

Sri M P Pandit Collective Life / Gnostic Society

A talk recorded on February 26, 1989.

The following is a transcription of a satsang gathering talk at Sri M P Pandit's home on February 26, 1989. People regularly gathered in the evening for talks and studies with M P Pandit.

SRI M P PANDIT:

I have been receiving now and then literature from a number of meditation groups, spiritual centers, in different countries, and I usually give a rapid glance to the contents of these bulletins. I was struck by a passage, which must be nearly 100 years old, regarding spiritual work on a group basis. The idea of spiritual discipline on an individual basis has been there all along, but as on a group basis the movement has gathered force in this century because the spiritual effort demanded of humanity is more of a collective nature than individual.

Sri Aurobindo raises the question in a whole chapter on "The Gnostic Being" in the Life Divine, where he discusses how there has to be a gnostic society consisting of gnostic individuals. Speaking of the features of such a community, a spiritual collectivity dedicated to the ideal and the practice of a life of the Supramental Consciousness, he lists three requirements before such a society can come into being, can work as a force for the intended work of establishing the higher consciousness on earth. The first principle is Unity. No matter how many are there, but there has to be a unity of purpose. A number of people living together, each pursuing his own avocations, but living in one geographical area, do not constitute a spiritual society. There has to be one ideal. Different groups may have different ideals. There is the ideal of sannyasa, there is the ideal of Mahayana, and there is the ideal of integral perfection. Whatever the ideal, all who form the members of that collectivity must accept that as the one goal of life. If there is one thing that brings together and holds together all of them, it must be this truth, this ideal for which they have gathered. So you have unity, unity of ideal, unity of aim, unity of purpose. Whatever our individual differences, individual variations of nature, at the level of the objective there has to be oneness, one ideal. We cannot say, you can pursue the ideal of perfection, I will pursue the ideal of rejection of life. It will not do. Let us assume that reasonably there is one ideal that forms the basis of unity of the community.

Next when a number of individuals are there, not each one living an isolated existence as in a monastery or in a Vihara, but where they have to live together, meet each other, interact with each other, work with each other, there has to be some Mutuality. Mutuality is the spirit of give and take, accepting the bona fides of each other. You may not agree with what a person says but you respect the person's sincerity in holding to what he says. Maybe I am not ready to accept or understand what he says or does but I have no right to interfere, I should not attribute motives to that person. Mutuality is a mutual respect, consideration, an interchange without reservations. You accept each individual as individual. When you do not agree, take it that you don't understand but you cannot judge. That is what Mother repeatedly emphasizes, do not ever judge people. To judge means you raise yourself on a superior pedestal whereas, as a matter of fact, you are all functioning on the same level of ignorance. There are mutual relations, in day-to-day dealings, you rub shoulders with others, you talk to others, you work with others, you help others, you are helped by others. In other words, a mutual acceptance.

The third requirement is as a result of the common ideal, common unity of objective, happy inter-relations, there is harmony, a continuous and flowing harmony in collective life. There are no clashes,

there are no uneven ups and downs in life because there is no competition. There is collaboration. Each one sees in what way one can contribute and one can serve, one can participate usefully in the collective life. Each one has to subordinate his individual's stress, in the interests of the collective life. So, if each one has the right attitude, there is very little scope for disequilibrium, disharmony, clash or for the play of egos. Sri Aurobindo emphasizes again and again that for a spiritual community, Unity, Mutuality, and Harmony are indispensable. Each spiritual community or collectivity wanting to be a spiritual center must keep these requirements as prerequisites before it can function as a spiritual community.

All these thoughts came in my mind when I happened to read as I said a paragraph in a very old writing which has been quoted in a bulletin of Mount Meditation from California. There they speak, "This group unity, which will have its roots in united group meditation or in the contemplative life wherein the Soul knows itself to be one with all Souls, must work out in some form of group activity." That is, the group unity, the group ideal has to stabilize itself, establish itself through some group activity. Only meditation, only study, only prayer will not do. There has to be a collective pouring of energies on all levels.

This question of group work is of vital importance and much is hoped from it these days. If in any organization of the physical plane the teachers can get "a nucleus of even 3 people who mutually interact," it is a capital gain. Mother has always held that if there are 3 people who accept this ideal and who want to aspire together, work together, they are eligible to start a center. *Three*. Three must be an occult number because the authors of this writing are from a totally different path. They say "a nucleus of even three people who mutually interact", that is, there must be a minimum at least of three who have no reservations about each other, who freely interact with each other, who don't question, who don't doubt, who accept wholly each other and interact without reservations and who disinterestedly follow the path of service.

Now, service is important because many people come with many motives, not all come to such collectivities for spiritual ends. Or even if many come for spiritual objectives to begin with, there is a certain dilution of their aspirations and other motives take their place. It may be seeking for power, seeking for domination, seeking for name-aggrandizement, whatever name you may call it; instead of that, the stress must be for service. And service means, there is no selfish motive. A self-less giving, doing something useful in the society, can produce more definite results in a shorter space of time than is possible in a large and active body of people who may be sincere and earnest, but do not know the meaning of trust. They will not trust, there is a cynical suspicion. So when you can't trust a human being who is before you, are you really going to trust God who is not physically visible? No. All good things start here. Unless you cultivate the capacity of trusting in things around you, in Nature, in goodness of colleagues, you are not going to have trust in Divine. Collaboration, as Mother would say, cooperation as they put it commonly; that is you mutually cohere, support each other, second each other, not go at cross purposes, not undermine what others are doing, not sabotage what somebody else is doing. If I cannot physically contribute, if I cannot physically add to the work somebody else is doing well I should have at least a supportive attitude. That is cooperation, not emanating contrary vibrations all the while, spreading poison in the air, introducing negative currents, critical. Critics are out of place.

And further: "The small group can do more than a body of people who may be large but guard not the gate of speech. This is an extremely important condition that whatever your merits, whatever your strong points, the community must guard the gate of speech, that is, they must take care not to speak ill of others, not to question the honesty of others, not to spread scandals, not to indulge in gossip, not to

indulge in character assassination; these are great dangers to the health of a spiritual collectivity. That is why the Mother used to repeatedly warn against gossip. One day she even wrote in big letters NO GOSSIP and had it put up at the Ashram entrance. Then somebody who was indulging in gossip represented to Mother that if the board was there, every visitor who came would have a poor opinion of us. So, he requested that the notice be kept inside and not outside. It was shifted.

What struck me was that even about 100 years ago, the perception of what is essential for a spiritual community was almost the same as what Mother and Sri Aurobindo have been saying today. The expression “guarding the gate of speech” is important. Gate, because it is through speech that our consciousness, our energies spill out, go out and impact on others. So speech is very important. To gain control over speech was very much insisted upon in the ancient disciplines. Only later as deterioration set in, control of speech was taken to mean absence of speech. Absence of speech, suppression of speech, total prevention of speech, is not what is meant in spiritual context. As Mother says, you speak when you must, you do not speak when you do not need to. You have to have this discrimination. Not to speak at all may be an extreme step in certain situations but that does not serve a spiritual purpose. Both Sri Aurobindo and Mother want temperate speech, that is you think before you talk, ‘Is it necessary for me to speak?’ If it is going to play a positive role, yes. Otherwise, withhold. That is why Mother wrote in another Notice, “If you do not have a good word to say of another, keep quiet.” Do not waste your energies in speaking ill. If you speak it should be positive, it should be elevating, it should be in the direction of spiritual atmosphere, otherwise, do not.