

How can I find my place in the Universal Work?

The Mother, Sri Aurobindo Ashram



This is a question which every individual puts to himself when he attains a certain level of inner awakening. In this article, the Mother gives simple and clear guidelines which can lead us in this path of self-discovery.

The Work to Accomplish

We all have a role to fulfil, a work to accomplish, a place which we alone can occupy.

But since this work is the expression, the outer manifestation of the inmost depth of our being, we can become conscious of its definitive form only when we become conscious of this depth within ourselves.

This is what sometimes happens in cases of true conversion.

The moment we perceive the transfiguring light and give ourselves to it without reserve, we can suddenly and precisely become aware of what we are made for, of the purpose of our existence on earth.

The Path of Self-discovery

But this enlightenment is exceptional. It is brought about within us by a whole series of efforts and inner attitudes. And one of the essential conditions if we want to achieve and maintain within ourselves these attitudes, these soul-states, is to devote part of our time each day to some impersonal action; every day, we must do something useful for others.

Until we know the essential thing we are intended to do, we must therefore find a temporary occupation which will be the best possible manifestation of our present capacities and our goodwill.

Then we shall give ourselves to this occupation with conscientiousness and perseverance, knowing that it may well be only a stage and that with the progress of our ideal and our energies, we shall certainly one day be led to see more clearly the work we must accomplish. To the extent that we lose the habit of referring everything to ourselves and learn more and more to give

ourselves more completely, with greater love, to earth and men, we shall see our horizons widen and our duties become more numerous and clear.

We shall find that our action follows a general line of progression determined by our own particular temperament.

Indeed, the successive occupations we shall hold before we become conscious of the definitive form of our action will always point in the same direction, be of the same type and mode, which is the spontaneous expression of our character, our nature, our own characteristic vibration.

The discovery of this tendency, this particular orientation, should come about quite naturally; it is a matter of taste and free choice, beyond all outer selfish considerations.

People are often blamed for choosing an action for themselves which does not correspond to their abilities. There is a slight confusion here.

The Pitfalls in the Path

Those who freely set out to accomplish their own favourite work cannot, in my opinion, be on the wrong track; this work must surely be the expression of their own particular tendency. But their mistake lies in wanting to accomplish this work all at once in its entirety, in its integrality, in depth and above all on the surface, forgetting that the very conception of the work is imperfect as they are imperfect and that to be wise, they should add to the knowledge of what they wish to do the more immediate and practical knowledge of what they are capable of doing at the present moment.

By taking both these factors into account, they can employ themselves with a minimum waste of time and energy.

But few people act with so much insight and wisdom. And it very often happens that one who is seeking his way falls into one of these two possible errors:

Either he takes his desires for realities, that is, he overestimates his present strength and capacity and imagines that he is capable of immediately assuming a place and a role which he can honourably fulfil only after many years of methodical and persevering effort.

Or he underestimates his latent powers and deliberately confines himself, in spite of his deeper aspirations, to a task which is far beneath his abilities and which will gradually extinguish within him the light that could have shone for others.

It seems difficult at first to steer clear of these pitfalls and find the balanced way, the middle way.

But we have a sure pointer to guide us.

Overcoming Self-love

Above all, whatever we undertake should not be done for the purpose of self-assertion. If we are attached to fame and glory, to the esteem of our peers, we are soon led to make concessions to them; and if we seek any opportunity to admire ourselves, it becomes easy to make ourselves out to be what we are not, and nothing more obscures the ideal within us.

We should never tell ourselves, openly or indirectly, "I want to be great, what vocation can I find for myself in order to become great?"

On the contrary, we should tell ourselves, "There must certainly be something I can do better than anyone else, since each one of us is a special mode of manifestation of the divine power which, in its essence, is one in all. However humble and modest it may be, this is precisely the thing to which I should devote myself, and in order to find it, I shall observe and analyse my tastes, tendencies and preferences, and I shall do it without pride or excessive humility, whatever others may think I shall do it just as I breathe, just as the flower smells sweet, quite simply, quite naturally, because I cannot do otherwise."

As soon as we have abolished within us, even for a moment, all egoistic desires, all personal and selfish aims, we can surrender to this inner spontaneity, this deep inspiration which will enable us to commune with the living and progressive forces of the universe.

The conception of our work will inevitably grow more perfect as we grow more perfect ourselves; and to realise this growing perfection, no effort to exceed ourselves should be neglected, but the work we perform must become always more and more joyful and spontaneous, like water welling from a pure spring.

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