



Widening one's Mind

a means to overcome difficulties

*"In its natural state the human mind is always limited in its vision,
narrow in its understanding, rigid in its conception,
and a constant effort is therefore needed to widen it,
to make it more supple and profound."*

The Mother



WHAT IS WIDENING?

To widen one's mind simply means to overcome one's rigidities, pre-conceived ideas, conceptions, points of view as also to be able to consider everything from as many points of view as possible.

It is through suppleness and elevation of thought that one can widen one's mind. The following exercises in this connection can help one develop suppleness and elevation of thought.

EXERCISES TO WIDEN ONE'S MIND

1) Identification with something wide

"The easiest way is to identify yourself with something vast. For instance, when you feel that you are shut up in a completely narrow and limited thought, will, consciousness, when you feel as though you were in a shell, then if you begin thinking about something very vast, as for example, the immensity of the waters of an ocean, and if really you can think of this ocean and how it stretches out far, far, far, far, in all direc-



tions, like this (Mother stretches out her arms), how, compared with you, it is so far, so far that you cannot see the other shore, you cannot reach its end anywhere, neither behind or in front nor to the right or left... it is wide, wide, wide, wide... you think of this and then you feel that you are floating on this sea, like that, and that there are no limits.... This is very easy. Then you can widen your consciousness a little.

Other people, for example, begin looking at the sky; and then they imagine all those spaces between all those stars, and all... that kind of infinity of spaces in which the earth is a tiny point, and you too are just a very tiny point, smaller than an ant, on the earth. And so you look at the sky and feel that you are floating in these infinite spaces between the planets, and that you are growing vaster and vaster to go farther and farther. Some people succeed with this."¹

"...begin trying to widen yourself – you feel you are widening yourself. There are many methods. Some find it very useful to imagine they are floating on water with a plank under their back. Then they widen themselves, widen, until they become the vast liquid mass. Others make an effort to identify themselves with the sky and the stars, so they widen, widen themselves, identify themselves more and more with the sky. Others again don't need these pictures; they can become conscious of their consciousness, enlarge their consciousness more and more until it becomes unlimited. One can enlarge it till it becomes vast as the earth and even the universe. When one does that one becomes really receptive. As I have said, it is a question of training. In any case, from an immediate point of view,... the method is just the same, you must act upon the contraction. One can act through thought, by calling the peace, tranquillity (the feeling of peace takes away much of the difficulty) like this: "Peace, peace, peace... tranquillity... calm." Many discomforts, even physical, like all these contractions of the solar plexus, which are so unpleasant and give you at times nausea, the sensation of being suffocated, of not being able to breathe again, can disappear thus. It is the nervous centre which is affected, it gets affected very easily. As soon as there is something which affects the solar plexus, you must say, "Calm... calm... calm", become

more and more calm until the tension is destroyed."²

2) *Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis*

"...there is an exercise which gives great suppleness and elevation to the thought. It is as follows: a clearly formulated thesis is set; against it is opposed its antithesis, formulated with the same precision. Then by careful reflection the problem must be widened or transcended until a synthesis is found which unites the two contraries in a larger, higher and more comprehensive idea."³

PROBLEM SOLVING: THROUGH WIDENING

By widening one's consciousness the problems we face in our daily lives can be overcome. It is a means to overcome a number of difficulties. In fact, Mother says, "Whenever there is a disagreement on any matter, such as a decision to take, or an act to accomplish, one must not stick to one's own conception or point of view. On the contrary, one must try to understand the other's point of view, put oneself in his place and, instead of quarrelling or even fighting, find out a solution which can reasonably satisfy both parties; there is always one for men of goodwill."⁴

1) *Overcoming difficulties*

"I am speaking, of course, of difficulties.... incomprehension, limitations, things like obstacles, which prevent you from advancing. And when I say "widen yourself", I mean widen your consciousness.

Difficulties always arise from the ego, that is, from your more or less egoistic personal reaction to circumstances, events and people around you, to the conditions of your life. They also come from that feeling of being closed up in a sort of shell, which prevents your consciousness from uniting with higher and vaster realities. ...

But if, when you have to face anguish, suffering, revolt, pain or a feeling of helplessness – whatever it may be, all the things that come to you on the path and which precisely are your difficulties – if physically, that is to say, in your body consciousness, you can have the feeling of widening yourself, one could say of unfolding yourself – you feel as it were all folded up, one fold on another like a piece of cloth which is



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

This is much easier than struggling against a difficulty with one's thought, for if you begin to discuss with yourself, you will find that there are arguments for and against which are so convincing that it is quite impossible to get out of it without a higher light. Here, you do not struggle against the difficulty, you do not try to convince yourself; ah! you simply stretch out in the Light as though you lay stretched on the sands in the sun. And you let the Light do its work. That's all."⁵

2) *Overcoming - Getting Hurt*

"There is a way also by trying to identify yourself with all things upon earth. For example, when you have a small narrow vision of something and are hurt by others' vision and point of view, you must begin by shifting your consciousness, try to put it in others, and try gradually to identify yourself with all the different ways of thinking of all others. This is a little more... how shall I put it?... dangerous. Because to identify oneself with the thought and will of others means

to identify oneself with a heap of stupidities (*Mother laughs*) and bad wills, and this may bring consequences which are not very good. But still, some people do this more easily. For instance, when they are in disagreement with someone, in order to widen their consciousness they try to put themselves in the place of the other and see the thing not from their own point of view but from the point of view of the other. This widens the consciousness, though not as much as by the first ways I spoke about, which are quite innocent. They don't do you any harm, they do you much good. They make you very peaceful."⁶

3) *For a Better Understanding*

"In thought also. For instance, you are reading something and come across a thought you don't understand – it is beyond you, you understand nothing and so in your head it lies like a brick, and if you try to understand, it becomes more and more like a brick, a stiffening, and if you persist it gives you a headache. There is but one thing to do: not to struggle with the words, remain just like this (*gesture: stretched out, immobile*), create a relaxation, simply widen, widen. And don't try to understand, above all don't try to understand – let it enter like that, quite gently, and relax, relax, and in this relaxing your headache goes away. You no longer think of anything, you wait for a few days and after some days you see from inside: "Oh! how clear it is! I understand what I had not understood." It is as easy as that. When you read a book which is beyond you, when you come across sentences which you cannot understand – one feels that there is no correspondence in the head – well, you must do this; one reads the thing once, twice, thrice, then remains calm and makes the mind silent. A fortnight later, one takes up the same passage again and it is clear as daylight. Everything has been organised in the head, the elements of the brain which were wanted for the understanding have been formed, everything has been done gradually and one understands."⁷

☞ **Compiled by Ritika Goyal and Aditi**

¹ The Mother, *Collected Works of the Mother*, vol.6, pp.344-45

² Ibid, vol.4, p.266

³ Ibid, vol.12, p.5

⁴ The Mother, in *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on Education*, pp.92-93

⁵ The Mother, *Collected Works of the Mother*, vol.8, pp.286-88

⁶ Ibid, vol.6, p.345

⁷ Ibid, vol.4, pp.266-67