



Individual & Collective

Change

‘Be the change you want to see in the world’ – an oft quoted line from Gandhi, is more positive in its tone than Leo Tolstoy’s: ‘Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.’ But the idea is the same. A deeper chord is struck by a Talmudic saying: ‘We do not see things as they are, we see things as we are.’ But there are other aspects to it as well, that lie even deeper, unravelling levels of connectivity between the individual and the collective – levels so deep that one tiny shift somewhere, in one being, in one individual, in one organization, can have the power of rippling off many interconnected shifts in the larger world. How to reach those levels? What does one need to change or develop in oneself or what does one need to sacrifice in oneself so that one can travel there? It is these deeper insights that my being senses in The Mother’s words, and it is some of these that I would like to share with you for a similar resonation.

The first is a prayer by The Mother, noted in her diary, that says a lot, says it all. Originally written in French, the prayer dated 28 November, 1912, has been translated into English by Sri Aurobindo himself... ..

“The outer life, the activity of each day and each instant, is it not the indispensable complement of our hours of meditation and contemplation? And is not the proportion of time given to each the exact image of the proportion which exists between the amount of effort to be made for the preparation and realisation? For meditation, contemplation, Union is the result obtained—the flower that blooms; the daily activity is the anvil on which all the elements must pass and repass in order to be purified, refined, made supple and ripe for the illumination which contemplation gives to them. All these elements must be thus passed one after the other through the crucible before outer activity becomes needless for the integral development. Then is this activity turned into the means to manifest Thee so as to awaken the other centres of consciousness to the same dual work of the forge and the illumination. Therefore are pride and satisfaction with oneself the worst of all obstacles. Very modestly we must take advantage of all the minute opportunities offered to knead and purify some of the innumerable elements, to make them supple, to make them impersonal, to teach them forgetfulness of self and abnegation and devotion and kindness and gentleness; and when all these modes of being have become habitual to them, then are they ready to participate in the Contemplation, and to identify themselves with Thee in the supreme Concentration. That is why it seems to me that the work must be long and slow even for the best and that striking conversions cannot be integral. They change the orientation of the being, they put it definitively on the straight path; but truly to





attain the goal none can escape the need of innumerable experiences of every kind and every instant.

. . . O Supreme Master who shinest in my being and each thing, let Thy Light be manifest and the reign of Thy Peace come for all.”¹

Meditation and contemplation are complemented by the outer activity – neither exists without the other. But, the activity is not for its own sake – it is a means to manifest the Divine, and thereby ‘to awaken the other centres of consciousness’ to this same dual movement – inner work and outer work. The qualities needed are ‘forgetfulness of self and abnegation and devotion and kindness and gentleness’, to be on guard against ‘pride and satisfaction with oneself’. Patience, endurance, perseverance are needed – for ‘the work must be long and slow’. Changes that are fast, striking, may effectuate a shift in the being, re-orient it in some way, but for an integral change, one needs to persist longer till all the elements are changed – through ‘innumerable experiences of every kind and every instant’.

There is another quote by the Mother which presents both the challenge and the hope of individual and collective change –

“The world will be made better only in proportion as we make ourselves better. The Vedantic truth that the world is only a projection – a function – of our consciousness is as pragmatically true as it is spiritually true. The ills that humanity suffers from – collectively and individually – stem from the errors that lie at the roots of our ignorant nature. We must be cleansed of these evils – individually first of all – if we ever hope to see a clean world outside. A yoga of self-purification is the condition precedent to a yoga of perfection.

But, in the end, a Higher Destiny leans over earth’s children and its ways are beyond calculation.”²

So beautifully it juxtaposes the need for effort, with the miracle of Divine Grace.

Forgetfulness of Self and Abnegation

In the prayer (quoted above), the Mother speaks of ‘forgetfulness of self and abnegation’. What these qualities are becomes more clear through the Mother’s response to the following question –

What is the greatest obstacle in ourselves to our consecration to impersonal work?







To identify one's consciousness with the consciousness of the whole; to be a link in the chain and faithfully transmit the current one has received without trying to keep it for oneself; and, to give ourselves to an impersonal action more and more – these are the steps the Mother puts forth; forgetfulness of the self leading to discovering our true individuality and our true role in the larger whole.

- Compiled by Anuradha

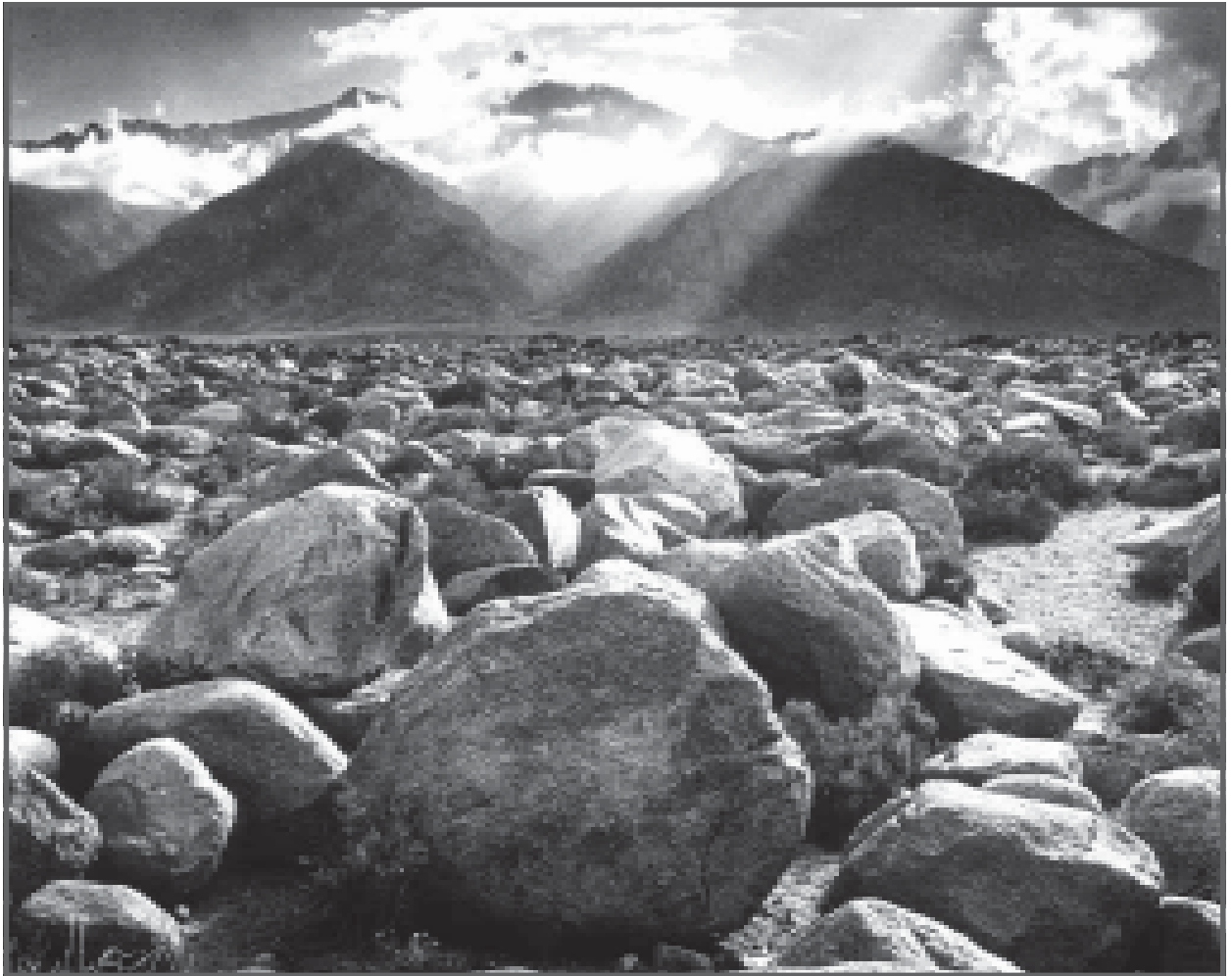


Sri Aurobindo

¹ The Mother. Prayers and Meditations (Collected Works of The Mother, vol.1). Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

² —. Vol.14, conversation of 16 August 1967. (paragraph breaks by editor)

³ —. Vol.2, conversation of 21 May, 1912.



How should we help the big change in the world...?

**The best way of helping is to let the Consciousness that has
come down upon earth work in you for transformation.**

The Mother

