

PERFECTION OF THE BODY

The perfection of the body, as great a perfection as we can bring about by the means at our disposal, must be the ultimate aim of physical culture. Perfection is the true aim of all culture, the spiritual and psychic, the mental, the vital and it must be the aim of our physical culture also. If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis, the body is the instrument which we have to use. *Sariram khalu dharmasadhanam*, says the old Sanskrit adage, — the body is the means of fulfillment of dharma, and dharma means every ideal which we can propose to ourselves and the law of its working out and its action. A total perfection is the ultimate aim which we set before us, for our ideal is the Divine Life which we wish to create here, the life of the Spirit fulfilled on earth, life accomplishing its own spiritual transformation even here on earth in the conditions of the material universe. That cannot be unless the body too undergoes a transformation, unless its action and functioning attain to a supreme capacity and the perfection which is possible to it or which can be made possible.

I have already indicated in a previous message a relative perfection of the physical consciousness in the body and of the mind, the life, the character which it houses as, no less than an awakening and development of the body's own native capacities, a desirable outcome of the exercises and practices of the physical culture to which we have commenced to give in this Ashram a special attention and scope. A development of the physical consciousness must always be a considerable part of our aim, but for that the right development of the body itself is an essential element; health, strength, fitness are the first needs, but the physical frame itself must be the best possible. A divine life in a material world implies necessarily a union of the two ends of existence, the spiritual summit and the material base. The soul with the basis of its life established in Matter ascends to the heights of the Spirit but does not cast away its base; it joins the heights and the depths together. The Spirit descends into Matter and the material world with all its lights and glories and powers and with them fills and transforms life in the material world so that it becomes more and more divine. The transformation is not a change into something purely subtle and spiritual to which Matter is in its nature repugnant and by which it is felt as an obstacle or as a shackle binding the Spirit; it takes up Matter as a form of the Spirit though now a form which conceals and turns it into a revealing instrument, it does not cast away the energies of Matter, its capacities, its methods; it brings out their hidden possibilities, uplifts, sublimates, discloses their innate divinity. The divine life will reject nothing that is capable of divinisation; all is to be seized, exalted, made utterly perfect. The mind now still ignorant, though struggling towards knowledge, has to rise towards and into the supramental light and truth and bring it down so that it shall suffuse our thinking and perception and insight and all our means of knowing till they become radiant with the highest truth in their inmost and outermost movements. Our life, still full of obscurity and confusion and occupied with so many dull and lower aims, must feel all its urges and instincts exalted and irradiated and become a glorious counterpart of the supramental super-life above. The physical consciousness and physical being, the body itself must reach a perfection in all that it is and does which now we can hardly conceive. It may even in the end be suffused with a light and beauty and bliss from the Beyond and the life divine assume a body divine.

But first the evolution of the nature must have reached a point at which it can meet the Spirit direct, feel the aspiration towards the spiritual change and open itself to the workings of the Power which shall transform it. A supreme perfection, a total perfection is possible only by a transformation of our lower or human nature, a transformation of the mind into a thing of light, our life into a thing of power, an

instrument of right action, right use for all its forces, of a happy elevation of its being lifting it beyond its present comparatively narrow potentiality for a self-fulfilling force of action and joy of life. There must be equally a transforming change of the body by a conversion of its action, its functioning, its capacities as an instrument beyond the limitations by which it is clogged and hampered even in its greatest present human attainment. In the totality of the change we have to achieve, human means and forces too have to be taken up not dropped but used and magnified to their utmost possibility as part of the new life. Such a sublimation of our present human powers of mind and life into elements of a divine life on earth can be conceived without much difficulty; but in what figure shall we conceive the perfection of the body?

In the past the body has been regarded by spiritual seekers rather as an obstacle, as something to be overcome and discarded than as an instrument of spiritual perfection and a field of the spiritual change. It has been condemned as a grossness of Matter, as an insuperable impediment and the limitations of the body as something unchangeable making transformation impossible. This is because the human body even at its best seems only to be driven by an energy of life which has its own limits and is debased in its smaller physical activities by much that is petty or coarse or evil, the body in itself is burdened with the inertia and inconscience of Matter, only partly awake and, although quickened and animated by a nervous activity, subconscious in the fundamental action of its constituent cells and tissues and their secret workings. Even in its fullest strength and force and greatest glory of beauty, it is still a flower of the material Inconscience; the inconscient is the soil from which it has grown and at every point opposes a narrow boundary to the extension of its powers and to any effort of radical self-exceeding. But if a divine life is possible on earth, then this self-exceeding must also be possible.

In the pursuit of perfection we can start at either end of our range of being and we have then to use, initially at least, the means and processes proper to our choice. In Yoga the process is spiritual and psychic; even its vital and physical processes are given a spiritual or psychic turn and raised to a higher motion than belongs properly to the ordinary life and Matter, as for instance in the Hathayogic and Rajayogic use of the breathing or the use of Asana. Ordinarily a previous preparation of the mind and life and body is necessary to make them fit for the reception of the spiritual energy and the organisation of psychic forces and methods, but this too is given a special turn proper to the Yoga. On the other hand, if we start in any field at the lower end we have to employ the means and processes which Life and Matter offer to us and respect the conditions and what we may call the technique imposed by the vital and the material energy. We may extend the activity, the achievement, the perfection attained beyond the initial, even beyond the normal possibilities but still we have to stand on the same base with which we started and within the boundaries it gives to us. It is not that the action from the two ends can not meet and the higher take into itself and uplift the lower perfection; but this can usually be done only by a transition from the lower to a higher outlook, aspiration and motive: this we shall have to do if our aim is to transform the human into the divine life. But here there comes in the necessity of taking up the activities of human life and sublimating them by the power of the spirit. Here the lower perfection will not disappear; it will remain but will be enlarged and transformed by the higher perfection which only the power of the spirit can give. This will be evident if we consider poetry and art, philosophic thought, the perfection of the written word or the perfect organisation of earthly life: these have to be taken up

and the possibilities already achieved or whatever perfection has already been attained included in a new and greater perfection but with the larger vision and inspiration of a spiritual consciousness and with new forms and powers. It must be the same with the perfection of the body.

The taking up of life and Matter into what is essentially a spiritual seeking, instead of the rejection and ultimate exclusion of them which was the attitude of a spirituality that shunned or turned away from life in the world, involves certain developments which a spiritual institution of the older kind could regard as foreign to its purpose. A divine life in the world or an institution having that for its aim and purpose cannot be or cannot remain something outside or entirely shut away from the life of ordinary men in the world or unconcerned with the mundane existence; it has to do the work of the Divine in the world and not a work outside or separate from it. The life of the ancient Rishis in their Ashramas had such a connection; they were creators, educators, guides of men and the life of the Indian people in ancient times was largely developed and directed by their shaping influence. The life and activities involved in the new endeavour are not identical but they too must be an action upon the world and a new creation in it. It must have contacts and connections with it and activities which take their place in the general life and whose initial or primary objects may not seem to differ from those of the same activities in the outside world. In our Ashram here we have found it necessary to establish a school for the education of the children of the resident Sadhaks teaching upon familiar lines though with certain modifications and taking as part and an important part of their development an intensive physical training which has given form to the sports and athletics practised by the Jeunesse Sportive of the Ashram and of which this Bulletin is the expression. It has been questioned by some what place sports can have in an Ashram created for spiritual seekers and what connection there can be between spirituality and sports. The first answer lies in what I have already written about the connections of an institution of this kind with the activities of the general life of men and what I have indicated in the previous number as to the utility such a training can have for the life of a nation and its benefit for the international life. Another answer can occur to us if we look beyond first objects and turn to the aspiration for a total perfection including the perfection of the body.

In the admission of an activity such as sports and physical exercises into the life of the Ashram it is evident that the methods and the first objects to be attained must belong to what we have called the lower end of the being. Originally they have been introduced for the physical education and bodily development of the children of the Ashram School and these are too young for a strictly spiritual aim or practice to enter into their activities and it is not certain that any great number of them will enter the spiritual life when they are of an age to choose what shall be the direction of their future. The object must be the training of the body and the development of certain parts of mind and character so far as this can be done by or in connection with this training and I have already indicated in a previous number how and in what directions this can be done. It is a relative and human perfection that can be attained within these limits; anything greater can be reached only by the intervention of higher powers, psychic powers, the power of the spirit. Yet what can be attained within the human boundaries can be something very considerable and sometimes immense: what we call genius is part of the development of the human range of being and its achievements, especially in things of the mind and will, can carry us halfway to the divine. Even what the mind and will can do with the body in the field proper to the body and its life, in the way of physical achievement, bodily endurance, feats of prowess of all kinds, a lasting activity refusing fatigue or collapse and continuing beyond what seems at first to be possible, courage

and refusal to succumb under an endless and murderous physical suffering, these and other victories of many kinds sometimes approaching or reaching the miraculous are seen in the human field and must be reckoned as a part of our concept of a total perfection. The unflinching and persistent reply that can be made by the body as well as the mind of man and by his life-energy to whatever call can be imposed on it in the most difficult and discouraging circumstances by the necessities of war and travel and adventure is of the same kind and their endurance can reach astounding proportions and even the unconscious in the body seems to be able to return a surprising response.

The body, we have said, is a creation of the Unconscious and itself unconscious or at least subconscious in parts of its self and much of its hidden action; but what we call the Unconscious is an appearance, a dwelling place, an instrument of a secret Consciousness or a Superconscious which has created the miracle we call the universe. Matter is the field and the creation of the Unconscious and the perfection of the operations of unconscious Matter, their perfect adaptation of means to an aim and end, the wonders they perform and the marvels of beauty they create, testify, in spite of all the ignorant denial we can oppose, to the presence and power of consciousness of this Superconsciousness in every part and movement of the material universe. It is there in the body, has made it and its emergence in our consciousness is the secret aim of evolution and the key to the mystery of our existence.

In the use of such activities as sports and physical exercises for the education of the individual in childhood and first youth, which should mean the bringing out of his actual and latent possibilities to their fullest development, the means and methods we must use are limited by the nature of the body and its aim must be such relative human perfection of the body's powers and capacities and those of the powers of mind, will, character, action of which it is at once the residence and the instrument so far as these methods can help to develop them. I have written sufficiently about the mental and moral parts of perfection to which these pursuits can contribute and this I need not repeat here. For the body itself the perfections that can be developed by these means are those of its natural qualities and capacities and, secondly, the training of its general fitness, as an instrument for all the activities which may be demanded from it by the mind and the will, by the life-energy or by the dynamic perceptions, impulses and instincts of our subtle physical being which is an unrecognised but very important element and agent in our nature. Health and strength are the first conditions for the natural perfection of the body, not only muscular strength and the solid strength of the limbs and physical stamina, but the finer, alert and plastic and adaptable force which our nervous and subtle physical parts can put into the activities of the frame. There is also the still more dynamic force which a call upon the life-energies can bring into the body and stir it to greater activities, even feats of the most extraordinary character of which in its normal state it would not be capable. There is also the strength which the mind and will by their demands and stimulus and by their secret powers which we use or by which we are used without knowing clearly the source of their action can impart to the body or impose upon it as masters and inspirers. Among the natural qualities and powers of the body which can be thus awakened, stimulated and trained to a normal activity we must reckon dexterity and stability in all kinds of physical action such as swiftness in the race, dexterity in combat, skill and endurance of the mountaineer, the constant and often extraordinary response to all that can be demanded from the body of the soldier, sailor, traveller or explorer to which I have already made reference or in adventure of all kinds and all the wide range of

physical attainment to which man has accustomed himself or to which he is exceptionally pushed by his own will or by the compulsion of circumstance. It is a general fitness of the body for all that can be asked from it which is the common formula of all this action, a fitness attained by a few or by many, that could be generalised by an extended and many-sided physical education and discipline. Some of these activities can be included under the name of sports; there are others for which sport and physical exercises can be an effective preparation. In some of them a training for common action, combined movement, discipline are needed and for that our physical exercises can make one ready; in others a developed individual will, skill of mind and quick perception, forcefulness of life-energy and subtle physical impulsion are more prominently needed and may even be the one sufficient trainer. All must be included in our conception of the natural powers of the body and its capacity and instrumental fitness in the service of the human mind and will and therefore in our concept of the total perfection of the body.

There are two conditions for this perfection, an awakening in as great an entirety as possible of the body consciousness and an education, an evocation of its potentialities, also as entire and fully developed and, it may be, as many-sided as possible. The form of body is, no doubt, in its origin a creation of the Inconscient and limited by it on all sides, but still of the Inconscient developing the secret consciousness concealed within it and growing in light of knowledge, power and Ananda. We have to take it at the point it has reached in its human evolution in these things, make as full a use of them as may be and, as much as we can, further this evolution to as high a degree as is permitted by the force of the individual temperament and nature. In all forms in the world there is a force at work, unconsciously active or oppressed by inertia in its lower formulations, but in the human being conscious from the first, with its potentialities partly awake, partly asleep or latent: what is awake in it we have to make fully conscious; what is asleep we have to arouse and set to its work; what is latent we have to evoke and educate. Here there are two aspects of the body consciousness, one which seems to be a kind of automatism carrying on its work in the physical plane without any intervention of the mind and in parts even beyond any possibility of direct observation by the mind or, if conscious or observable, still proceeding or capable of continuing, when once started, by an apparently mechanical action not needing direction by the mind and continuing so long as the mind does not intervene.

There are other movements taught and trained by the mind which can yet go on operating automatically but faultlessly even when not attended to by the thought or will; there are others which can operate in sleep and produce results of value to the waking intelligence. But more important is what may be described as a trained and developed automatism, a perfected skill and capacity of eye and ear and the hands and all the members prompt to respond to any call made on them, a developed spontaneous operation as an instrument, a complete fitness for any demand that the mind and life-energy can make upon it. This is ordinarily the best we can achieve at the lower end, when we start from that end and limit ourselves to the means and methods which are proper to it. For more we have to turn to the mind and life-energy themselves or to the energy of the spirit and to what they can do for a greater perfection of the body. The most we can do in the physical field by physical means is necessarily insecure as well as bound by limits; even what seems a perfect health and strength of the body is precarious and can be broken down at any moment by fluctuations from within or by a strong attack or shock from outside: only by the breaking of our limitations can a higher and more enduring perfection come. One direction

in which our consciousness must grow is an increasing hold from within or from above on the body and its powers and its more conscious response to the higher parts of our being. The mind pre-eminently is man; he is a mental being and his human perfection grows the more he fulfils the description of the Upanishad, a mental being, Purusha, leader of the life and the body. If the mind can take up and control the instincts and automatisms of the life-energy and the subtle physical consciousness and the body, if it can enter into them, consciously use and, as we may say, fully mentalise their instinctive or spontaneous action, the perfection of these energies, their action too becomes more conscious and more aware of itself and more perfect. But it is necessary for the mind too to grow in perfection and (his it can do best when it depends less on the fallible intellect of physical mind, when it is not limited even by the more orderly and accurate working of the reason and can grow in intuition and acquire a wider, deeper and closer seeing and the more luminous drive of energy of a higher Intuitive will. Even within the limits of its present evolution it is difficult to measure the degree to which the mind is able to extend its control or its use of the body's powers and capacities and when the mind rises to higher powers still and pushes back its human boundaries, it becomes impossible to fix any limits: even, in certain realisations, an intervention by the will in the automatic working of the bodily organs seems to become possible. Wherever limitations recede and in proportion as they recede, the body becomes a more plastic and responsive and in that measure a more fit and perfect instrument of the action of the spirit. In all effective and expressive activities here in the material world the cooperation of the two ends of our being is indispensable. If the body is unable whether by fatigue or by natural incapacity or any other cause to second the thought or will or is in any way irresponsive or insufficiently responsive, to that extent the action fails or falls short or becomes in some degree unsatisfying or incomplete. In what seems to be an exploit of the spirit so purely mental as the outpouring of poetic inspiration, there must be a responsive vibration of the brain and its openness as a channel for the power of the thought and vision and the light of the word that is making or breaking its way through or seeking for its perfect expression. If the brain is fatigued or dulled by any clog, either the inspiration cannot come and nothing is written or it fails and something inferior is all that can come out; or else a lower inspiration takes the place of the more luminous formulation that was striving to shape itself or the brain finds it more easy to lend itself to a less radiant stimulus or else it labours and constructs or responds to poetic artifice. Even in the most purely mental activities the fitness, readiness or perfect training of the bodily instrument is a condition indispensable. That readiness, that response too is part of the total perfection of the body.

The essential purpose and sign of the growing evolution here is the emergence of consciousness in an apparently inconscient universe, the growth of the consciousness and with it growth of the light and power of the being; the development of the form and its functioning or its fitness to survive, although indispensable, is not the whole meaning or the central motive. The greater and greater awakening of consciousness and its climb to a higher and higher level and a wider extent of its vision and action is the condition of our progress towards that supreme and total perfection which is the aim of our existence. It is the condition also of the total perfection of the body. There are higher levels of the mind than any we now conceive and to these we must one day reach and rise beyond them to the heights of a greater, a spiritual existence. As we rise we have to open to them our lower members and fill these with those superior and supreme dynamisms of light and power; the body we have to make a more and more and even entirely conscious frame and instrument, a conscious sign and seal and power of the spirit. As it grows in this perfection, the force and extent of its dynamic action and its response and service to the spirit must increase, the control of the spirit over it also must grow and the plasticity of its functioning both in its developed and acquired parts of power and in its automatic responses down to those that are now purely organic and seem to be the movements of a mechanic inconscience. This cannot happen without a veritable transformation and a transformation of the mind and life and very body is indeed

the change to which our evolution is secretly moving and without this transformation the entire fullness of a divine life on earth cannot emerge. In this transformation the body itself can become an agent and a partner. It might indeed be possible for the spirit to achieve a considerable manifestation with only a passive and imperfectly conscious body as its last or bottommost means of material functioning, but this could not be anything perfect or complete. A fully conscious body might even discover and work out the right material method and process of a material transformation. For this, no doubt, the spirit's supreme light and power and creative joy must have manifested on the summit of the individual consciousness and sent down their fiat into the body, but still the body may take in the working out its spontaneous part of self-discovery and achievement. It would be thus a participator and agent in its own transformation and the integral transformation of the whole being; this too would be a part and a sign and evidence of the total perfection of the body.

If the emergence and growth of consciousness is the central motive of the evolution and the key to its secret purpose, then by the very nature of that evolution this growth must involve not only a wider and wider extent of its capacities but also an ascent to a higher and higher level till it reaches the highest possible. For it starts from a nethermost level of involution in the Inconscience which we see at work in Matter creating the material universe; it proceeds by an Ignorance which is yet ever developing knowledge and reaching out to an ever greater light and ever greater organisation and efficacy of the will and harmonisation of all its own inherent and emerging powers; it must at last reach a point where it develops or acquires the complete fullness of its capacity and that must be a state or action in which there is no longer an ignorance seeking for knowledge but Knowledge self-possessed, inherent in the being, master of its own truths and working them out with a natural vision and force that is not afflicted by limitation or error. Or if there is a limitation, it must be a self-imposed veil behind which it would keep truth back for a manifestation in Time but draw it out at will and without any need of search or acquisition in the order of a right perception of things or in the just succession of that which has to be manifested in obedience to the call of Time. This would mean an entry or approach into what might be called a truth-consciousness self-existent in which the being would be aware of its own realities and would have the inherent power to manifest them in a Time-creation in which all would be Truth following out its own unerring steps and combining its own harmonies; every thought and will and feeling and act would be spontaneously right, inspired or intuitive, moving by the light of Truth and therefore perfect. All would express inherent realities of the spirit; some fullness of the power of the spirit would be there. One would have overpassed the present limitations of mind: mind would become a seeing of the light of Truth, will a force and power of the Truth, Life a progressive fulfilment of the Truth, the body itself a conscious vessel of the Truth and part of the means of its self-effectuation and a form of its self-aware existence. It would be at least some initiation of this Truth-Consciousness, some first figure and action of it that must be reached and enter into a first operation if there is to be a divine life or any full manifestation of a spiritualised consciousness in the world of Matter. Or, at the very least, such a Truth-Consciousness must be in communication with our own mind and life and body, descend into touch with it, control its seeing and action, impel its motives, take hold of its forces and shape their direction and purpose. All touched by it might not be able to embody it fully, but each would give some form to it according to his spiritual temperament, inner capacity, the line of his evolution in Nature: he would reach securely the perfection of which he was immediately capable and he would be on the road to the full possession of the truth of the Spirit and of the truth of Nature.

In the workings of such a Truth-Consciousness there would be a certain conscious seeing and willing automatism of the steps of its truth which would replace the infallible automatism of the inconscient or seemingly inconscient Force that has brought out of an apparent Void the miracle of an ordered universe and this could create a new order of the manifestation of the being in which a perfect

perfection would become possible, even a supreme and total perfection would appear in the vistas of an ultimate possibility. If we could draw down this power into the material world, our age long dreams of human perfectibility, individual perfection, the perfectibility of the race, of society, inner mastery over self and a complete mastery, governance and utilisation of the forces of Nature could see at long last a prospect of total achievement. This complete human self-fulfillment might well pass beyond limitations and be transformed into the character of a divine life. Matter after taking into itself and manifesting the power of life and the light of mind would draw down into it the superior or supreme power and light of the spirit and in an earthly body shed its parts of inconscience and become a perfectly conscious frame of the spirit. A secure completeness and stability of the health and strength of its physical tenement could be maintained by the will and force of this inhabitant; all the natural capacities of the physical frame, all powers of the physical consciousness would reach their utmost extension and be there at command and sure of their flawless action. As an instrument the body would acquire a fullness of capacity, a totality of fitness for all uses' which the inhabitant would demand of it far beyond anything now possible. Even it could become a revealing vessel of a supreme beauty and bliss, — casting the beauty of the light of the spirit suffusing and radiating from it as a lamp reflects and diffuses the luminosity of its indwelling flame, carrying in itself the beatitude of the spirit, its joy of the seeing mind, its joy of life and spiritual happiness, the joy of Matter released into a spiritual consciousness and thrilled with a constant ecstasy. This would be the total perfection of the spiritualised body.

All this might not come all at once, though such a sudden illumination might be possible if a divine Power and Light and Ananda could take their stand on the summit of our being and send down their force into the mind and life and body illumining and remoulding the cells, awaking consciousness in all the frame. But the way would be open and the consummation of all that is possible in the individual could progressively take place. The physical also would have its share in that consummation of the whole.

There would always remain vistas beyond as the infinite Spirit took up towards higher heights and larger breadths the evolving Nature, in the movement of the liberated being towards the possession of the supreme Reality, the supreme existence, consciousness, beatitude. But of this it would be premature to speak: what has been written is perhaps as much as the human mind as it is now constituted can venture to look forward to and the enlightened thought understand in some measure. These consequences of the Truth-Consciousness descending and laying its hold upon Matter would be a sufficient justification of the evolutionary labour. In this upward all-uplifting sweep of the Spirit there could be a simultaneous or consecutive downward sweep of the triumph of a spiritualised Nature all-including, all-transmuting and in it there could occur a glorifying change of Matter and the physical consciousness and physical form and functioning of which we could speak as not only the total but the supreme perfection of the body.