President Kennedy's assassination, "It has as though served to trigger one of the movements of the earth's transformation."

But what is interesting, and disconcerting, is that these 'milestones' are negative, as though the worst had to be traversed -- or the worst given a free hand -- for the door of the New to open.

15. At the Threshold of the Formless

Weeks and months went by after the Morissets' return from Algeria. The year 1907 was well in its stride. Mirra was twenty-nine years old. Her ten years of intimate mingling with artists was drawing to its close -- she had seen the boundaries of their world. After living ten years with Henri, it became amply evident to her that their parting of the ways had come.

She returned to Tierncen for the second year running.

"18 July 1907 -- Mirra came," Teresa noted in her diary.

Quite unexpectedly, on this second visit, Mirra was on the verge of discovering a secret. Mother disclosed this to Satprem when replying to a question of his. He wanted "to understand the process" -- Sri Aurobindo's or the Veda's -- by which the Supermind was to be found.

She replied, "My own experience I know and can speak about in detail. There is also what Theon and Madarne Theon used to say."

She remarked upon the vision of Theon and Madame Theon converging on that of the Veda -- the world of Truth which must incarnate on this earth and create a new world. "They even picked up the old phrase from the Gospels, 'New heavens and a new earth.'

"Because Theon also knew about it. He knew and called it 'the new world,' I think, or 'the new creation upon the earth and the glorified body.' But anyway, he knew the Supramental's existence -- he had had the revelation of it and that's what he announced. He also said that it would be reached through the discovery of the inner Divine; and that that would lead to the 'thing.' For him, as I told you the other day, the 'thing' had a greater density -- it seems to be a correct experience. Well, for my part, I made investigations and saw the earth's history in innumerable visions, about which I spoke a lot with Sri Aurobindo."

To whom she also told what Theon had said to her about Barlet and his "idea that the perfect man, the immortal man, would be spherical." And Sri Aurobindo, who always enjoyed a joke, repeated it in an informal chat with his disciples. "This question about the nature of the Supramental body was answered by Theon. He was in France at that time and he said the Supramental body would be a 'body of light -- *corps glorieux*.' He had a number of disciples, some of whom were mathematicians and scientists. One of them brought the solution one day that the body of the Superman would be a sphere! Theon said, It may be, but it would be very inconvenient if people want to kiss each other!"³²

Although Theon had all the knowledge, it was actually his wife who had all the experience FOR him. Mother gave a graphic description of the process she used. "Madame Theon had this experience, and it is she who, not actually taught me, but gave me the indication of how it was to be done. She would go out of her body and become conscious in the vital world -- there were many intermediary states too, if one cared to explore them. After the vital came the mental ; you consciously went out of the vital body, left it behind -- you could see it -- and entered the mental world. Then you left the mental body and entered into... And in like manner she successively left twelve different bodies, one after the other. She would leave one body and enter the consciousness of the new plane she was in -- she was extremely 'formed,' you see, individualized and organized, I mean -- then fully experience the surroundings and all that was there, and describe it. And so on twelve times."

The Indian term for these bodies is *kosha* or 'sheath.' You leave your 'food sheath,' or the material body, on the material plane; then you enter the vital plane in your vital sheath; there you unsheath again to enter the mental plane. And so forth.

"I did the same thing," said Mother. "With great dexterity even. I could halt on any plane, do , what I had to do there, move around and look, study, and then tell and record what I had seen. And my

³²1. *Evening Talks with Sri Aurobindo*, by A.B. Purani.

last stage abutted upon the Formless -- Theon almost used the Jewish terminology: the Supreme without form he called 'the Formless.' From this last stage -- which Theon called 'pathetism,'³³ a very barbaric but very expressive word -- one passed on to the Formless. There was no further body to leave behind, one was beyond all form, even all thought-forms, all possible forms were ended. In this domain one experienced total unity -- unity in something that was the essence of Love; Love being a manifestation more... 'dense,' he would always say -- there were all sorts of different 'densities'; Love was a denser expression of that. that was the sense of perfect Unity -- perfect unity and identity -- and that no longer had any form corresponding to those of the lower worlds. It was a Light! An almost immaculate white light, but with something of a golden-rose in it. Words are crude. This Light and this Experience were truly marvellous, it's inexpressible in words," Mother shook her head.

"Well then, once I was there -- Theon said not to cross to the other side, because one did not return -- but once there, I wanted to pass over to the other side. When, in a quite unexpected and astounding way, I found myself in the presence of the 'principle' as it were, a principle of the human form. It bore no resemblance to man as we see him, but it was an upright form, standing just on the borderline between the world of forms and the Formless, like a kind of 'standard.' At the time nobody had ever spoken to me about it, and Madame Theon had never seen it; nobody had ever seen or said anything. But I felt that I was on the point of discovering a secret."

Mother, during another conversation, had remarked upon the evolution of the human form showing a trend towards diminishing the difference between the male and the female forms. "More and more they resemble what I myself had seen on the highest height. I had seen it at the beginning of the century, even before knowing of Sri Aurobindo's existence, and without having ever heard the word 'supramental.' Nothing. No idea. I saw on the highest height, there at the threshold of the Formless, at the extreme limit, an ideal form resembling the human form -- it was an idealized form, neither man nor woman. A luminous form, a form of golden light.

³³1. Theon defines 'pathetism' as 'the Second World responding specially to Love.'

At the treshold of the Formless

"Afterwards, when I met Sri Aurobindo and talked with him about it, he told me. It is certainly the prototype of the supramental form.' I saw it several times again, later on, so this proved to be true.

"I did this experiment approximately in 1904 -- I think it was in 1904." It was in 1907 actually. "Consequently, when I arrived here, it was all an accomplished work and a known domain. Thus, when the question of finding the Supermind came up I had only to do my experiment again, to which I was well accustomed. I was used to doing it; I was taught to do it at will, through successive exteriorizations. It was a voluntary process."

16. The Mantra of Life

"From that highest height I would redescend," said Mother, "reentering my bodies one after the other -- you really feel the friction, you feel you are retaking a body and reentering."

She let fall that "when one is on that highest height, the body is in a cataleptic state." Which is neither sleep nor death, but a state in between.

Satprem the seeker, sought to know, "Is there a difference between sleep and death? Or are they the same?"

"Death and sleep? Oh, no!"

"But isn't sleep like death?" he insisted. "When asleep one is no longer in one's body; everything else goes out just as it does at the time of death. No?"

"Oh, no! Not at all," she disagreed. "No. The cataleptic state of trance, yes, it's like death, apart from the link which remains -- only a link remains, otherwise everything goes out. Actually, the body becomes cataleptic when everything has gone out. Otherwise all that is most material in the vital remains in the body."

The work Mirra did with Theon was "quite a perilous work, moreover. It was the body's life-energy that went out -- everything, everything went out, just as when you die. Besides, that's how I came to experience death."

"I mean," Satprem chipped in, "aren't the places you go to in sleep the same as the ones you go to after death?"

"No. No-no." Then she gave the underlying reason for sleep and described what mostly happens in reality during sleep. She stated, moreover, "But no two sleeps are alike, my child. And the same goes for death -- no two are alike. But they are different because... they are different STATES."

She repeated, "The STATES are different. While you have a body you are not in the same state as when you are 'dead.' After the doctors have declared you 'dead' there is a period of seven days when you are still in an intermediary state. But the state of death, death proper, is totally different because there is no longer this physical base."

Mother took up the theme of the body's cataleptic state, giving her own example. "Once... it happened twice, but I am not sure about the second time as I was alone. The first time was in Tierncen and I was with Theon. My body was in a cataleptic state and I was in a conscious trance. But it was a special kind of catalepsy, in that my body could speak. I could speak, although very slowly -- Theon had taught me how to do it. Well, anyhow, it can be done because the life of the form' always remains and this is what takes seven days to leave." Mother was always indignant at the way Indians cremate their dead so soon, only a few hours after they are pronounced dead.

"The life of the form, when trained, can make the body move -- although the being is not there -- at any rate, it can make it utter words." She then gave additional details on her own case.

"By and by, while I was still in catalepsy, the body began to live again, that is, it was able to speak and even move. The body managed to get up and move about. And yet everything had gone out of it. When everything goes out, the body becomes cold, of course, but there's a body-consciousness which manages to draw a little energy from the air, from this and that. And I would speak in that state; I spoke -- I could speak very well and would recount all that I was seeing elsewhere."

In this state life literally hangs by a thread.

"However, this state is not without danger, the proof being that during my work, for some reason or the other -- obviously due to some negligence on Theon's part who was there to watch over me -- the cord, I don't know what to call it, went snap!" There was a faint rueful smile on Mother's face. "The link was cut malevolently."

Satprem shuddered. With reason. For, as a rule, it denotes a point of no return. To put it simply, when a spirit goes out from a body that is asleep or in a trance -- as in Mirra's case -- as long as life continues in the body the spirit is attached to it by a tenuously thin cord of silver light which is capable of stretching to an infinite distance.

I was told by a Tantrik that this was how the Rishis of yore could stay in trance for such long periods of time without dying. They left their bodies seated on the earth while their spirits went roaming, for instance, in the Sun-world (*Suryaloka*). To take an example at random, Mirra visited distant planets, we learn from Sri Aurobindo. It was way back in 1934 when a disciple was "wondering whether the Mother has been able to establish a direct connection with Mars or any other far-off planet."

Sri Aurobindo wrote back, "A long time ago Mother was going everywhere in the subtle body but she found it of a very secondary interest. Our attention must be fixed on the earth because our work is here. Besides, the earth is a concentration of all the other worlds and one can touch them by touching something corresponding in the earth-atmosphere."

But evidently great precaution should be taken to guard the material body while the subtle body or the spirit goes out of it.³⁴ It can be darned dangerous. However, if sudden danger threatens the body, the silver cord is able to recall the spirit to animate it. But if that silver cord is once severed, the body dies. That is generally the case of people who are said to have "died in their sleep."

And why was the link "cut malevolently"?

Mother answered Satprem's mute question. "Theon made me find the Mantra of Life, the mantra that gives life. And he wanted me to give it to him, he wanted to possess it -- the thing was formidable! It was preserved in a place." Not physical, of course. "It was the mantra that gives life -- it can make anyone return to life, but that's only a small part of its power. This mantra was shut away, sealed, with my name on it in Sanskrit. I didn't know Sanskrit at that time, but he did. When he led me to that place, I told him, 'There is a sort of design, it must be Sanskrit.' I could recognize the characters as Sanskrit. So he told me to reproduce what I was seeing. I reproduced it. And it was my name, Mirra, written in Sanskrit. It was meant for me, and none but I could open it. He told me -- we were doing this when I was in a catalytic state -- 'Open it and tell me what is there.' Then something in me knew at once, and I said, 'No.' And I didn't read it."

Mirra's refusal made Theon violently angry, and it was this that snapped the silver cord.

"I had gone out of my body in an entirely material way, the body was in a cataleptic state, and the link got cut. So the link was cut."

Satprem, ever curious, asked, "But what was the experience at that moment?"

"The experience was," Mother said laughingly, "impossible to enter that!"

Then in a more serious vein she went on, "When I wanted to return, when it was time to return, I couldn't get through. But Theon was there -- Theon was scared stiff! But I was able to warn him. I alerted him, saying, 'The cord is cut.'

"He was capable; he knew -- he knew how to 'pull.' So he used his power and his knowledge to make me return. But it was no joke! It was very difficult," she said mildly.

She reverted to Satprem's first question. "And that's when I had the experience of the two different states; because there, the part that had gone out had gone without the body's support -- the link was cut. Then I knew. I was, of course, in a special state since I was doing a certain work in full consciousness with all the vital power, and I was mistress not only of my surroundings but... But, you see, what happens is a kind of reversal of consciousness -- you begin to belong to another world. You feel this quite

³⁴I. A story from Shankaracharya's life (788-820 A.D.) illustrates this. Shankara-charya had been a sannyasin since his childhood, and once he needed to have the experience of worldly life. Having asked a disciple of his to keep a close watch over his body for a year, he left it and entered the body of a dying king. After living a king's life for a whole year, Shankaracharya left the king's body and returned to his own, having acquired the knowledge he wanted. He would seem to have acquired a Tantric process -- a *siddhi* -- by which yogis transfer themselves into another body.

distinctly. Now, Theon instantly asked me to concentrate -- I was getting ready to go wandering off! He was in a mortal dread that I would die on him! He entreated me to concentrate, so I concentrated on my body."

An impossible situation, surely! "But Theon was there," so the reentry into the body was made possible.

Knowledge was an important factor. "There was, from an occult point of view, knowledge -- a goodly knowledge! There was knowledge as well as the will," Mother made a gesture of pushing to reenter the body. "And also an inner faith -- but I never spoke about it -- a concentration." Another factor helped. "Besides, the body was not deteriorated, you see; it was undamaged, so it wasn't difficult. It was in a very good condition, only the thread was cut -- that is, what gives life had gone out and could no longer return.

"I returned as a result of the power and the will, because... In fact, simply because I still had something to do on the earth."

We suppressed our smiles at Mother's understatement.

"But when I reentered, it hurt horribly. Hurt atrociously. An excruciating pain, terrible, terrible, as though you were entering into a hell."

"Into a...?" Satprem was flabbergasted.

"Into a hell." Mother laughed. Yet it was no laughing matter. On the contrary the reentry was "an unforgettable suffering," she told us once.

"It was terrible. It doesn't last," she added.

"He made me drink half a glass of cognac. He always made me take some every day after the session, because I remained working in trance for more than an hour -- which is generally a forbidden practice.

"But still, I am quite sure that had it not been he and I, that would have been the end. I would not have reentered.

"So, even in my outermost consciousness I know a little bit. A little bit, that's all."

And she said in conclusion, "No, sleep is something else. Yes, something else. It's more like a falling back into the Inconscient. We all know, of course, that the Divine Consciousness is there in the depths of the Inconscient. But for some reason, probably owing to the necessities of the Work, I've never had, to my knowledge, a fully unconscious sleep."

As for the Mantra of Life, "I found it again when I was with Sri Aurobindo. And I gave it to Sri Aurobindo.

"But that is another story again."

17. The Being of Irised Light

Mother took it for granted that "we all know, of course, that the Divine Presence is there in the depths of the Inconscient." But do we?

Well, anyway, as it happens, Mother had SEEN the Divine in the Inconscient.

It was in the 1920s. "After I returned from Japan, and we began to work together," Mother recounted to Satprem, "Sri Aurobindo had already brought down the supramental light into the mental world and was trying to transform the Mind. It's strange,' he told me, 'it is an endless work! Nothing seems to get done -- everything is done and then has to be constantly done all over again.'

"Then I gave him my personal impression, which went back to the old days with Theon, It will be like that until we touch bottom.'

"So, instead of continuing to work in the Mind, we both descended almost immediately -- in a day or two it was done -- from the Mind into the Vital.

"This lasted for a few months.

"Then we descended into the Physical -- and all the trouble began. But we didn't stay on in the Physical, we descended into the Subconscient. And from the Subconscient to the Inconscient. That was how we worked.

"And it was only when I descended into the Inconscient that I found the Divine Presence, there, in the heart of Darkness."

Satprem was intensely interested to learn this and waited for Mother to go on.

"This wasn't the first time. When I was working with Theon at Tierncen -- the second time I was there -- I once descended into the total, unindividualized, that is, general Inconscient. Total. It was when he wanted me to find the Mantra of Life. And there I suddenly found myself in front of something which opened -- like a vault or a grotto, of course it was only something like' -- and when it opened, I saw a Being of irised light reclining with his head on his hand, fast asleep. All the light around him was iridescent.

"When I told Theon what I was seeing, he said it was 'the Immanent God in the depths of the Inconscient.'"

Her audience of one listened in rapt attention.

"But then a rather remarkable phenomenon occurred. When I looked at him, he opened his eyes -- he woke up. He expressed that it was the beginning of conscious, wakeful action.

"I have experienced the descent into the Inconscient many times. You remember," Mother reminded Satprem, "once, you were there the day it happened -- it had to do with Divine Love. That experience of descending to the very bottom of the Inconscient and finding there the Divine Consciousness, the Divine Presence, in one form or another, has happened quite frequently."

In some traditions, we find accounts full of imagery, depicting a Being of prismatic light, lying in a deep sleep in the cave of the Inconscient. When Divine Love comes missioned down, its touch awakens him 'to an immobile activity by radiation. "Countless rays issue from his body and spread throughout the Inconscient, and little by little, they awaken in each thing, in each atom as it were, the aspiration to Consciousness and the beginning of evolution," she explained.

"I had that experience.

"I had the experience of being 'missioned,' so to speak, in a form of Love and Consciousness combined emanated directly into the nethermost depths of the Inconscient. And there, I had the impression of being, or rather of finding a symbolic Being in deep sleep... so veiled that he was almost invisible. Then, at my contact, the veil seemed to be rent and, without his awakening, there was a kind of radiation spreading out. I can still see my vision."

With Mother it was the case of once seen, never forgotten: "I don't have the memory of sound, but the memory of the eyes- astounding. A thing seen once, never forgotten."

This particular vision was published in the *Cosmic Review*, 1906, exactly as Mirra had written it in French. We give below its translation.

"I slept, and now I am awake.

"I slept upon the westward waters and now I penetrate into the ocean to fathom its depths. Its surface is the green of beryl, silvered by moonbeams. Below, the water is the blue of sapphire and already faintly luminous.

"Reclining on the waves' silken folds, I descend; rocked from one undulating wave to another in a gentle rhythm, I am borne in a straight line towards the west. The deeper I go, the more luminous the water becomes, great silvery currents coursing through it.

"Cradled from wave to wave, for a long while I descend deeper, ever deeper.

"All at once, looking above me, I glimpse something roseate; I draw nearer and discern a coralesque shrub, as large as a tree, held fast to a blue reef. The denizens of the waters, myriad and diverse, glide to and fro. Now I find myself standing upon fine, shining sand. I gaze about me in wonder. There are mountains and valleys, fantastic forests, strange flowers that could as well be animals, and fish that might be flowers -- there is no separation, no gap between stationary beings and non-stationary. Colours everywhere, shimmering, brilliant or muted, but always harmonious and refined. I walk upon the golden sands and contemplate all this beauty bathed in a soft, pale blue radiance; tiny, luminous spheres of red, green and gold circulating through it.

"How marvellous are the depths of the sea! Everywhere the presence of the One in whom all harmonies reside is felt!

"Ever westward I advance, not tiring, not slowing. Sight succeeds sight in incredible variety. Here upon a rock of lapis lazuli stretch fine and delicate seaweeds like long blond or violet tresses; here are great, rose-hued fortress walls, all streaked with silver; here flowers seem chiselled from enormous diamonds; here goblets, as beautiful as though crafted by the most skilled carver, are filled with what appear to be droplets of emerald, alternately vibrant with light and shade.

"Presently I wend my way between two rock walls, blue as sapphire, upon a path flecked with silver; and the water becomes ever purer and more luminous.

"A sudden turn in the path and I find myself before a grotto which seems fashioned in wrought crystal, scintillating with prismatic radiance.

"Standing there between two iridescent pillars is a very tall figure; his face, framed in short blond curls, is that of a very young man; his eyes are sea-green; he is clad in a pale blue tunic, and like wings upon his shoulders are great fins, white as snow. Beholding me, he steps aside against a pillar to let me pass. Barely have I crossed the threshold when an exquisite melody strikes my ears. The waters are all iridescent here, the ground aglow with lustrous pearls; opaline the portico and vault, hung gracefully with stalactites; delectable perfumes hover everywhere; galleries, niches and alcoves open out on all sides; but directly ahead of me I perceive a great light and towards it I bend my steps. There are broad rays of gold, silver, sapphire, emerald and ruby, radiating outward in all directions, born from a centre too distant for me to discern; to this centre I feel drawn by a powerful attraction.

"Now I see whence these rays emanate. I see a recumbent oval of white light girdled by a superb rainbow, and I sense that the One whom the light hides from *my* view is plunged in a profound repose. For long I remain at the outer edge of the rainbow, trying to pierce the light and see the One who is sleeping girdled by such splendour. Unable to discern anything, I enter the rainbow, and thence into the white and shining oval. Here I see a marvellous Being, stretched on what seems to be a drift of white eiderdown. His supple body, of incomparable beauty, is clad in a long, white robe. His head rests on his folded arm, but of that I can see only his long hair, the hue of ripened wheat, flowing over his shoulders. A great and sweet emotion sweeps through me at this magnificent spectacle, and a deep reverence as well.

"Has the sleeper sensed my presence? For now he awakens and rises in all his grace and beauty. He turns towards me and his eyes meet mine, mauve and luminous eyes with a gentle, an infinitely tender

expression. Wordlessly he bids me a sublime welcome and my whole being joyously responds. Taking my hand, he leads me to the couch he has just left. I stretch out on this downy whiteness, and his harmonious visage bends over me; a sweet current of force enters wholly into me, invigorating, revitalizing each cell.

"Then, girdled by the splendid colours of the rainbow, enveloped by lulling melodies and exquisite perfumes, beneath his gaze so powerful, so tender, I float into a beatific repose. And during my sleep I learn many beautiful and useful things.

"Of all these marvellous things, understood without the noise of words, I mention only one.

"Wherever there is beauty, wherever there is radiance, wherever there is progress towards perfection, whether in the Heaven of the heights or of the depths, there, assuredly, is found the form and similitude of man -- man, supreme terrestrial evolver."

Thus ended Mirra's account of her vision.

"And it is remarkable," concluded Mother, "that this marvellous Being strangely resembles him whose vision I had one day: the Being who is found at the other extremity -- at the borderline of the form and the Formless. Only, the latter was in a golden glory, carmine, while in its sleep this other Being was diamond white, emanating opalescent rays.

"That, in fact, is the origin of all the Avatars."

18. A Skilled Occultist

In spite of all the astonishing happenings at Tierncen with which we have become acquainted, Mother still had other startling news up her sleeve.

"There were some amazing things," she said.

Then she dropped her bombshell of a revelation. "Theon also showed me how to deflect lightning."

"Can it be done?" asked an astounded Satprem.

"Ah, yes!" she was positive. "He used to do it."

"But it takes a formidable power!"

"Oh, he had a formidable power!" She laughed, "Theon had a formidable power.

"I saw him deflect a bolt of lightning! I SAW it!" she said rubbing her eyes. "I can't say I dreamed it -- I saw it." She shook her head in wonder. "How did he do it? I don't know."

She mused awhile. "One stormy day -- there were terrible thunderstorms over there -- he climbed to the high terrace above the sitting room.

"It's a strange time to be going up there,' I said to him.

"He started to laugh, 'Come along, don't be afraid!'"

"So I went up with him. He began chanting some invocations and then I clearly saw a bolt of lightning that had been heading straight towards us swerve abruptly midway IN ITS COURSE."

Satprem gasped.

"You'll say it's impossible; but *I* saw it swerve. It went and struck a tree farther away.

"I asked Theon, 'Did you do that?' He nodded."

Mother left no doubt about the Occultist's power. "Oh, that man was terrible, you know. He had a terrible power. But outwardly, perfectly correct!"

And Theon could outrank any teacher of occultism. "At least, he taught me well occultism. At that time I was really very skilled! I too," Mother added with a laugh, "I have performed a number of miracles! But I set no value on them nor attached any importance to them."

Sri Aurobindo's sentence will perfectly fit this case. "Great saints have performed miracles; greater saints have railed at them; the greatest have both railed at them and performed them."³⁵

One of the miracles Mirra performed took place on the high seas. This time, Theon went with her on her return journey.

"When I went back from Tierncen the second time, Theon accompanied me. He was going to go on a tour of Europe."

This was 1907. Not planes but steamships were then the means of transport across the seas. Five years later, the *Titanic* was to sink in North Atlantic.

"While we were at sea," related Mother, "a violent storm broke out. The sea became very rough. High waves lashed the ship continually, tossing it up and down. There was apprehension of a catastrophe. The Captain himself was full of anxiety and said,

"'The passengers may be in danger.'"

"The passengers on board got very nervous, many were rather pale, and some of them even began to cry.

"Theon looked at me and said, 'Go and stop it.'"

³⁵1. *Thoughts and Aphorisms*.

"The Captain was most astonished. He didn't at all understand what Theon meant! But naturally, I did. So I went to my cabin and lay down on the bunk.

"Then, leaving my body there, I went up out of it and moved freely to the open sea. There I found innumerable entities, but formless, madly jumping about. They were the ones that were creating all this havoc! I went near and, approaching them gently, said very sweetly,

"What can you gain by torturing these poor people?' I appealed to them, 'Please calm down and spare their lives.'

"For half an hour I went on cajoling and remonstrating with them, until they gradually began to calm down. When they had completely ceased their activity, the troubled sea was calm once more.

"I returned to my body and went out of the cabin. Arriving on the saloon-deck I found everybody thoroughly enjoying themselves. They were all gathered at the bar, making merry and boasting," said Mother with half a mocking smile.

19. Mirra Learns to Discourse

They landed in France.

We presume that Max Theon proceeded to rejoin his wife who had gone to Italy.

As for Mirra, at a guess, she went to her new apartments in Paris' 17-th arrondissement. This was on 49 Rue de Levis, a multistoreyed building. Her flat was on the fifth floor. Her divorce from Henri Morisset was finally decreed in March 1908.

Mirra went out to all kinds of occult reunions, seances and all. And being a thorough 'materialist' she was equally keen on studying human nature; so she went to the theatre.

Once, long ago, Mother was asked by a young chap, "How do you know the character of a person by looking at his eyes?"

She replied, "Not only by looking at the eyes; I know a person's character through identification."

Mother never missed a chance to hammer one basic principle into our heads. "One can learn to identify oneself. You have to learn it. It is indispensable if you want to get out of your ego. Because when you are locked up in your ego, you can make no progress."

"How does one do it?" was another question put to her.

Here are some excerpts from her reply in an English translation, as Mother always spoke to us in French.

"When I was in Paris," said Mother, "I used to go to many places where all kinds of meetings were held by people who were making all sorts of research, spiritual -- so-called spiritual-and occult, etc. Once I was invited to meet a young lady who, I believe, was Swedish -- who had found a method of knowledge, precisely a method of learning. She explained nil that to us. We were three or four. Her French wasn't too good but, anyway, she was quite convinced. She said. 'Here, you take an object or draw a sign on a blackboard or you take a picture- it's immaterial, take whatever is easy for you!' She had a blackboard on which she drew a kind of semigeometrical design. 'Well then, you sit in front of the design and concentrate your whole attention on it. You look and look and look, you *become* this design you are looking at. Nothing else exists in the world except the design, then, all of a sudden, you are through to the other side. And when you have passed to the other side you enter into a new consciousness, and you know.'" Oh, my! Is that what happened to Alice Through the Looking Glass?

"We laughed a lot," said Mother remembering, "because it was amusing. But it's very true, it's an excellent way for practising." Actually, it is an age-old method of target-practice. Arjuna, the third Pandava, learned this method from the royal preceptor Drona, and became the foremost archer of his time.

There is another type of identification which comes easily to us. When we read some wonderful books full of exciting adventures and get right into the story, we feel that what is happening to the hero or the heroine is happening to us. Indeed we could not be any closer to them if we were inside his or her skin -- which in a way we are.

Mother encouraged us. "It adds a lot of interest to life." Not only that; but also if instead of knocking against things from outside because they are foreign to you, you enter them, then, "you understand. And you live in many places at the same time."

Mirra, we said, went to the theatre. "In Paris there are third- or fourth-grade theatres where sensational dramas are staged. These are the suburban theatres." Mother was giving a description of what prevailed in the early part of the century; things are quite changed now. "The play is not meant for intellectuals, it's for the masses, and all the component parts are always extremely dramatic and moving. And, well, people who go there are, for the most part, very simple souls, and they completely forget that they are in a theatre. They identify themselves with the play. And things such as this happens: On the stage there is the villain hidden behind the door and the hero arrives, naturally unaware that the villain is hiding and that he is going to get killed. Then occupants high up in the gallery -- it is called 'the gods' -- right at

the top of the theatre cry out, 'Beware! He is there!' And not one time but hundreds of times did this occur spontaneously.

"I saw a similar play, called *Le Bossu* ('The Humpy'), I think. Anyway, it was a thoroughly sensational drama and was staged at the 'Theatre de la Porte Saint-Martin.' In that play there was a room. On the set one could see a big room and next to it a small closet, and... I no longer remember the story, but inside the closet there was a button which could be pressed, and when the button was pressed the ceiling of the big room came down on the people there, and crushed them inevitably! We were already warned of this by some people who had talked, who had passed on the word. Well then, a villain who was hidden in the small room knew the trick of the button. Then there was the hero who arrived with other people and they began to discuss; besides we knew that the ceiling was going to come down. I didn't utter a word, for I remembered that I was in a theatre, and I was waiting to see how the author was going to get out of this difficulty and save his hero -- because obviously he couldn't let his hero be killed like that in front of everybody! But the others weren't at all in that state. Well, well, some spectators shouted, actually shouted, 'Beware of the ceiling!' That's how it went," she observed.

"These are phenomena of identification. Only they are involuntary." And Mother ended her talk.

We have always known Mother to be quite free and at ease when discoursing upon a subject; not only in private conversations but in public too. But that was not always the case.

"I was rather timid by nature and there wasn't much confidence in my own capacity; although the feeling of being able to do anything if necessary was there," said Mother. "Up to the age of twenty or twenty-one, I spoke very little, and never, never anything that resembled a discourse. I didn't participate in conversations; I listened but spoke very little... Wait! Yes, I was put in touch with Abdul Baha -- of the Bahai faith -- who was then in Paris. A sort of intimacy had grown between us, and I would go to his meetings because I was interested.

"Then one day, when I was in his room he told me,

"'I am sick, I cannot speak; go and speak for me.'

"I said, 'Who, me? But I don't speak.'

"He replied, 'You only have to go there, seat yourself, remain still, concentrated, then what you must say will come to you. Go. Do it. You will see.'

"Well then," Mother said smilingly. "I did as he bade me. There were about thirty to forty people, I went and sat down in their midst; then I remained very still, and... I remained like that without a thought, nothing. And suddenly I began to speak. I spoke to them for half-an-hour -- I don't even know what I told them. When it was over everybody was pleased. I went to find Abdul Baha, who told me, 'You spoke admirably.'

"I said, 'It's not me!'

"Well, from that day onward -- I had got the knack from him, you see -- I would remain like this, very still, then everything would come."

Mother gave us a straight tip. She said, "Mainly, you have to lose the sense of the 'I'. That is the great art in everything, for everything, for whatever you do. I have done painting, sculpture, architecture even, I have done music -- for all, but all, if you are able to lose the sense of the 'I', you become open to... to the knowledge of the thing."

20. The Gambler and the Spirit

"Oh, I could write you a book with all the examples I've had of those things," said Mother talking about the forces one contacts through automatic writing or other kindred means.

And as was her wont, she first cleared the decks. "It all depends on the person practising it."

But to be frank, she viewed all this spiritism with a rather scornful eye. "Sometimes there are no forces at all!" she said. "Ninety-eight times out of a hundred, what works the planchette is the mental and vital vibrations of those present, and they call up their own subconscious ideas.

"At one time I actually wanted to prove to people that what they were calling up was nothing else but themselves. So I had a little fun furniture-rapping, table-moving and so on, simply through a concentration of the will."

She spoke plainly, hiding nothing so that people would not be lured blindfolded into this type of trap. "The atmosphere in which we live is filled with any amount of small vital entities that are the product of unsated desires, of a very low type of vital movements, as well as the decompositions of more important beings of the vital world -- in short, it swarms with all this. You know, it's certainly a protection that most people don't see what's going on in that vital atmosphere, for it's not too pleasant."

But there are some very cocksure people about who would, at any cost, come into contact with that atmosphere. So "they set about trying automatic writing or table-turning or... well, any similar kind of thing, just out of unhealthy curiosity."

In case they do manage to get in contact with those small entities then what happens is that the latter have fun at the former's expense. "It's a fine booby-trap, all this business," said Mother. "In some cases the vital entities really get hold of a person, and then it is dangerous."

She was telling us all this in 1958. "Long, long ago, when I was in France, I knew a man who had a little aptitude and who indulged in all kinds of practices known as 'spiritism'; and through repeated exercises he had succeeded in coming in conscious contact with what he called a 'spirit.' He was a businessman, a financier. The man happened to be a gambler and spent his time on speculations and roulette-playing. Part of the year he passed in Monte Carlo gambling at roulette and the other part he lived in the South of France, and speculated on the Stock Exchange.

"Now, there really was someone using him -- it was through automatic writing -- using him and, for years together, giving him absolutely precise, exact information. His relation with his 'spirit' was of a very practical nature. When he played roulette it would tell him, 'Put your wager on this number,' or 'Place your bet on this place,' and he would win. Naturally enough, he worshipped this 'spirit' which gave him such sensational revelations. At the Exchange too it would tell him when the stocks and shares were going to move upward and when downward: 'Sell this,' or 'Buy that,' or 'Wager on this,' or 'Bid on that' -- it would provide him with very precise financial details.

"For years this man had been listening to his 'spirit' and acting on it, and he was fantastically successful. The man became colossally rich. He always boasted to all his friends about the method by which he had grown rich and about the spirit who 'guided' him. He would tell everybody, 'You see, it's worthwhile learning how to put oneself in contact with these spirits.' But one day he met a man who was a little wiser and who put him on his guard, saying, 'Be careful, it doesn't look very honest. You should beware of this spirit.' So swollen with his ambition and power was he that he didn't listen. He fell out with that person.

"A few days later he was in Monte Carlo and... He always played for high stakes, didn't he, since inevitably he always won; he always broke the bank, and he was much dreaded. So then the spirit gave him a final piece of advice. 'Now you can become the richest man in the world. Your ambition will be fulfilled. You just follow my direction. Do this: Put all you possess in this transaction and you will become the richest man in the world. Stake everything, all that you have, on it.' The stupid fool didn't even perceive the trap laid for him. He did as he was told, and at a single stroke lost everything! But then, he still had some money left from his Exchange speculations. He told himself, 'That's just bad luck.'

Again he received a very precise direction, 'Do this,' as usual. For years he had followed his 'guide' and succeeded, so he followed the last direction and did it -- completely cleaned out! To the last penny. And as a finishing touch, the spirit told him -- it must have its good fun! -- 'Now you commit suicide. Fire a shot into your head.' And he was so much under its sway that he did it.

"That's the end of the story. And it is an authentic story," said Mother.

Then someone brought to her notice the case of an American clairvoyant who saw a child playing on a railway track, in danger. Suddenly he saw an apparition by the child's side and sighed with relief, thinking, "The child will be safe." But to his great consternation the apparition put its hand over the child's eyes and, in a way, pushed him under the train. The man was aghast, not understanding why a higher being -- as he took it to be -- should push a child to his death.

"It could have been one of two quite different things," replied Mother. "Perhaps, for some reason, it was a predestined death. Or... or, it was a hostile being whom the man mistook for an angel of light, because people generally make this mistake -- when they see an apparition they always believe it's something heavenly. It's heavenly if you like, but it depends on which heaven it comes from!"

Mother was silent for a few minutes, then she again took up the first question. "Generally, spiritism isn't a good line of approach." And she added discouragingly, "The least one could say about such pursuits is that they are dangerous."

She put forth another argument. "Besides, they have never served to prove anything to anybody. One might say, 'Oh, it's to make you understand that there is an inner life, an invisible life, that it puts you in touch with things you don't see and proves to you their existence.' It's not true," she averred.

"I have known people... I knew one man in particular who was a man of science, intelligent and worthy; he had done higher science studies, become an engineer, and he held an important position.

"This man was a member of what is known as a society of 'spiritism,' which had discovered a medium with really altogether exceptional abilities. Now, the man attended every seance with the idea of learning, in order to convince himself and get tangible proofs of an invisible world's existence, the concrete and real existence of an invisible world. He had seen all that could be seen, under the strictest control, in the most scientific way possible -- all the controls were foreseen to the least detail. He narrated to me the most extraordinary things he had seen. I had in my hand a piece of something resembling what they make nowadays, those plastic cloths, which are not woven, a piece of plastic -- but in those days plastic was not made, it had not yet been discovered, it was a long time ago. I had it in my hand, just a little piece, torn, with a small, very pretty design on it. He recounted to me how it had all come to pass. When the medium had been put into trance, a person appeared, dressed in a robe of that substance -- it was a materialization. That person passed in front of him and, like the little brute he was, he tore off a piece so as to have a proof, and he kept the piece. The medium screamed, and everything, everything vanished immediately. But the piece remained in his hand and he gave it to me. I gave it back to him. He simply showed it to me; I had it in my hand.

"It was therefore a completely concrete thing, wasn't it, since he still had the piece; he couldn't tell himself that it was a hallucination. Well, despite all that, despite the most extraordinary stories which could make an entire book, he believed in nothing! He could explain nothing. He wondered who was man, he himself or the others or... All that hadn't advanced his knowledge even half a step."

Mother concluded, "No amount of external proof will ever give you any knowledge.

"It is only when you yourself are developed within, capable of having a direct and inner contact with these things, that you know what they are. But no material proof -- material and of this kind -- can give you knowledge if you don't have within you the BEING capable of gaining this knowledge." Thus in her customary way Mother placed her finger on the very nub of the problem.

"Hence, the conclusion is that this kind of experiment is perfectly useless," she said bluntly.

"I consider these things an unhealthy curiosity, that's all."

21. OM

That Mirra had "the BEING capable of gaining this knowledge" within her is without a shadow of doubt.

Matteo's son Etienne Alfassa told the following story to our friend Rachel Neuville, from whom we heard it. In the beginning, Mirra used to pull along her brother to those 'spiritist' reunions. One day, as they went in, they were told that there was a young man who was a first-rate subject. But he looked rather puny. Matteo perceived a heap of big, fat dictionaries in the drawing-room, and he willed the young man to carry them across to the other end of the room. To his own and the group's amazement the youth lifted the pile of dictionaries and began carrying them. Then Matteo said to himself, "But he won't be able to carry them, he'll collapse!" And it happened! Midway through, the young man fainted. Matteo became furious and turning to his sister said, "Look at what you made me do. Never again shall I accompany you to these reunions."

Mirra replied, "But why did you first think that he should take the books and next that he wouldn't be able to carry them?!"

This is a typical incident showing at one stroke Matteo's strong willpower and Mirra's uncanny habit of reading thoughts. I guess Matteo's anger melted at once at the reasonableness of his sister's remark. In any event, Matteo loved his sister with all his heart, so perhaps he relented and continued to accompany Mirra to those reunions and other gatherings.

"Did anyone here ever happen to faint all of a sudden, as though accidentally?" Mother was addressing her class of 1951. What with students and teachers, and many elders from the Ashram it was a motley crowd in that classroom. We students were not bad as such but we were quite young and didn't know much about things that really mattered. She was explaining to us about going out of one's body. "You see your body, don't you, and wonder, 'But what's it doing there in that ridiculous position?' And you rush back inside."

A condition is however attached to this 'seeing' when you are out of your body: you have to have the visual organ of your subtle physical body well developed. Mirra had seen to it when she was confined to bed for five months in Rue Lemercier.

"It happened to me once in Paris," she said. "I was given a good dinner, then I went to a conference hall, I think. There were lots of people, it was very hot. I was standing there with my good dinner lying on my stomach, when suddenly I felt uneasy. I said to my companion, 'We must get out at once.' Once outside- it was the Trocadero Square- I fell in a dead faint. I saw my body there and I found it so ridiculous that I rushed back into it and scolded it roundly. I told it, 'You shouldn't play such tricks on me!'"

Mother often referred to a certain conference to which she had gone. She always remembered it when talking with Satprem about *mantras* or about the inherent power of some words. A mantra can consist of one single word or a string of words. It is a power, *mantra-shakti*.

"A mantra given you by a guru has only the power of realizing the experience attained by the discoverer of the mantra. This power is automatically there, because the sound holds the experience."

There is a transference of power from the Guru -- hard to get such a guru!-to the disciple who receives all the power of the initiator. Generally, a mantra is meant to evoke a certain deity. But it also lends itself to all sorts of uses. For example, a *mantra-siddha*, that is, one who has mastered the art of applying a mantra, can easily protect others or himself from harm. Such a case of a Sadhu was witnessed not by an occultist or a theosophist, but by an army general! The General noticed a scorpion close to the foot of the Sadhu. "Don't move," he said, "there is a scorpion by your foot." The Sadhu leaned over, and when he saw the scorpion he pointed his fingers at it, upon which the animal immediately and in the presence of the General shrivelled up and died. "You seem to have some powers already," the General could not refrain from saying. But the Sadhu simply waived the matter aside as being of no importance. This account was given by Sir John Woodroffe.

The Vedas are divided into two parts: Mantra and Brahmana. The Mantra or the metrical portion is known as Samhita.

"We must recollect that in the Vedic system the Word was the creatrix," explains Sri Aurobindo. "The ancient Vedic theory and practice extended the creative action of speech by the Mantra. The theory of the Mantra is that it is a word of power born out of the secret depths of our being where it has been brooded upon by a deeper consciousness than the mental..." And its power of action? "The Mantra can not only create new subjective states in ourselves, alter our psychical being, reveal knowledge and faculties we did not before possess, can not only produce similar results in other minds than that of the user, but can produce vibrations in the mental and vital atmosphere which result in effects, in actions and even in the production of material forms on the physical plane."

Then he said a very significant thing. "Thus we see that the theory of creation by the Word, and the theory of the material creation by sound-vibration in the ether correspond and are two logical poles of the same idea. They both belong to the same ancient Vedic system."

The Word itself has its seed-sounds -- the seed-sounds of the Tantriks -- which carry in them the principles of things. "The Word has its rhythms, for it is no disordered vibration, but moves out into great cosmic measures; and according to the rhythm is the law, arrangement, harmony, processes of the world it builds."

And one of the greatest seed-sounds of the Word is the eternal syllable of the Veda: OM.

"In the Indian languages they have this sound OM," said Mother, "which is a marvel.

"I once saw it in Paris, at a time when I knew nothing about India, absolutely nothing except the usual rubbish. I didn't even know what a mantra was.

"The first time I heard it... I had gone to a lecture given by some fellow who, supposedly, had practised 'yoga' for one year in the Himalayas, and he was discoursing upon his experience -- none too interesting at that. It was a certain Bernard who had spent one year in India, in the Himalayas, and he was visited by yogis whom he didn't know. He was living all alone in a hut in the Himalayas. And a yogi came to visit him, didn't say anything to him, but sat by his side and then left. And this yogi simply told him, 'OM.'

"This Bernard returned to France and recounted his experiences in India, and then he said the word. Suddenly, in the course of his lecture, he uttered the sound OM. Then I saw the whole room we were in fill up all at once with light, a golden, vibrant light. I was probably the only one to have noticed it. At that time I knew nothing about India, but when he uttered the word OM..." Mother brought her arms down in a swift gesture. "It came -- a Force like this -- my whole, entire body, everything vibrated in an extraordinary way! It was like a revelation -- all, but all started vibrating. Then I said, 'At last, here's the true sound!' Yet I knew nothing, but nothing, nor even what that meant or anything.

"Then I forgot this business. But it so happened that two or three times the same experience recurred in two or three different countries and with different persons, and every time there was this sound OM, I always saw the same light suddenly fill up the place.

"Then I understood.

"That particular sound holds the vibration of thousands upon thousands of years of spiritual aspiration -- man's aspiration to the Supreme is there in its entirety. And the power is automatically there since the experience is there. Oh, a tremendous power. Tremendous."

OM or AUM is known also as the first seed-mantra of the Vedas. It is also said that the three letters represent the three Godheads: A = Vishnu, U == Maheshwar (or Shiva), M = Brahma.

"Do you know what they say?" Mother said to Satprem. "That OM is the totality of the sounds of the creation perceived by the Supreme; He hears OM like a call to Him. It's magnificent as idea, as symbol..."

22. The Lord as Electrical Vibration!

Well then, Mother has already told us the loads of fun she had had table-moving, furniture-rapping and all that, in her apartment on Rue de Levis. But all sorts of other things took place during those reunions.

One day Satprem was reading to her an article³⁶ on the electrical force of the cells, which reported that "in experiments in his Mexico city laboratory, Dr Ruggiero produced a current in a goat with which the animal lit a series of 40-watt bulbs and activated an electric doorbell." Mother cut in to say, "But it's been known for a long time that cats -- the skin of cats -- are full of electricity. This was used to cure humatism."

Then, remembering, she said, "When I had those reunions in Paris, and followed Theon's system - he didn't call them meditations but 'repose': 'to have repose together' -- at that time, during our reunions a kind of vibration of light would come out of my fingers. It was visible to the naked eye. But it was like electricity. And that was a concentrated vital force. It was visible like a vibration of light coming out of the fingers."

Some years earlier. Mother had explained to Satprem where this electricity-like light originated from. On one of his birthdays, after their meditation together, she asked him, "What have you felt?"

He answered, "When I am alone, there is never this power, this ..."

She said, "The physical vibration is important."

Then she touched her body, her hands, and said, "You know, even now all this feels so vibrant and alive that it's difficult to sense the limit -- as though it extended beyond the body in all directions. The limit doesn't exist anymore."

But she felt a lack of something. "But it's still not luminous in the dark. Because normally what's when I was working with Theon -- after returning to France we had group meditations, he called it 'repose,' and we used to do that in a darkened room -- and there was... it was like phosphorescence, exactly the colour of phosphorescent light, like certain fish in the water at night. It would emanate from the body, spread out, move about. But that's the vital, it originates in the vital. It's a force from above, but what manifests is vital.

"Whereas now it's absolutely and clearly the golden supramental light in... an extraordinary pulsation, vibrant with intensity. But probably it still lacks a... what Theon used to call 'density,' an agent that would enable it to be seen in the dark -- but then it would be seen golden, not phosphorescent."

The question of light apart, this new Vibration enhanced the healing power in Mother's hands. "When somebody tells me, 'I have a pain here,' I put my hand on it and it's gone. The hands are so conscious of the Vibration that they feel everything is possible." She gave a recent example and said, "And I felt all the vibrations at my fingertips: like needles -- needles of light." Is that acupuncture without needles?!

"But it is very, very concrete, very material," said Mother about the Supermind.

Sri Aurobindo went further. "Before the Supermind Matter dwindles to a shadow."

"What is that concreteness like?" asked a disciple.

"The sense of solidity, mass," he replied. "That is perhaps what the Veda meant when it said, 'Agni is wide of light and concrete of body.' You can say that the Supermind is harder than diamond and yet more fluid than gas."

"It is so compact," Mother said musingly. "Curious, this impression," she said. "It's something more... more compact, denser than the physical. The New Creation. One always tends to think of it as

³⁶1. From the *Sunday Standard* of 14 May 1967.

something more ethereal, but it's not! Theon always said with insistence, 'It will have a greater density.' That's what he said, 'A greater density.' And the feel I get of this atmosphere is of something more compact -- more compact and, at the same time, without any heaviness or thickness. Evidently, all this is scientifically absurd. Yet the feeling is one of compactness."

But that is tomorrow's Matter. In the meantime, as Mother said, magnetic force or electric or whatever are all expressions of that same Power on *different* planes of the being -- the mind, the vital, the body--the expressions differing with each part. "Personally, I think it's all one and the same thing, except that it's the scientists' material notation of *the Fact*."

Then she came up with one of her pithyutterances. "The Lord as electrical vibrations!"

Our laughter swelled the sound of her musical laugh.

It was during one of those 'reposes' that a young man was upset by an inner experience. To be upset always indicates a weakness in some part of the being.

"I knew a boy in France who was a fine musician," said Mother. "He played the violin admirably. But he didn't have a very big brain, it was just enough to help him with his music, nothing more. He used to come to our spiritual reunions and, all of a sudden, he had the experience of the infinite in the finite. It was an absolutely genuine experience -- in the finite individual came the experience of the infinite. But this upset the boy so much that he was completely befuddled. He couldn't even play his music anymore. The experience had to be stopped because it was too powerful for him."

She pointed out, "This is an instance where the mind was too weak."

But cats were really Mother's favourite creatures. She made them the subject of a special study. The number of experiences she had with these animals could make a book in itself and very interesting reading it would make too!

Well, when Satprem asked for her permission to poison some cats that caused him sleepless nights with their miaowings on his terrace, Mother said no.

"I once had a cat with almost a child's consciousness, and someone poisoned it. And the day he came back poisoned, dying, I cursed all the people who poison cats. And that's serious. You mustn't do it. It was a real curse -- I was with Sri Aurobindo, so it was serious -- don't do it, please.

"But there's a way...."

"I made a pact with cats, you know, with the King of the Cats. It goes very, very far back. And it's extraordinary -- it happened in Tiencen, entirely on the occult plane -- extraordinary! For certain reasons, the King of the Cats gave me a power over these creatures -- and it's true. Only I have to see them.

"We shall try."

The King of the Cats had visited Mirra when she helped the angora cat kill the aspic.

"What do these animals represent in the terrestrial manifestation?" Satprem queried. "They're so strange...."

"Cats are vital forces," she explained.- "They are incarnations of vital forces. The King of the Cats -- that is, the spirit of the species -- is a being of the vital world.

"For example, cats can very easily embody the vital force of a dead person. I've had two absolutely astounding experiences of this."

Let us skip the first story, which will come in its time and place, and go straight to the second.

"The other story," Mother said, "happened very long ago, long before the [1914] war even. I was living in another house; I had only the fifth floor," she said, referring to Rue de Levis. "Once a week I used to hold reunions there with a small number of friends -- three or four -- interested in occultism. They came to have me demonstrate or tell them about 'things.'

"There was a Swedish artist, a French lady and... a French boy, who was a student and a poet. He used to come regularly to these reunions which took place on Wednesday evenings. His parents were decent country folk who bled themselves white to pay for his life in Paris. The boy was very intelligent and a true artist, but he was depraved. We knew about it, but that was his private life and none of our business.

"That particular evening there was a reunion, and we were perhaps four or five, but the boy didn't turn up. We were surprised; we had met him a few days before and he had said he would come- he didn't come. We waited quite a long time. We had our reunion anyway and didn't give much thought to his absence -- we thought he must be busy elsewhere.

"Around midnight, when the reunion was over and the people were leaving, I opened the door to let them out. A big black cat was sitting in the doorway. It rushes into the room like mad, and in a single bound jumps on me, just like that, all curled up into a ball, and mewling despairingly. So I calm it down, I look at it: 'Ah, the eyes of...' -- I don't recall his name now -- 'Ah, the eyes of so-and-so.' Right away -- at the time we were all involved in occultism -- we said, 'Something has happened to him, he was unable to come and the cat has embodied his vital force.'

"The next day, all the newspapers were full of a vile murder -- a pimp had murdered the boy. Revolting! Something utterly revolting. And it had happened at the very moment he should have come. He was seen, the concierge had seen him going into the house with that pimp. He had been assassinated that night. The next morning he was found lying strangled on his bed. What happened? Was it just for money or for something else -- vice? Or what?"

23. They Came as Forerunners

Came a bolt from the blue.

Madame Theon was dead.

Mirra heard the news in utter disbelief. Why? Why? Oh, why?

How? When? Where?

After eighty years the trail was evidently cold. But in 1988 Patrice followed it doggedly and his perseverance paid off. Helped by Christian Chanel, he came up with a few hard facts which have enabled us to reconstruct the sequence of events.

The Theons were spending that summer of 1908 at Courseulles, with the Themanlys family, when Madame Theon decided to visit the Channel Islands. We do not know for what reason. So, early in September, she went to the port of Carteret on the Normandy coast. Cotentin, as the French call this peninsula jutting out into the English Channel, has a rocky coast. Before taking the steamer that was to ferry her to the island of Jersey, she went out for a stroll on the narrow cliff path, ie Sentier de la Corniche,' which soon gets narrower and rather dangerous. As she was walking along in a trance, she fell off the promontory and into the sea. The water in September is chilly there. But undeterred, she did not cancel her short voyage -- from Carteret to Jersey is more or less 30 kilometres, and the steamer would have made it well within two hours. But once the ship had sailed, she suddenly felt an extreme malaise. So much so that the Captain on board the ship informed the officer commanding the Port of Gorey in Jersey that one of the passengers, a lady, was sick. The news was published in a local daily, datelined 12 September 1908, which contained additional details: Upon the ship's arrival, a doctor, O' Connor, examined her and diagnosed pneumonia. She was immediately transported to Hotel Elfine, where she died almost immediately after. It seems that she was taken to a hotel -- the nearest available -- rather than to a hospital because other critical condition. The newspaper states further that a telegram was sent to her husband, Max Theon, editor of *The Cosmic Review* in Algeria, who arrived by S.S. Cygne. She was buried in the cemetery of the Croix-Grouville in the island of Jersey.

Theon of course had to register her demise before the burial, and obtain a death certificate. The entry in the register³⁷ goes thus:

Place: Faldouet

Date: 10 September 1908

Name: Miriam Lin Woodroffe

Sex: Female

Age: 65 years

Cause of death: Pneumonia

Registered on: 12 September 1908

In the Parish of St-Martin, Jersey.

There are some discrepancies between the marriage certificate and the death register, such as Madame Theon's name, age, etc., but as we have seen, Theon didn't much care for officialdom.

Or he might have been too numb. Admittedly, the departure of his twenty-three years' companion (from March 1885 to September 1908) -- and what a companion.I -- was a terrible blow to Theon. He fell a prey to a profound depression.

³⁷1. Jersey being French-speaking, the original entries are in French.

The Themanlys couple took their broken-hearted Master to their Normandy home and for several months nursed him with loving care, until he was somewhat recovered and could travel. He then returned to Tierncen.

But before doing that he told the members of the Cosmic movement that as the Heart of the Movement had stopped beating, the publication of the *Cosmic Review* would stop too. Thus the *Cosmic Review* was published only for seven years -- from January 1902 to December 1908.

It was in the November 1908 issue that Mirra poured forth her own sorrow at the sudden demise of Madame Theon. Herebelow we give an English rendering of the article.

THE EMPTY PLACE

"No more do we see her dear form, of harmonious lines, her likable face so good and so tender, furrowed by long years of a Psychic Fighter's life; nor her sweet smile like sunbeam which chases away sadness, nor her calm and majestic bearing Fit for a pre-eminent Victress!

"No more do we hear her melodious voice, her gentle words inspired by wisdom, that powerful and profound poetry which flowed like a magnificent river from the pure source of the Soph, and through which this great intelligence expressed itself in the immense range of her vast knowledge!

"The dear psychic children kiss no more her small hands of a Sensitive, her small industrious and diligent hands, ceaselessly occupied with works of art and literature, as also -- and above all -- with the care of the sacred life of the Home, the blessed shelter of love!

"We heard her tell the story of a long-ago ghost who, from time to time, came to sit by the family hearth among her own people.

"Will she, too, return to gladden us by her presence? Will she let us once again rest at her feet as in the days gone by?

"And it is by no means a dream, this, not a baseless construction: surely she will return! Surely she will appear before us, visibly even to the neuro-physical state.

"Life is universal; it is one; eternal; unchangeable; it changes but in the form, and it reigns, sovereign unifier, in her who, being individualized, has not quit us for long.

"Already She approaches, She is amongst her own, who are aware of a close link with Her, a gradual awareness growing day by day, in the same way as Her own consciousness, too, becomes ever more present and more complete.

"Let us whiten our clothes so that they may not be too unworthy in the presence of her luminous robe, pure, immaculate; and may our tears, shed with such pain, wash away the stains with which we may have sullied them by uncharitable thoughts, words or deeds.

"Let us march on courageously straight ahead, let us pursue this path on which She has led us: it is painful at this moment; but as we walk on it our pain will lessen until we hear the heroic chants of the glad victory, when the last dark veil, drawn aside, reveals to us the so dearly Beloved, who conquers us and brings us happiness, as a Triumphant Queen!"

It is as though Mirra had penned this for us, Mother's children, for the time when she herself would leave us behind.

* * *

Theon returned to Tierncen.

His visits to France became extremely rare. So rare that most people believed he had died in 1913 or thereabouts.

In 1971, Satprem asked Mother, "Isn't he upon earth anymore? He left his body?"

She replied, "Oh, yes! Long ago. I think he left before I came here. Long ago."

Pascal Themanlys, however, wrote, "I saw him during one of his sojourns in Paris in 1920. Subsequently he returned to Tierncen and lived there in company with his devoted secretary. Miss Teresa, up to 1926."

By 1920 Mother had already left France. But her words reflected the widely held belief about Theon's earlier demise. There was a reason which gave currency to this belief, as can be seen from a few jottings from Teresa's diary:

"1913, October 18 -- Dear Theon has gone to Alger about autos.

"1913, October 24 -- Theon came home accident with the auto."

He must have suffered agonies, because she went on to note down:

"1913, November 1 -- Doctor has now set the fracture, so dear Theon will suffer less & less now, I hope, for he has suffered terribly."

Then two months later, she wrote:

"1914, January -- Theon left his rooms for the first time since his accident & walked in the court (with crutches)."

That, then, is the reason why people thought he had died in 1913.

He was still in Tierncen and gaining strength when the 1914 war broke out. It quite upset him, for he held a war to be "the greatest crime, because life is sacred." In fact, according to him, the ideal political system ought to be a Government by the Wise. Alas for us, more and more headless people seem to be occupying the seats of power!

Be that as it may, during the four years of war they did not move from Tierncen apparently. It was almost one year after the armistice that Theon and Teresa ventured out of Africa. Gleanings from Teresa's diary:

"1919, October 10 -- Here we are [in Paris]... after a very long & troublesome journey

"1920, June 3 -- We start for Tlemcen

"1920, June 8 -- Got home at last"

In all probability this was their last homecoming, because in 1920 both of them were well into their seventies and must have found travelling more and more difficult. In fact, if one fell ill, which happened, the other was unable to do any nursing.

Finally, according to a small paragraph in a newspaper published at Tierncen, Theon died on 4 March 1927, and the funeral was held on 6 March 1927.

Teresa survived him perhaps by two years.

When she too passed away, the authorities put up the property, which was in Madame Theon's name, to auction since there were no legal heirs.

It was a very nice young Arab boy, who told Patrice that his maternal grandfather had bought the house in 1930.

* * *

6 March 1988.

"BUSHAOR! It's BUSHAOR!!" exclaimed in unison all the old men crowding around Patrice to see the photo he was holding aloft.

Patrice had gone to Tienccen to try and find out more about Theon and visit Zarif where Mother had had so many experiences. After several false trails he hit upon the idea of visiting the local old men's club. At first the old men shook their heads when he asked them if they remembered Max Theon or Aia Aziz. No, the names evoked no response. Then he brought out a photo of Theon and showed it to them. It was then that they expressed their amazement at suddenly seeing a familiar face.

"BUSHAOR! It's Bushaor!" all of them cried delightedly. Then they explained to Patrice that this was their nickname for the old man because of his long hair. Now they themselves were old, but when they had known him they were in their twenties or even less. But they still remembered a few things about Theon. "It was someone who didn't have very many contacts," they said. "He didn't speak. Oh, he was some kind of... magician. Nobody dared to approach him. People were afraid of him. Nobody went inside his property. But he would be seen now and then, just like that, when he came down into town. We would see him walking; he had long hair, wore a beret, and also a great big costume. For us," the Arabs said, "only prophets dress in that fashion. So then ..."

At any rate, it was one of the old men who kindly guided Patrice to Zarif. It was there that the latter met the young boy and his family who showed him around the house. The boy's mother felt sorry that their visitor could not meet her father who had passed away only a few years earlier; for the old man was for ever telling his little daughter stories about Theon and happenings at Zarif, to which she had paid but scant attention.

But there still are people alive in Tienccen who remember Theon.

* * *

When the news of Madame Theon's death reached her, Mirra was stunned. Understandably. "She was a marvellous woman from the standpoint of experience -- unique ..." Mother was to tell Satprem half a century later. "Madame Theon was the first to tell me what I was, what she had seen -- the crown of twelve pearls over my head," she told us. "Madame Theon said to me -- I used to narrate to her all my childhood stories -- she told me, 'Oh, but of course! I know: You are THAT and the sign is on you, and it is that.' "

Why did Mirra have to lose such a precious one barely found?

My own feeling is that Madame Theon left only after she had met Mirra and was assured that THEIR work, for which she and Theon had come, would be carried on and completed.

She gone, he was lost. But he was too great to remain just a miracle-maker. To quote Satprem, "We would be doing an injustice to Theon were we to think he was in pursuit of the great, dazzling powers.... He was in search of something much more momentous. Perhaps Theon's tragedy is this: the underlying defiance and grief and irony of a certain greatness that knows itself doomed to failure, but that struggles all the same like a veritable conquering doge. One day, perhaps, we shall see him again, without his toga, perhaps even in rags, sowing the seeds of revolution amongst the last stragglers of the old world."

Sri Aurobindo was to say, "Theon knew that he was not meant to succeed, but had only come to prepare the way to a certain extent."

And Mother: "But truly, they came as forerunners."

Mirra's destiny was in a hurry; it never allowed her to stay put with any one experience. That boundless Heart was in a constant forward motion.

Madame Theon gone, no backward pull tied Mirra to the occult world. She had thoroughly explored it and tested its boundaries, and the barriers had ceded beneath her touch. It was time to go on to the next exploration: the Mind.

"I have noticed," said Mother, "that the different stages of my development occurred in twelve-year periods. In practice, these periods overlap; but approximately every twelve years a particular type of development predominated. In this order: consciousness first; the vital next, mainly from the standpoint of aesthetics together with a study of sensations, which culminated in the occult development with Theon; then, at around the same *time*, an intensive mental development which lasted from 1908 to approximately 1920, a little less but especially before coming here in 1914."

As the year 1908 ebbed, it swept away Madame Theon with it. Then bidding adieu to the Earth it shook her hand -- on 28 December 1908 Messina, the port city of Sicily, was completely destroyed by an earthquake followed by tidal waves, which left more than 80,000 dead.

The Cosmic Review made its last appearance in December of that year.

Mira Ismalun, Mirra's grandmother, passed away on 2 February 1909.

Theon retired in 1909.

Thus that "brief period of occultism which served as a transition to as well as a basis for spiritual development," was over.

However, before the transit to the spiritual realization, there was the Mind to be measured.

But let us be clear. We shall be doing Mirra an injustice if we think that she had neglected to cultivate her mind during thirty years of her existence. Quite the contrary. Rarely does one come across such a highly cultivated and refined young lady. Not only did she devour libraries, or write articles -- for *the Cosmic Review* or her 'reunions' -- but she even wrote stories. When Satprem was writing *By the Body of the Earth or the Sannyasm*, Mother recalled, "These past few days, the memories of things I had written came back to me -- what I had imagined at a particular time and written, at the beginning of the century -- before your birth! -- in Paris. And there was, in that thing I wrote, this: 'The love of Beauty saved her.' It was the story of a woman who was greatly heartbroken by so-called love -- as human beings conceive it -- but who felt the need to express love, a marvellously beautiful love; well then, with that force and that ideal she overcame her personal sorrow. I wrote a small book like that -- I don't know where it is, by the way, but that's quite unimportant. At that particular time I could well conceive that personal things ought to be overcome by the will to realize something more essential and more universal. And I followed the curve of my own consciousness, how it began like that, then from there how I went on to... other things. I was eighteen years old. It was my first try at getting out of an exclusively personal viewpoint and pass on to a larger viewpoint, and at showing that the larger, the more universal viewpoint makes you overcome the personal thing."

By "intensive mental development" Mother meant "a mental development in the most comprehensive way: a study of all the philosophies, all the conceptual juggling, in the minutest details -- delving into systems, getting a grasp on them. Ten years of intensive mental studies leading me to... Sri Aurobindo."

In between Sri Aurobindo who was to come and Theon who was gone, who was to bring Mirra the key to the Mind? Not just any middling teacher would do for her. Just as we may say that Theon was occultism personified, so may we say that Mr Mind presented himself in person. His name was Paul Antoine Richard, and he was born on 21 June 1874 at Marsillargues, southern France.

"He had been a pastor at Lille, in France," Mother narrated to Satprem, "for perhaps ten years; he had practised his religion a lot, but dropped it all as soon as he began to study occultism. At first, for his

pastoral examinations, he had had to specialize in theological philosophy, studying all the modern philosophy of Europe -- he had a rather remarkable metaphysical brain." He even published a book-length metaphysical essay.

Thus, after a thorough vital development, Mirra was led by Richard to a "mental development taken to its uppermost limit, where you can juggle with all ideas, that is to say, when the mind's development has already made you understand that all ideas are true and that there's a synthesis to be made, and that beyond the synthesis lies something luminous and true."

She recalled, "Then I met him in connection with Theon and the *Cosmic Review*." In all likelihood they first met in 1908, when Andre was ten. At any rate he told me that this was in Montmorency, at the house of his aunts, to whom Mirra had entrusted her son. She was on the best of terms with the Morisset sisters, and often went to their home. There she played tennis -- "my passion." Paul Richard also played tennis.

Naturally, we don't know when actually Paul first heard of Mirra. Was it from the Theons in Tlemcen, when he stayed at Zarif for over a month - from 7 January to 17 February 1907?

Mirra playing tennis

"And it's I who led him to the knowledge of the occult. I gave him enough occult knowledge for him to know how to get out of his own body and enter into another." Indeed, she gave him much of that, and "the books he wrote -- especially the first one, *The Living Ether* -- *were*, in fact, based on my knowledge. He put my knowledge into French -- beautiful French at that! I would tell him my experiences and he would write them down. Later he wrote *The Gods* -- *it* was incomplete, one-sided."

Mother continued, "Afterwards, there were all sorts of quite uninteresting stories." She refrained from recounting them. "He became a lawyer some time after we met; I learned Law along with him -- I could even have passed the exam!" It was in July 1908 that Richard obtained his law degree from the University of Lille.

Therefore it was Paul Richard who introduced Mirra to the leaden formulas of the Mind. It did not take her long to overpass them. And with Sri Aurobindo she was to achieve "a limitless Mind that can contain the world."

"Then the divorce business began," she said. "He divorced his wife." She was Dutch. "He had three children and wanted to keep them, but to do so he had to have his legal situation in order, so he asked *me* to marry him -- I said yes. I have always been totally indifferent to these things. But anyway, when I met him I knew who he was and I decided I would convert him. That's the thing. The whole story revolves around that."

What a story it was going to be!

"Then he became a lawyer and entered politics; he was a first-rate orator and fired his audiences with enthusiasm; and he was sent here, to India, to help a certain candidate who couldn't manage his election campaign by himself." A Mr Paul Bluysen, for our records, an aspirant deputy to the French National Assembly. He got elected.

"And since Richard was interested in occultism and spirituality, he took the opportunity to come here and seek -- he was seeking a 'Master,' a yogi. Upon his arrival, instead of busying himself with politics, the first thing he stated was, 'I am seeking a yogi.' He was told, 'You have got the devil's own luck! The yogi has just arrived.' Sri Aurobindo had just arrived. It was put to Sri Aurobindo: 'There is a Frenchman who requests a meeting with you.' Sri Aurobindo was none too pleased, but anyway the coincidence seemed rather interesting to him; he received him. That was in 1910."

Sri Aurobindo was lodged in the third storey of Shankar Chetty's house on April 4, 1910. A three-storey building was a rare sight in Pondicherry in those days. Two young Bengali boys -- Bijoy and Moni -- were with him. Moni gives an eye-witness account (in Bengali) of that meeting.

"About five to seven days -- or at the most ten to fifteen days after Sri Aurobindo settled down at Chetty's house," wrote Moni, "a Frenchman, just arrived from France, came to meet him. The French gentleman's name was Paul Richard. He was a barrister from Paris. His address on the visiting card read: 19 Rue Val de Grace.

"Although the ostensible reason for his coming to Pondicherry was politics, he had some ulterior object. So the first thing he inquired upon landing on the Indian soil was, where could he meet a yogi? He asked his friend Zir Naidu, a bigwig of the Hindu Party, whether he could introduce him to a yogi. To which Mr Naidu whispered back (whispered because Sri Aurobindo's presence in Pondicherry was a very hush-hush affair at the time; only a very few top brass knew of it) that there was a great yogi in Pondicherry itself, but that it was extremely difficult to meet him; but, nevertheless, he would try his best. Then, quite probably, Naidu had recourse to Srinivasachari, who broached the matter to Sri Aurobindo and obtained his permission. All this is my guesswork, of course, because I wasn't present there!

"Be that as it may, one morning between nine-thirty and ten, Srinivasachari and Zir Naidu brought Paul Richard in person to meet Sri Aurobindo.

"Yes, we must say 'in person' because tall is his person made taller by a French colonial sun-helmet -- he isn't someone to be passed by unnoticed. His age would be between thirty-five and forty; the two eyes -- that cannot be termed lotus-petalled -- are unmistakably glowing with intelligence; the nose is such that you cannot be unmindful of it. He wears a coat whose colour is chocolate tending towards red; the cuffs of his shirt can be glimpsed from time to time peeping out of his coat sleeves, with chocolate-colour dots on them. But what most drew my attention was Mr Richard's beard; it hung down to his breast

and was dark, dark black. Never before have I seen such a jet-black and so long a beard on any European -- except on Lord Ripon."

Sri Aurobindo received Richard for two days. Each day they talked for two to three hours. What were the subjects discussed? We do not know. But presumably they exchanged ideas about occultism and mysticism and the almost forgotten ancient traditions. Purani, however, notes that "one of the questions related to the symbolic character of the 'Lotus.' Sri Aurobindo explained that the lotus stands for the opening of the consciousness to the Divine. It can be seen on any of the subtle planes of consciousness."³⁸

The significance Mother gave much later to the red lotus is: 'The Avatar -- the Supreme Manifested on Earth in a Body'; and to the white lotus: 'Aditi -- the Divine Consciousness.'

³⁸1. A.B. Purani, *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*.

And what was Mirra doing in France?

To begin with, she attended all sorts of 'spiritual meetings,' and met many people. One of them was Alexandra David-Neel, who became famous for her Tibetan exploits afterwards. We shall come to her later.

Mirra also wrote articles for the group Idea,' and she taught some of its members how to consciously go out of their bodies.

"I knew somebody in France who used to come and see me every evening so that I might show him some unknown realm or take him for a ramble in the vital or the mental world, and I would in fact take him there," said Mother. "At times there were other people also, at times the person was alone. I showed him how to go out of the body, how to get back, how to keep consciousness, etc. I would show him places, telling him, 'There you must take this precaution, here you must do such and such a thing.' And this continued for a long time."

We are not sure whether Mother referred to the same person when she cited someone's out-of-body experience. "A friend of mine," she said, "who was in the habit of going out in his vital body, complained one day that he found himself face to face with a gigantic tiger every time, which made him pass dreadful nights. I told him to drive away all fear and walk straight towards the beast while looking it right in the face; and, of course, if necessary, to call for help. That's what he did and, behold, the tiger suddenly began to grow smaller till it became an insignificant cat."

Satprem requested Mother, "You speak of exteriorization, couldn't you show me a simple way of learning to do it?"

Mother refused. "You can't do it on your own, it's dangerous. I would never let anyone who hadn't the knowledge do it on his own. If spontaneous, it comes from previous existences, so there's an old habit. But it's a bit risky all the same, someone should always be there to keep a watch over your body. As for teaching it to someone offhand -- no."

She then explained the reason for her refusal. "I did try it once in France, with Hohlenberg." He was a Danish artist. "He came to France and asked me. He absolutely insisted. He had read all of Theon's stuff and was well up on everything, and very earnest about it. So I taught him how to do it, and what's more I was there, he did it in my presence. And, my child, the moment he went out of his body, he was thrown into such a panic! The man was no coward -- he was very courageous -- but it terrified him so! Sheer panic.... So I said, 'no, no, no.'"

Johannes Hohlenberg came to Pondicherry during the First World War. While he was there, he took a photograph of Sri Aurobindo in standing profile, looking towards the future, and also did a portrait of him. Sri Aurobindo, who never forgot anybody, once said, "In 1914 when the Mother came here, there came also a Danish painter who did a sketch of me. At the end of every meditation, he used to say, 'Let us now talk of the Ineffable!'"

* * *

Mirra met Hohlenberg's mother also. She was a Protestant. Once she happened to be in Paris. "I had her for dinner one day. Well-well, if only you had seen that woman!" Mother said to Satprem. "I don't now recall how the talk turned to the Catholics, and she flew into such a rage! She shouted, 'And those idolaters!...' It was frightful," Mother laughed outright.

* * *

Talking of Hohlenberg brings us to some of Mirra's adventures in his company.

She was always ready for an adventure, be it inner or outer. The more challenging the activity, the greater her enthusiasm. So when one day some friends mooted the idea of a trekking expedition, she readily agreed to join them and make a foursome.

Mother said to Satprem in 1969, "Just fancy! A memory came to me... from the beginning of the century. I don't know why, and it won't go away. And as it won't go away, I'll recount it to you -- there's perhaps a reason, but I don't at all know it."

She explained. "These things from the past... it's rather odd -- now, when they come and I tell them, they are erased. As if they were returning one last time to say goodbye before leaving for good.

"All these 'memories' -- actually they are pictures rather -- seem to be coming forward to show themselves with all the knowledge, truth and HELP they represent."

She was silent for a few moments, no doubt reviewing the episode. "Four of us went on an excursion from," she began, "I forget from which place on the banks of the Rhone -- I don't recall the place anymore -- to go to Geneva, crossing the mountains on foot. That meant about eight to ten days of hiking across the mountains. We were four -- two men, two women. Each, of course, carried his own bag on his back, because one does need a few things. But when you are obliged to carry baggage for kilometres on end -- forty to fifty kilometres each day -- you try to reduce the weight of your knapsack as much as you can. So then, before setting off, we held a sort of little conference to find out exactly the things we needed, absolutely indispensable things. And always we ended up by saying, 'Let's see, this can be managed this way,' and everything got reduced to so little."

Mother then came to Johannes Hohlenberg. "I knew a Danish artist -- he came here, by the way, and did a portrait of Sri Aurobindo. This Danish artist was practising yoga. He said, 'Oh, for my part, I think I can do without anything. I really think that one can reduce one's needs to a bare minimum. But, all the same, I need a toothbrush. I, you see, when I travel I need just one thing: a toothbrush.' But somebody answered him back, 'But no! If you have no brush, you simply rub with your fingers!'" Mother remarked, "At that time I hadn't yet lived in India, otherwise I would have told him, 'There are millions of people who never had a toothbrush but whose teeth are perfectly clean.'" She observed, "I think that, in the final analysis, we need very few things. Another person said, 'A piece of soap.' Generally the need revolves around these simple little things. Yet how many people here, in India, have never used soap, and that hasn't prevented them from being clean! There are other ways of being clean."

matter how trivial it may seem on the surface, Mother never lost an opportunity to blast the myth of such life patterns. The sense of what is indispensable or not, she said, "is the result of a certain education and a life in a certain milieu."

Let us rejoin our trekkers.

"We walked, then when we reached some place at lunchtime and were hungry, we ate there. When we reached some place and it was time to sleep, we slept there, then we went on -- it was quite an adventure. We didn't even know the route, we had some kind of maps. Well then, one time, far away from any town, any village, on a mountain road, we arrived at lunchtime at a sort of inn -- something resembling an inn -- standing all alone. It was miles from anywhere. We entered. An old man and an old woman were there... they looked most peculiar. They were very brisk, very alert, they had a peculiar air. Then we asked if we could eat. They said yes. They looked at us, eyed us closely, then made us enter a big room; there in a corner was a table with chairs around it, and also big benches -- I don't know to what use that room was put. They made us eat in there. And they asked us if we wanted -- they had a nice small white wine -- if we wanted some. The other three said yes; for myself, I had stopped drinking any alcohol by then. They said yes. And they drank the wine; it was a light wine, they washed down their food with it. As for me, I didn't touch it. At the end of the meal they said, 'Oh, how sleepy we are! We would very much like to rest, we would like to sleep.' So they lay down on the benches and slept. Now, I had a pair of shoes on that didn't fit me and were hurting one of my big toes: this had caused an inflammation and it was painful; I wanted to bathe it in order to disinfect it. I wasn't the least bit sleepy. I sat down -- there was a basin and some water -- and bathed my foot. Half an hour later, the room's entrance door opened, slowly, and the old couple came in furtively." Mother made a gesture. "As I sat rather low, I was hidden by the tables, so they didn't see me. They entered on tiptoe, looked this way and that, and they were about to go up to the benches where the others were lying... just when they saw me -- ah!" Mother gave a start of surprise to suit her exclamation. "They stopped. So then I raised my head and looked at them. I said, 'You wanted -- ?'

"They were very wily, they said, 'Oh, we came to see if you needed anything.' And they went out.

"I knew AT ONCE that they had come to steal; they had put some drug in the wine and had come to steal, they thought I too was sleeping."

She said pensively, "But the picture that came back was so vivid, as though they held a butcher's knife in the hand. ...

"Why has it come? I don't know.

"Things come when I have to do something about them." Things came to Mother constantly. They came from afar: far away on the earth and far away in time. Things from the past came to be put in order, to be presented to the New Light.

"This story is old almost by... it must have been in 1910 or at the utmost '12, that is, more than fifty years. Those people were old, they are long dead -- why has it come? What was there in it to teach me? I don't know.

"You see," she said, "I am convinced that basically *karma* is simply all the things we haven't used in the true way that we drag along behind us.... If we have totally and clearly learnt the lesson that each event or each circumstance ought to have brought, then its utility is gone and it dissolves."

But the picture she had just seen "has remained ALIVE, you see, like a living thing. What did it want to teach?. . . Naturally, always, the presence of the Grace is an understood affair -- but I don't need it shown to me, I know it!

"They were far from anywhere, there was nothing for miles around....

"It was quite a scene from a movie, and all set to be shot.

"It happened in Savoy, French side, in the mountains.

"Strange ..."

* * *

"The presence of the Grace," yes, of course. But something else is needed for the Grace to act instantaneously. How often things that are going to happen -- an 'accident' -- announce their presence, and always it takes them a few seconds or a couple of minutes to make contact with us, "because a door or a wall or something prevents us from seeing them." Only when we can spread our consciousness far and wide can it come instantly into contact with things. That was the case with Mirra.

"I have had many such experiences," said Mother. "Once I was walking along a mountain path wide enough for only one person: on one side, a precipice, on the other, sheer rock. Three children were behind me and a fourth person brought up the rear. I was in the lead. The path skirted the rock so you couldn't see what lay ahead. It was quite dangerous besides: one slip and you fell into the abyss. I was walking in front when, suddenly, I saw with other eyes than these -- yet I was carefully watching my steps -- I saw a snake lying in wait on the rocks around the bend. I took one gentle step, and a snake was very much there! This spared me the shock of surprise -- because I had seen it and was advancing cautiously -- and as there was no shock of surprise, I could say to the children without scaring them, 'Stop, be quiet, don't move.' A shock might have caused a mishap -- the snake had heard us and was already on the defensive, coiled before its hole, its head swaying -- a viper. It was in France. Nothing happened, but with confusion and commotion, who knows?"

"This type of things has happened to me very, very often -- four times with snakes. Once it happened here, when it was pitch dark, near the fishing village of Ariankuppam. There was a river and it took place just where it empties into the sea. It was dark -- night had fallen very swiftly and we were walking along a road, when right in the middle of a step -- I had already raised my foot and was about to lower it -- I distinctly heard a voice in my ear: 'Watch out!' Yet no one had spoken. So I looked, and just as my foot was about to touch the ground, I saw an enormous black cobra, on whom I was casually going to put my foot. Those fellows don't like that sort of thing! He slithered away and swam across the water -- what a beauty, my child! Hood wide open, head held high above the water, he swam across like a king. I would certainly have been punished for my impertinence!"

The inner senses Mirra had taken care to develop came in handy in her external life.

"There are loads of stories I could tell; but I don't remember any more right now." In fact she said elsewhere, "I have so totally forgotten a whole world of incidents and events..."

After considering the subject some more, she said, "It can happen in different ways. Quite often I was informed by a small entity or some being or the other. Sometimes the aura protected me." We shall soon see how. "All sorts of things. My life was rarely limited to the physical body. And this is useful, it's *good*. Necessary also -- it enhances your capacities. Theon told me right from the start, 'You people deprive yourselves of the most useful kind of senses, EVEN FOR ORDINARY life.' and it's true, absolutely true," Mother confirmed.

"When Richard finished his work," Mother continued her narrative, "he returned with a poor photograph of Sri Aurobindo, and a completely superficial impression of him; yet with the feeling that Sri Aurobindo knew. He hadn't at all understood the man; he didn't sense it was an Avatar; but he sensed he had the knowledge. Besides, I think, he always held that opinion, because he used to say that from an intellectual standpoint Sri Aurobindo was a unique giant, but that from a spiritual standpoint he didn't have many realizations! Nonsense of that kind -- similar to Remain Rollands." Mother exchanged a glance of understanding with Satprem.

"Well, you see, my relationship with Richard was on an occult plane, and it's difficult to touch upon it. You know, what happened here was far more exciting than any novel imaginable!" We shall see how true that is as Mother's life story unfolds.

"When he returned, he told me he would take me there as soon as he could.

"But the man was..." she stopped abruptly.

Mirra and Paul Richard were married on 5 May 1911.

They lived on Rue du Val de Grace, in a small house at the far end of a garden with two entrances from the street, numbered 9 and II.

"Well-well! The house on Val de Grace!" Mother exclaimed seeing the picture Pavitra was holding out to her. In those days Mother gave interviews to Satprem in the privacy of Pavitra's office. As a rule, Pavitra did not remain there during the interviews, except when he had something specific to talk over with her. That day, as soon as Mother was settled in her chair and all ready for Satprem's questions, Pavitra -- as the Ashram's General Secretary, he dealt with all foreign correspondence -- showed her the photo he had received in the morning's mail.

The house on Rue du Val de Grace

" Well-well I The house on Val de Grace I" Mother exclaimed, taking the picture in her hand. "It looks inhabited, there are curtains on the windows. I lived there -- a small house, very small, with a room on top."

She began to explain what was what to the two men. "Here, it's the drawing-room, this is the studio," she jabbed her fingers on the spots to suit her words. "Then, behind the kitchen, there was a small room that served me as dining room and it opened onto a courtyard. Between this dining room and the kitchen there was a bathroom and a tiny antechamber. Here is the kitchen; you went up three steps, there was a tiny antechamber with stairs that led to the room. Next to the room, there was a toilet about as big as a thimble.

"It's part of a big house. There's a seven-storey apartment building on each side, and the street is here.

"It wasn't very big. But the studio was fairly large -- a beautiful room.... That's where I used to receive Madame David-Neel -- we saw each other almost every evening.

"There was a large library in the studio -- the library took up the whole far end of the room -- more than two thousand books belonging to my brother. There were *some* complete sets of classics. And I had my entire collection of the *Cosmic Review*, as well as my postcard collection -- it was down below. The postcards were mostly from Algeria, Tierncen -- about two hundred. But there were five years of the *Cosmic Review*. And written in such a French! It was most funny." There was also her stamp collection.

With what care Mirra arranged the rooms. That there should be harmony among things came naturally to her artistic temperament. But what's more, things were never inanimate objects to her -- so each object found its rightful place in her house.

Andre was a regular visitor to Val de Grace. "After my father and mother divorced. Mother married Paul Richard, and they came to live on Rue du Val de Grace." Andre was around twelve. "I used to go and have lunch with them every Sunday. After lunch, specially when the weather was bad, we would go to the studio. Paul Richard stretched out on a couch, lit his pipe, and they started working. That is, my mother wrote in her own handwriting what he dictated. I could not help but notice that Mother was rectifying most of Paul's dictation."

Andre added, "This small house, at the back of a garden, or more precisely of a fairly large courtyard with a few trees, stretching in front of a big apartment house, was strikingly cosy and very comfortable."

Yes, it was that kind of house, with an air of comfortable simplicity, where you felt welcome and at your ease. Knowing Mother, knowing Mirra, it does not surprise us, really.

* * *

I believe that Mirra's first group 'Idea' was scrapped when she moved to Val de Grace. But in those three years, from 1911 to 1913, she was an active member of another group, 'L'Union des Pensees Feminines' (the Union of Women's Thoughts). The talks she gave to this group were first published in 1946 -- thanks to me! For it was at my request, as an apprentice in the new printing press, that Mother gave the manuscript for printing -- under the general title, *Reunions*, in the book *Paroles d'Autrefois*, which also contained other early writings by Mother. The group's meetings were held not only in the spacious studio on N°9 Rue du Val de Grace, but elsewhere as well.

The little booklet, *The Supreme Discovery*, for instance, is one such article, which Mirra read out on 28 April 1912 at the residence of one Miss Sanderson.

It is a beautiful piece and worth reading in its entirety. Here is a sampling of a few lines taken haphazardly.

"You who are weary and bruised and beaten down, you who fall, who think perhaps that you are defeated, listen to the voice of a friend. He knows your sorrows, he has shared them, he has suffered like

yourselves from the ills of the earth; he has, like you, crossed deserts under the burden of day, he has known hunger and thirst, solitude and abandonment, and, most cruel of all, the destitution of the heart.

"You are in the wilderness: well, listen to the voices of the silence.

"You are walking in deep night: well, gather there the priceless treasures of the darkness.

"You are following the path of denudation; it is the way to plenitude.

"Each grain that one puts in the earth produces a thousand.

"Each wing-beat of sorrow can be a soaring towards glory.

"Beautiful, doubtless, was the song of the primordial sphere rocked on the bosom of immensity, but how much more beautiful and triumphal is the symphony of the constellations, the music of the spheres, the immense chorale filling the heavens with an eternal hymn of victory!"

At the end of the manuscript we came across a short note, in French:

"This is for Miss Baffet.

"Will you be kind enough to give it to her, for I did not find her at home.

"When can I see you? I am free after five on Monday and Wednesday next week.

"My friendliest regards,"

Signed: M. P.R.

"That's where" -- the drawing-room on N°9 Rue du Val de Grace -- "I used to receive Madame David-Neel," said Mother. "We saw each other almost every evening."

In the first place, how did they get acquainted?

Mother was telling us in what a fierce fight she was engaged against those who hold on to the idea that 'spiritual life' means abandoning the earth and going off to some faraway Nirvana. "But I," she said, "I always reply with the story of Buddha. Just as he was about to enter into Nirvana, all of a sudden he saw that the earth must be changed -- and he stayed back."

Then she described her first meeting with Alexandra David-Neel. "I remember. Once it happened with Mme David-Neel. It was very interesting. She came to deliver a lecture -- I wasn't acquainted with her, it's there that I came to know her -- at the Theos-ophical Society, I think ³⁹ I don't quite remember. I attended the lecture; and while she was speaking I saw Buddha -- I saw him clearly, not above her head, but a little to the side. He was present." A slow smile spread across her face. "Well then, after the lecture, I was introduced to her. I didn't know the sort of woman she was! So I said to her, 'Oh, Madam, during your speech, I saw Buddha there.'

"She answered me back," Mother took on an angry tone of voice, "Impossible! Buddha went into Nirvana.'

Mother lifted her eyebrows, "Well-well-well..." and laughed.

"But he really was there, notwithstanding what she thought."

Alexandra David-Neel was born in Paris on 24 October 1868. Her father, Louis David, had taken a very active part in the coup d'etat of 1851. He was exiled to Belgium along with a great friend of his, Victor Hugo.

Ever since she was a little girl of five in Paris, Alexandra David wanted to "go beyond the garden gate in search of the Unknown." She began that search around the age of twenty-three, when she made her first overseas voyage -- to India and Ceylon. And again when she roamed Indo-China for three years - - from 1895 to 1897.

At the turn of the century she went to Tunis. There she met Philippe Neel, whom she married in 1904. Without the generosity of her husband she would hardly have been able to indulge in her passion for travel.

On the first page of David-Neel's diary, dated 1 January 1911, is a note by her: "Began the year with a meeting of philosophical meditation at the Richards'."

Again, the same year, on February 3, she notes, "In the evening, at the Richards', strange and involuntary vision of my life..."

Much later, in her book *Linde ou j'ai vecu (The India Where I Lived)*, Alexandra was to evoke the memory of those early days with Mirra. "I have the most pleasant recollections of the evenings spent with her in the small house she resided in on Rue du Val de Grace, in Paris, and of the walks we had together in the Bois de Boulogne. Neither she nor I could at the time have imagined the role she has today."

They went picnicking in the Bois de Boulogne and were greatly entertained by the first aeroplanes trying to take off. Watching the progress with interest, they would exclaim to each other, "Oh, look! This time it has gone up at least four metres.... Oh! Look! Look..."

As their intimacy grew, Alexandra narrated to Mirra many adventures she had had during her peregrinations. From time to time, Mother regaled us with some of those stories.

³⁹After sixty years. Mother was of course not quite sure. It appears that Mme David-Neel gave only one lecture at Paris' Theosophical Society, and that was in 1947.

"Mme David-Neel," said Mother, "was an intense woman and capable of profound meditation. Now, one day, she started walking while in meditation. It was in the open. She walked and walked for a long time with eyes closed. When at last she opened them she found herself in a strange place and turned to go home. She walked back, this time without shutting her eyes. After some time, at a certain distance, she saw a stream running right across. It was a fairly wide and deep stream. How had she gone over the stream? There had been nobody to help her take a boat. Obviously she had walked upon the water! This seems incredible," said Mother, "but Mme David-Neel would not fool anybody, nor would she deceive herself."

Mother frequently suffered from bloodshot eyes. When that happened, instead of reading, she would pull out a grain from her vast granary and tell us a story. Thus, one day she told us one which she had heard. "I heard the story from Mme David-Neel," she said, "who, as maybe you know, is a well-known Buddhist, specially as she was the first woman to enter Lhasa. Her journey to Tibet was extremely perilous and thrilling, and she herself gave me an account of one of the incidents of this journey." In all probability, Mother heard it in Japan when they met again in 1917.

"She was travelling with a certain number of fellow-travellers forming a sort of caravan." She was bound for Lhasa, in Tibet. The caravan had to go through some forests. "And these forests are infested with tigers, some of whom become man-eaters... and when that happens, they are called 'Mr Tiger.'

"Late one evening, when they were in the thick of the forest -- a forest they had to cross in order to set up camp in security -- Mme David-Neel realized that it was the time for her meditation. Now, she used to meditate very regularly at a fixed hour, without fail. And as it was the meditation hour, she told her companions, 'Keep going; as for me, I shall sit here and do my meditation. When I have finished, I shall join you. Meanwhile, go on to the next stage and set up the camp.'

"One of the coolies told her, 'Oh, Madam! No. It's impossible, absolutely impossible.' He spoke in his own language, of course, but I must tell you that Mme David-Neel knew Tibetan like a Tibetan. It is quite impossible, "Mr Tiger" is there in the forest, and it is just the time for him to come out in search of his dinner. We cannot leave you and you can't stop here!' She answered that it did not at all matter to her, that the meditation was much more important to her than safety, and they could all withdraw and she would remain alone.

"Much against their will they went away, for it was impossible to reason with her -- once she had decided on doing something, nothing could prevent her from doing it. They left and she sat down comfortably at the foot of a tree and entered into meditation. After a while she felt a somewhat unpleasant presence. She opened her eyes to see what it was... and three or four steps in front of her was Mr Tiger! His eyes full of covetousness. So, the good Buddhist that she was, she said, 'Good. If this is the way I shall attain Nirvana, very good. Only I must prepare to leave my body in a befitting manner, in the proper spirit.' And, not moving, not even trembling, she closed her eyes again and entered once more into meditation, a meditation which was a little deeper, intenser, detaching herself completely from the illusion of the world, ready to pass into Nirvana. Five minutes went by, ten minutes gone, half an hour passed -- nothing happened. Then, as it was time for the meditation to be over, she opened her eyes... no tiger there!

"Doubtless, seeing so immobile a body, he must have thought it was unfit for eating! For tigers, like all wild animals -- except the hyena -- don't attack and eat a dead body. So she found herself quite alone and out of danger. She went her way calmly; and, on reaching camp, told them, 'Here I am.'"

Mme David-Neel set out in August 1911 for the Far East. This time her journeys covered not only India, Ceylon, Burma, Indo-China, but also China, Japan, Mongolia and Korea. On her way to Lhasa during the journey from China to India, which she made entirely on foot, she explored vast tracts of Tibetan territory which no white traveller had crossed before her.

Philippe Neel died in 1941.

Alexandra passed away in her home, Samten-Zong, in Digne, France, on 8 September 1969, at the age of a hundred and one.

Even in the early sixties she and Mother kept in touch with each other through letters.

However, what interests us most is that upon landing in India Alexandra went almost immediately to Pondicherry to meet Sri Aurobindo on the recommendation of her friends the Richards. Even decades later, she was to recall that "beautiful memory."

December 31, 1911.

A shooting star drew a line of light in the sky.

"It was New Year's Eve, and I decided, 'Within the coming year.'"

The image Mother had retained was "at the door of our studio. I had a large, almost square studio, a bit bigger than this room" -- Mother was seated in her top-floor room -- "with a door giving on to a courtyard. I opened the little door and looked at the sky; and there, just as I looked, was a shooting star.

"You know the tradition," she said to Satprem, "if you formulate an aspiration just as you see a shooting star -- before the star disappears -- it will be realized within the year. And there, just as I opened the door, was a shooting star -- I was totally in my aspiration: 'Union with the inner Divine.'

"And before the end of December of the following year, I had the experience."

Quite obviously, it wasn't exactly the shooting star that made the realization possible! "Just as the shooting star was passing, there sprang up from my consciousness: 'To realize the divine union, for my body.' " It is amply evident that because Mirra's whole being was one-pointed in her aspiration the union with the inner Divine could be achieved within that short period of time. For in the normal course that would take at least thirty-five years.

Her whole consciousness was dominated by that magnificent obsession. She walked in the street, it was with her. She rode in a bus, it was with her. She took the metro, it was with her. And in that condition of hers, a 'Force' acted through her. It had the same effect as the 'Golden Robe' of her younger days: this Force went out to console, to heal ...

Let us take the case, of a man in a bus in which Mirra was riding. She saw in what a terrible state of nervous tension he was. Sobs wracked him. She did not stir. Nobody would have even guessed her part in what followed. She saw the 'Force' go out quietly through her, go towards this broken-down man. Then "little by little, the face relaxed, everything quietened, he calmed down. This happened several times. That's how I came to know about this Force," Mother said candidly. "Because at the time I wasn't yet very well informed."

But when Mother was recounting all these incidents to us in 1966, she was very well informed indeed! She knew the working of the 'Force' backward and forward. She who saw a considerable number of people daily, saw their reaction -- of adults and children -- when a drop of That or a ray of That fell on them. Most of the adults... trembled. Children were another matter altogether. The majority of them would press themselves against her knees.

"It reminded me of certain bygone experiences. Quite at the beginning, at least two years before coming here for the first time in 1914, I did not know Sri Aurobindo, but I knew the 'Cosmic,' and I was studying, was working earnestly at occultism; I was deep in the middle of my own experiences. It was in Paris. I used to go about by bus or the metro. And not once, but many times it happened: there were people -- a woman for example, with her child. The child would abruptly leave its mother -- children three or four years old, very young, just beginning to run -- and come. It happened quite a few times. Me, I was simply in my meditation, I paid no attention to anything or anybody; all of a sudden, a child would separate itself from its mother, come, poff! and cling to me like this, clutching my knees. Then the mother would beg my pardon, thinking it was very ill-mannered!" Mother laughed.

"But I used to say, 'No! It's quite all right.'

"Children are like that."

Yes, children were instinctively drawn by the love, the tenderness that emanated from Mirra.

Like the rose buds that opened when Mother caressed them.

"They are so innocent! There's this little Astha."

Astha was a lively six-year-old, with a mind of her own. Mind you, I don't blame her for what she did! Twenty years before her I did much the same thing. And I wasn't six, I was twenty if a day! When Mother would stand talking with Pavitra at the doorway of my laboratory, her back to me, her hands clasped behind her, I never could resist slipping my little finger into her fist. She would at once press it firmly, keep it until her conversation with Pavitra was over. Then only would she release it. And give me such a smile!

"There's this little Astha, who comes every morning -- it's she who decided to come, I wasn't supposed to say no! She said, 'I come' -- she comes every morning. In the beginning she used to do a 'pranam,' but a serious pranam: she would remain there rolling her head on my feet! But now she has found something else. She comes, doesn't say a word to anyone, looks at the people in the room, then when she sees everybody well occupied, she gets under my table, catches hold of my hand, and begins to play with it; she kisses it, turns it, pulls it. When she has finished this side, she comes to the other side! And with such pretty joy and trust, so pretty, so confident: 'Oh! How amusing this is!'

"It's pretty, that."

She hugged her pain.

"I was thinking of nothing but that: concentrating-concentrating, as though I were sitting in front of a closed door, and it hurts!" Mother touched her breast in a poignant gesture. "For months on end, sometimes years, you may be sitting before a closed door, push-push-pushing, and feeling, feeling the pressure -- it hurts! -- and there's nothing, no results."

Mother said. "When I met Theon and came to understand the mechanism, I also understood why I wasn't conscious at that level. I think I told you how I spent ten months of a year working between two layers -- two layers of consciousness -- because the contact wasn't established. There was a whole gamut of things that I didn't get spontaneously, because the contact wasn't established.

"Theon had explained to me, 'You have all your states of being one inside the other in the fourth dimension; you only lack a very small step.'

"So I asked him, 'What's to be done?'

"He told me, 'You have to develop it.'

"He told me. I did it."

But she worked at it "day after day, day after day, for one year" to bridge that gap. It was the sole object worth living for.

"You see," Mother said to Satprem, "Madame Theon had told me, and I knew what my mission on earth was, and all that -- that's telling you -- she told me, 'there's an undeveloped layer between this part and that part.'

"So I was exclusively concentrated on that." Her concentration was like a brooding hen. Unknown to her the time for the hatching of the egg was near.

"I was in Paris. One day as I was crossing the Boulevard Saint-Michel, I was almost run over. I had resolved to attain union with the psychic presence, the inner Divine within a certain number of months, and these were the last weeks. I was thinking of nothing but that, engrossed in that alone. Every day I spent some time in the Luxembourg Gardens. They were near the house, but to get there I had to go all the way up Rue du Val de Grace and cross Boulevard Saint-Michel, where there were trams and cars and buses -- the whole circus." That evening she was going there for a stroll when, still indrawn, she "came to a kind of intersection -- not a very sensible place to cross when you are interiorized! Then, in that state, I

started to cross when, all of a sudden, I felt a shock, as if I had been hit by something, and I instinctively jumped back. As I jumped back a tram rushed by. I had felt the tram at a little more than arm's length. It had touched my aura, the protective aura; the aura was very strong at the time -- I was deep into occultism and knew how to maintain it. My protective aura was touched, and it literally threw me backwards, just as a physical shock would have done.

The crossing between Boulevard St.-Michel and the Luxembourg Garden, as it was in Mirra's time.

"Accompanied by the driver's insults!

"I leapt back just in time, and the tramway passed by."

And she went on working, "absolutely without any result. It was all the same to me, I just continued. And then -- I used to tell myself, 'Well, perhaps I'll need some fifty years to arrive at something, I don't know.' Only, I never had doubts. Simply, I used to think, 'How very stupid of me, I don't know how to do it.' I was living in Paris. Come summer, I went on holiday. I left for the country. I went to some friends', who had an estate by the sea. There was a small wood, an extensive meadow, it was pretty. And after lunch, I go and lie down on the grass, I lie down on the grass, pfft! there was a sort of inner explosion -- the link was established. Full consciousness came, along with all the ensuing experiences. All -- from the air, from the earth, from the water, from everything -- all came. What I wanted to have, all-all came just like that. Suddenly. Like that. Effortlessly. The result of ten months of work.

"So I told myself, 'That's good, it has served some purpose!'"

The gap was bridged. "It opened. And with that... It didn't just last for hours, my child, it lasted for months! It didn't leave me, that light, that dazzle, that light and that immensity. And the sense was: That wills, That knows, That rules the whole life, That guides everything. Since then, it has never left me for a minute. And always, whenever I had to make a decision, I would simply stop for a second and receive the indication from there."

* * *

"The dates? I am no good at dates!" exclaimed Mother with her habitual frankness, when Satprem asked her to situate this event. But she did recall a pointer. "The realization of the inner Divine, that's when I started writing my *Meditations*."

Her meditations were published in book form under the title *Prayers and Meditations*. And the first few lines of the very first 'meditation' that has come down to us, dated 2 November 1912, read:

"Although my whole being is in theory consecrated to Thee, O Sublime Master, who art the life, the light and the love in all things, I still find it hard to carry out this consecration in detail. It has taken me several weeks to learn that the reason for this written meditation, its justification, lies in the very fact of addressing it daily to Thee. In this way I shall put into material shape each day a little of the conversation I have so often with Thee. ..."

* * *

Thus, a great chapter in Mirra's life was completed. What anyone else would have considered to be the fulfilment of his or her existence, was but a chapter in hers.

" But not for self alone the self is won:

Content abide not with one conquered realm;

Adventure all to make the whole world thine ."⁴⁰

That is what Mirra was going to do.

Europe had given Mirra of her best, indeed, all she could give. The most solid foundation for the work Mirra had to do.

Mirra was going to meet the 'Krishna' of her visions.

⁴⁰Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, vii, vi.

Epilogue

That fateful year 1914 had begun.

The dark clouds were gathering over Europe.

But.. .

"A star stood in the east -- the morning star -- and a coming brightness smote the heavens. Out of the light a still voice came advancing, swelling, widening, until it filled all space. 'Look forth,' it said, 'upon the groaning earth, with all its cold, and pain, and cruelty, and death. Look forth, and fear not; but when the worn-out faiths of nations shall totter like old men, turn eastward, and behold the light that lighteth every man; for there is nothing dark it doth not lighten; there is nothing hard it cannot melt; there is nothing lost it will not save.'"⁴¹

In the East they met.

Sri Aurobindo and Mirra.

Mother and Sri Aurobindo.

Together they set out to bring that Light to this groaning Earth.

In this hour of Earth's history, when the worn-out faiths of nations are tottering like old men, bring down this Light they did; for, in truth, nothing is lost in It, no darkness escapes It, It lays out to light the innermost recesses of every man. Of every nation.

Together, Sri Aurobindo and Mother were going to accomplish the greatest adventure of man.

21 February 1989

⁴¹Excerpted from *The Heroes of Asgard*, by A. & E. Keary.

Mother's Chronicles
Book Three -- Mirra the Occultist

Chronology

- 1897 to 1907 -- Mirra and Henri Morisset live in 15 Rue Lemer cier.
- 1898, August 23 -- Their son, Andrea Morisset, is born in Paris.
- 1903-1904 -- First contact with the Cosmic Movement.
-- Series of visions of Sri Aurobindo, or Krishna as Mirra thought.
- 1905 -- Mirra meets MAX THEON.
- 1906, 14 July to 15 October -- First visit to Tlemcen.
- 1906 -- Mother founds her first group. *Idea*.
- 1907, July to October -- Second visit to Tlemcen.
- 1908 -- Mirra lives in 49 Rue de Levis.
- 1908, March -- Divorce from H. Morisset.
- 1910, April -- Paul Richard meets Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry.
- 1911, 5 May -- Mirra marries Paul Richard. they live in 19 Rue du Al de Grace.
- 1911-1913 -- Mother's second group, *L'Union des Pensees Femmines*.
- 1912, November -- Beginning of *Prayers and Meditations*.

Bibliography

To weave Mother's story, I had necessarily to pick up a line here, a sentence there. But Readers interested in finding out more about Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's experience may like to consult the following books by Satprem:

MOTHER'S AGENDA, 1951-1973 (13 volumes)

Recorded by Satprem in the course of countless personal conversations with Mother, the log of her fabulous exploration in the cellular consciousness of the body. Twenty-three years of experiences which parallel some of the most recent theories of modern physics. The key to man's passage towards the next species.

(Volumes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 12 & 13 already published in English)

Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness, an essay (1984)

The Mind of the Cells, an essay (1982)

Mother, a trilogy,

I *The Divine Materialism* (1980)

II *The New Species* (1983)

III *The Mutation of Death* (1987)

On the Way to Supermanhood, an essay (1986)

Life Without Death, by Satprem & Luc Venet (1989)

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