Ambition

We have heard people say that without ambition we cannot do anything. In our schools, in our social life, in our relationships with each other, in anything we do in life, we feel that ambition is necessary to achieve a certain end, either personal or collective or social or for the nation. You know what that word ambition means? To achieve an end, to have the drive, the personal drive; the feeling that without struggling, without competing, without pushing, you cannot get anything done in this world. Please watch yourself and those about you; and you will see how ambitious people are. The clerk wants to become the manager, the manager wants to become the boss, the minister wants to be the prime minister, the lieutenant wants to become the general. So each one has his ambition. We also encourage this feeling in schools. We encourage students to compete, to be better than somebody else.

All our so-called progress is based on ambition. If you draw, you must draw much better than anybody else; if you make an image, it must be better than that made by anybody else; there is this constant struggle. What happens in this process is that you become very cruel. Because you want to achieve an end, you become cruel, ruthless, thoughtless, in your group, in your class, in your nation.

Ambition is really a form of power, the desire for power over
myself and over others, the power to do something better than anybody else. In ambition, there is a sense of comparison, and therefore, the ambitious man is never really a creative man, is never a happy man; in himself he is discontented. And yet, we think that without ambition we should be nothing, we should have no progress.

Is there a different way of doing things, a different way of living, acting, building, inventing without ambition, without this struggle of competition in which there is cruelty and which ultimately ends in war? I think there is a different way. But that way means doing something contrary to all the established customs of thought. When we are seeking a result, the important thing to us is the result, not the thing we do, in itself. Can we understand and love the thing which we are doing without caring for what it will produce, what it will get us, or what name or what reputation we shall have?

Success is the invention of a society which is greedy, which is acquisitive. Can we, each one of us, as we are growing, find out what we really love to do—whether it is mending a shoe, becoming a cobbler, or building a bridge, or being a capable and efficient administrator? Can we have the love of the thing in itself without caring for what it will give us or what it will do in the world? If we can understand that spirit, that feeling, then, I think, action will not create misery as it does at the present time; then we shall not be in conflict with one another. But it is very difficult to
find out what you really love to do because you have so many contradictory urges. When you see an engine going very fast, you want to be an engine-driver. When you are young, there is an extraordinary beauty in the engine; I do not know if you have watched it. But later on that stage passes, and you want to become an orator, a speaker, a writer, or an engineer, and that too passes. Gradually, because of our rotten education, you are forced into a particular channel, into a particular groove. So you become a clerk or a lawyer or a mischief-monger, and in that job you live, you compete, you are ambitious, you struggle.

Is it not the function of education while you are very young, particularly in a school of this kind, to help to bring about such intelligence in each one of you that you will have a job which is congenial to you and which you love and want to do, and that you will not do a job which you hate or with which you are bored but which you have to do because you are already married, or because you have the responsibility of your parents, or because your parents say that you must be a lawyer when you really want to be a painter? Is it not very important, while you are young, for the teacher to understand this problem of ambition and to prevent it by talking it over with each one of you; by explaining, by going into the whole problem of competition? This will help you to find out what you really want to do.

Now we think in terms of doing something which will give us a
personal benefit or a benefit to society or to the nation. We grow to maturity without maturing inwardly, without knowing what we want to do, but being forced to do something in which our heart is not. So, we live in misery. But society—that is, your parents, your guardians, your friends, and everybody about you—says what a marvellous person you are because you are a success.

We are ambitious. Ambition is not only in the outer world, but also in the inner world, in the world of the psyche, the spirit. There also we want to be a success, we want to achieve the greatest ideals. This constant struggle to become something is very destructive, it disintegrates, it destroys. Can’t you understand this urge to ‘become’ and concern yourself only with being whatever you are, and then, from there, move on? If I am jealous, can I know I am jealous or envious, and not try to become nonenvious? Jealousy is self-enclosing. If I know I am jealous and watch it and let it be, then I will see that out of that something extraordinary comes.

The ‘becomer,’ whether in the outer world or in the spiritual world, is a machine, he will never know what real joy is. One will know joy only when one sees what one is and lets that complexity, that beauty, that ugliness, that corruption, act without attempting to become something else. To do this is very difficult because the mind is always wanting to be something. You want to become philosophers or become great writers, you want to become an M.A. But you see, such ambition is never a creative
thing. In that ambition there is no initiative because you are only concerned with success. You worship the god of success instead of understanding the ambition itself. However poor you may be, however empty, however dull, if you can see the thing as it is, then that will begin to transform itself. But a mind occupied in ‘becoming’ something never understands the ‘being.’ It is the understanding of what one is, the being of what one is, that brings an extraordinary elation, a release of creative thought, creative life.

All this is probably a bit difficult for the average student. As I said yesterday, you should discuss this with your teachers. Did you ask your teachers? Did you take ten minutes of your classtime for this? What happened to you? and what happened to the teacher? Could you tell me? Could you understand, through the teacher, what was said?

This morning, we are talking about something which is entirely different from the usual traditional approach to life. All the religious books, all our education, all our social, cultural approaches are to achieve, to become something. But that has not created a happy world, it has brought enormous misery. Hitler, Stalin, Roosevelt are all the result of that, so also are your particular leaders, past and present.

Ambition is the activity of an unhappy person, not of a happy person. But to live, to act, to think, to create, without ambition, is extremely difficult. Without understanding ambition, there cannot be creativity. An ambitious
person is never a creative, joyous person; he is always tortured. But a man who feels the love of anything, the being of anything, is really creative; such a person is a revolutionary. A person who is a communist, a socialist, a congressman, or an imperialist cannot be revolutionary. The creative human being is inwardly very rich, and out of that richness, he acts and has his being.

Ask your teachers the implications of all that I have said, and find out if one can live without ambition.

We live now with ambition. That is our daily bread. But that bread poisons us, produces in us all kinds of misery, mentally and physically, so that the moment we are thwarted and prevented from carrying out our ambition, we fall ill. But a man who has the inward feeling of doing the thing which he loves without thinking of an end, without thinking of a result—that man has no frustrations, he has no hindrances, he is the real creator.