

# Sri Aurobindo and The Mother on Influenza & Epidemics

## Sri Aurobindo on Influenza

“What is the difficulty [in understanding how the subtle forces of illness attack the body using bacilli and viruses for their purpose]? You are like the scientists who say or used to say that there is no such thing as mind or thought independent of the physical brain. Mind and thought are only names for brain quiverings. Or that there is no such thing as vital Force because all the movements of life depend upon chemicals, glands and what not. These things and the germs also are only a minor physical instrumentation for something supraphysical.

They [the forces of illness] first weaken or break through the nervous envelope, the aura. If that is strong and whole, a thousand million germs will not be able to do anything to you. The envelope pierced, they attack the subconscious mind in the body, sometimes also the vital mind or mind proper—prepare the illness by fear or thought of illness. The doctors themselves said that in influenza or cholera in the Far East 90 per cent got ill through fear. Nothing to take away the resistance like fear. But still the subconscious is the main thing.

If the contrary Force is strong in the body, one can move in the midst of plague and cholera and never get contaminated. Plague too, rats dying all around, people passing into Hades. I have seen that myself in Baroda.”

*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 31, Letters On Yoga-IV, P568-569*

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“There is a general suggestion in the air about catching dengue or influenza. It is this suggestion that is enabling the adverse forces to bring about symptoms of this kind and spread the complaints; if one rejects both the suggestions and the symptoms, then these things will not materialise.”

*Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 31, Letters On Yoga-IV, P557*

## The Mother on Influenza & Epidemics

*Question: Sweet Mother, when one sees an illness coming, how can one stop it?*

Ah! First of all, you must not want it and nothing in the body must want it. You must have a very strong will not to be ill. This is the first condition.

The second condition is to call the light, a light of equilibrium, a light of peace, quietude and balance, and to push it into all the cells of the body, enjoining them not to be afraid, because that again is another condition.

First, not to want to be ill, and then not to be afraid of illness. You must neither attract it nor tremble. You must not want illness at all. But you must not because of fear not want it; you must not be afraid; you must have a calm certitude and a complete trust in the power of the Grace to shelter you from everything, and then think of something else, not be concerned about this any longer. When you have done these two things, refusing the illness with all your will and infusing a confidence which completely eliminates the fear in the cells of the body, and then busying yourself with something else, not thinking any longer about the illness, forgetting that it exists... there, if you know how to do that, you may even be in contact with people who have contagious diseases, and yet you do not catch them. But you must know how to do this.

Many people say, "Oh, yes, here I am not afraid." They don't have any fear in the mind, their mind is not afraid, it is strong, it is not afraid; but the body trembles,

and one doesn't know it, because it is in the cells of the body that the trembling goes on. It trembles with a terrible anxiety and this is what attracts the illness. It is there that you must put the force and the quietude of a perfect peace and an absolute trust in the Grace. And then, sometimes you are obliged to drive away with a similar force in your thought all suggestions that after all, the physical world is full of illnesses, and these are contagious, and because one was in contact with somebody who is ill, one is sure to catch it, and then, that the inner methods are not powerful enough to act on the physical, and all kinds of stupidities of which the air is full. These are collective suggestions which are passed on from one person to another by everybody. And if by chance there are two or three doctors, then it becomes terrible. (Laughter)

**Question:** *When Sri Aurobindo says that illness comes from outside, what exactly is it that comes?*

It is a kind of vibration made up of a mental suggestion, a vital force of disorder and certain physical elements which are the materialisation of the mental suggestion and the vital vibration. And these physical elements can be what we have agreed to call germs, microbes, this and that and many other things.

It may be accompanied by a sensation, may be accompanied by a taste, also by a smell, if one has very developed subtle senses. There are these formations of illness which give a special taste to the air, a special smell or a slight special sensation.

People have many senses which are asleep. They are terribly tamasic. If all the senses they possess were awake, there are many things they would perceive, which can just pass by without anyone suspecting anything.

For example, many people have a certain kind of influenza at the moment. It is very wide-spread. Well, when it comes close, it has a special taste, a special smell, and it brings you a certain contact (naturally not like a blow), something a little more subtle, a certain contact, exactly as when you pass your hand over

something, backwards over some material... You have never done that? The material has a grain, you know; when you pass your hand in the right direction or when you pass it like this (gesture), well, it makes you... it is something that passes over your skin, like this, backwards. But naturally, I can tell you, it doesn't come like a staggering blow. It is very subtle but very clear. So if you see that, you can very easily...

Besides, there is always a way of isolating oneself by an atmosphere of protection, if one knows how to have an extremely quiet vibration, so quiet that it makes almost a kind of wall around you. But all the time, all the time one is vibrating in response to vibrations which come from outside. If you become aware of this, all the time there is something which does this (gesture), like this, like this, like this (gestures), which responds to all the vibrations coming from outside. You are never in an absolutely quiet atmosphere which emanates from you, that is, which comes from inside outward (not something which comes from outside within), something which is like an envelope around you, very quiet, like this—and you can go anywhere at all and these vibrations which come from outside do not begin to do this (gesture) around your atmosphere.

If you could see that kind of dance, the dance of vibrations which is there around you all the time, you would see, would understand well what I mean.

For example, in a game, when you play, it is like this (gesture), and then it is like the vibrations of a point, it goes on increasing, increasing and increasing until suddenly, crash!... an accident. And it is a collective atmosphere like that; we come and see it, you are in the midst of a game—basketball or football or any other—we feel it, see it, it produces a kind of smoke around you (those vapours of heat which come at times, something like that), and then it takes on a vibration like that, like that, more and more, more and more, more and more until suddenly the equilibrium is broken: someone breaks his leg, falls down, is hit on the mouth by a ball, etc. And one can foretell beforehand that this is going to happen when it is like that. But nobody is aware of it.

Yet, even in less serious cases, each one of you individually has around him something which instead of being this very individual and very calm envelope which protects you from all that you don't want to receive... I mean, your receptivity becomes deliberate and conscious, otherwise you do not receive; and it is only when you have this conscious extremely calm atmosphere, and as I say, when it comes from within (it is not something that comes from outside), it is only when it's like this that you can go with impunity into life, that is, among others and in all the circumstances of every minute...

Otherwise if there is something bad to be caught, for example, anger, fear, an illness, some uneasiness, you are sure to catch it. As soon as it starts doing this (gesture), it is as though you called all similar vibrations to come and get hold of you.

What is to be wondered at is the unconsciousness with which men go through life; they don't know how to live, there's not one in a million who knows how to live, and they live like that somehow or other, limping along, managing, not managing; and all that for them, bah! What is it? Things that happen.

They don't know how to live. All the same one should learn how to live. That's the first thing one ought to teach children: to learn how to live. I have tried but I don't know if I have succeeded very much. I have told you all these things very often, I think, haven't I? Haven't I?"

*Collected Works of The Mother, Vol. 07, Questions and Answers 1955, P142-143*

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“From the ordinary point of view, in most cases, it is usually fear—fear, which may be mental fear, vital fear, but which is almost always physical fear, a fear in the cells—is fear which opens the door to all contagion. Mental fear—all who have a little control over themselves or any human dignity can eliminate it; vital

fear is more subtle and asks for a greater control; as for physical fear, a veritable yoga is necessary to overcome it, for the cells of the body are afraid of everything that is unpleasant, painful, and as soon as there is any unease, even if it is insignificant, the cells of the body become anxious, they don't like to be uncomfortable. And then, to overcome that, the control of a conscious will is necessary. It is usually this kind of fear that opens the door to illnesses. And I am not speaking of the first two types of fear which, as I said, any human being who wants to be human in the noblest sense of the word, must overcome, for that is cowardice. But physical fear is more difficult to overcome; without it even the most violent attacks could be repelled. If one has a minimum of control over the body, one can lessen its effects, but that is not immunity. It is this kind of trembling of material, physical [p.122] fear in the cells of the body which aggravates all illnesses.

Some people are spontaneously free from fear even in their body; they have a sufficient vital equilibrium in them not to be afraid, not to fear, and a natural harmony in the rhythm of their physical life which enables them to reduce the illness spontaneously to a minimum. There are others, on the other hand, with whom the thing always becomes as bad as it can be, sometimes to the point of catastrophe. There is the whole range and this can be seen quite easily. Well, this depends on a kind of happy rhythm of the movement of life in them, which is either harmonious enough to resist external attacks of illness or else doesn't exist or is not sufficiently powerful, and is replaced by that trembling of fear, that kind of instinctive anguish which transforms the least unpleasant contact into something painful and harmful.

There is the whole range, from someone who can go through the worst contagion and epidemics without ever catching anything to one who falls ill at the slightest chance. So naturally it always depends on the constitution of each person; and as soon as one wants to make an effort for progress, it naturally depends on the control one has acquired over oneself, until the moment when the body becomes the docile instrument of the higher Will and one can obtain from it a normal resistance to all attacks.

But when one can eliminate fear, one is almost in safety. For example, epidemics, or so-called epidemics, like those which are raging at present—ninety-nine times out of a hundred they come from fear: a fear, then, which even becomes a mental fear in its most sordid form, promoted by newspaper articles, useless talk and so on.”

*Collected Works of The Mother, Vol. 09,  
Questions and Answers 1957-1958, P122-123*

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***“Can one get ill through fear?”***

Yes. I knew someone who was so full of fear that he got cholera! There was cholera in the next house and he got so frightened that he caught the illness and without any other reason, there was no other reason for his catching it: it was through sheer fright. And it is a very common thing; in an epidemic, it is so in the majority of cases. It is through fear that the door is opened and you catch the illness. Those who have no fear can go about freely and generally they catch nothing. But still as I have said there<sup>1</sup>, you may have no fear in the mind, you may have no fear even in the vital, but who has no fear in the body?... Very few.

A strict discipline is needed to cure the body of fear. The cells themselves tremble. It is only by discipline, by yoga that one can overcome this fear. But it is a fact that one can catch anything through fear, even invite an accident. And, you see, from a certain point of view everything is contagious. I knew a person who got a wound through the kind of fear that he felt seeing someone else’s wound. He really got it.” [22nd July 1953]

*Collected Works of The Mother, Vol. 05, Questions and Answers 1953, P166-167*

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<sup>1</sup> Questions and Answers 1929 – 1931 (19 May 1929).

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*The Mother on the influenza epidemic ("Spanish Flu") exactly a 100 years ago which infected 500 million people and killed 50-100 million people worldwide:*

"...I had two experiences of that kind. The first was at Tlemcen and the second in Japan.... There was an epidemic of influenza, an influenza that came from the war (the 1914 war), and was generally fatal. People would get pneumonia after three days, and plop! finished. In Japan they never have epidemics (it's a country where epidemics are unknown), so they were caught unawares; it was an ideal breeding ground, absolutely unprepared—incredible: people died by the thousands every day, it was incredible! Everybody lived in terror, they didn't dare to go out without masks over their mouths. Then somebody whom I won't name asked me (in a brusque tone), "What Is this?" I answered him, "Better not think about it." "Why not?" he said, "It's very interesting! We must find out, at least you are able to find out whatever this is." Silly me, I was just about to go out; I had to visit a girl who lived at the other end of Tokyo (Tokyo is the largest city in the world, it takes a long time to go from one end to the other), and I wasn't so well-off I could go about in a car: I took the tram.... What an atmosphere! An atmosphere of panic in the city! You see, we lived in a house surrounded by a big park, secluded, but the atmosphere in the city was horrible. And the question, "What Is this?" naturally came to put me in contact—I came back home with the illness. I was sure to catch it, it had to happen! (laughing) I came home with it.

Like a bang on the head—I was completely dazed. They called a doctor. There were no medicines left in the city—there weren't enough medicines for people, but as we were considered important people (!) the doctor brought two tablets. I told him (laughing), "Doctor, I never take any medicines." "What!" he said. "It's so hard to get them! That's just the point," I replied, "they're very good for others!" Then, then... suddenly (I was in bed, of course, with a first-rate fever), suddenly I felt seized by trance—the real trance, the kind that pushes you out of your body—and I knew. I knew: "It's the end; if I can't resist it, it's the end." So I looked. I looked and I saw it was a being whose head had been half blown off by a bomb and who didn't know he was dead, so he was hooking on to anybody

he could to suck life. And each of those beings (I saw one over me, doing his "business"!) was one of the countless dead. Each had a sort of atmosphere—a very widespread atmosphere—of human decomposition, utterly pestilential, and that's what gave the illness. If it was merely that, you recovered, but if it was one of those beings with half a head or half a body, a being who had been killed so brutally that he didn't know he was dead and was trying to get hold of a body in order to continue his life (the atmosphere made thousands of people catch the illness every day, it was swarming, an infection), well, with such beings, you died. Within three days it was over—even before, within a day, sometimes. So once I saw and knew, I collected all the occult energy, all the occult power, and... (Mother bangs down her fist, as if to force her way into her body) I found myself back in my bed, awake, and it was over. Not only was it over, but I stayed very quiet and began to work in the atmosphere.... From that moment on, *mon petit*, there were no new cases! It was so extraordinary that it appeared in the Japanese papers. They didn't know how it happened, but from that day on, from that night on, not a single fresh case. And people recovered little by little.

I told the story to our Japanese friend in whose house we were living, I told him, "Well, that's what this illness is—a remnant of the war; and here's the way it happens.... And that being was repaid for his attempt!" Naturally, the fact that I repelled his influence by turning around and fighting... [dissolved the formation]. But what power it takes to do that! Extraordinary.

He told the story to some friends, who in turn told it to some friends, so in the end the story became known. There was even a sort of collective thanks from the city for my intervention.... But the whole thing stemmed from that: "What Is this illness? You're able to find out, aren't you?" (Laughter) Go and catch it!

But that feeling of being absolutely paralyzed, a prey to something—absolutely paralyzed, you can't... You are no longer in your body, you understand, you can't act on it any more. And a sense of liberation when you are able to turn around.

I had a tremendous fever, which naturally dropped little by little—after a few days I was completely cured; even immediately, I was almost cured.

There, petit.”

*Mother's Agenda, Vol. 4, P74-75*

## **Further reading:**

Sri Aurobindo Ashram Online Library: <http://library.sriurobindoashram.org>

\*Here you can download and read collections of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother's works.

The Incarnate Word: <https://incarnateword.in>

\*Here you can search for their works on specific topics.