



The Practice of the Integral Yoga

With copious hints for the Pilgrims of the Path

— Jugal Kishore Mukherjee

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About The Practice of the Integral Yoga

This is a comprehensive treatise on the effective practice of the Yoga of Integral Transformation as propounded by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The book is an outcome of what has been shaped on the anvil of long practice, deep reflection, and inner experience.

Combining the clear, analytical thought of a scientist with the psychic insightfulness of a sadhaka, Prof. Mukherjee has produced a book that is at once lucid and profound. Its comprehensiveness, authenticity and compactness will make *The Practice of the Integral Yoga* an ideal companion and an outstanding vade-mecum for the practice of the Integral Yoga.

Review

Often, after the first flush of discovering Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, the question arises – how does one practice their yoga? If we are accustomed to any traditional understanding of yoga, it is some formula which we seek, a method and schedule of asanas and pranayama, meditation and/or mantras. A bewildering profusion of such routines has been developed over the centuries in India (and now abroad) and tagged with different names – each promising the shortcut to “realization.” To some it is almost a shock to realize that no such esoteric formula, given in secret to initiates has been provided by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother and many are likely to look askance at this absence as a sign of the impracticality of this yoga. Indeed, the

Integral Yoga has deliberately avoided the formulae of routine methods and shortcuts. In *The Synthesis of Yoga*, while writing about the processes of the traditional yogas, Sri Aurobindo says: “The methods of the integral Yoga must be mainly spiritual, and dependence on physical methods or fixed psychic or psycho-physical processes on a large scale would be the substitution of a lower for a higher action.” What then are these “spiritual methods” and their “higher action” that Sri Aurobindo is referring to?

In the opening sentence of his mantric text *The Mother*, Sri Aurobindo introduces the twin sources for all methods in the Integral Yoga: “*There are two powers that alone can effect in their conjunction the great and difficult thing which is the aim of our endeavour, a fixed and unfailing aspiration that calls from below and a supreme Grace from above that answers.*” The aspiration that calls from below comes from our inmost being, also known as the psychic being. The Grace from above that answers is the action of the Divine Mother. Instead of trying to control or transform prakriti by the methods of prakriti, the aim of the Integral Yoga is more one of invoking the action of the psychic purusha, at first through its influence on the mental-vital-physical complex and then directly through its emergence and control of the entire nature. Simultaneously, it is one of openness and trust in the force of the Divine Mother entering into and working on the different parts of the being and spiritualizing them in collaboration with the psychic action. The “methods” of this yoga then are better seen as those arising spontaneously and dynamically from the dual action of the psychic being and the Mother.

Another reason for avoiding the formulaic methods and routines of traditional yogic practice is the fact that the Integral Yoga is a customized process of Self-discovery and expression and such a process unfolds itself uniquely given the specific proclivities of the individual. This is what makes Sri Aurobindo describe his yoga through the varied windows of Knowledge, Works, Love and Self-Perfection in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, acknowledging that our approach can be through any one or a combination of these depending on our soul-type, but that whatever the approach, it must widen eventually to take in the fruits of realization of all other approaches.

But granted the undesirability of stereotypical practices, are there not any guidelines or starting points to follow before one can become aware of the hidden action of the psychic being and the Mother’s force? How even can one open to these sources of the yoga and how can one be sure of their action? Such questions are natural and both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given us ample leads in this direction. The Mother’s talks have innumerable incisive pointers on the practice of the Integral Yoga, but for the overall theory of its practice we have to turn to Sri Aurobindo. Answering a disciple’s question once on how he could be led to the realization of the Mahashakti, the Mother replied simply: “*I do not know of any guru better than Sri Aurobindo to lead one to the Mahashakti.*”

The three major texts by Sri Aurobindo which open for us the how-to of the yoga are *The Synthesis of Yoga*, the *Letters on Yoga* and *The Mother*. These three texts can give us all we need in the way of guideposts of practice. But it has been said that many find Sri Aurobindo’s writings difficult of approach and need pre-digested servings before they can get to his works. Thus many have found the talks and writings of M. P. Pandit particularly helpful. Another approach has been compilations of the Master’s and Mother’s writings, letters and talks. A. S. Dalal’s continuing series has served this purpose, as have the compilations specifically made to explain the practice of the yoga. Three works of this kind making substantial use of Sri Aurobindo’s letters are *Bases of Yoga*, *A Practical Guide to Integral Yoga* and *The Integral Yoga: Sri Aurobindo’s Teaching and Method of Practice*.

Now into this pool of literature meant to make the practice of the Integral Yoga more accessible, has come Jugal Kishore Mukherjee's *The Practice of the Integral Yoga*. This work is not a compilation of Sri Aurobindo's letters on yoga or of the Mother's talks; nor is it a primer of yoga practice in the style of M. P. Pandit. Yet, in a way, it is all these and more. Springing from the author's many years as a teacher at the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, its prose is marked by the friendly enthusiasm of sharing though hardly lacking in the analytical rigor for which Jugal Kishore has become well known. At 350 odd pages, the paperback is not verbose, is easy to read, perceptive and practical. Best of all, it brings together some of the most helpful quotes from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, weaving them into its text in contextual ways which make them much more potent than in their isolated placement in compilations.

In its organization of materials, the book displays the working of an incisive selecting intuition which picks out the most relevant aspects from all the major yogic works of Sri Aurobindo to form its chapters. Thus, though the contents of the chapters derive their effectiveness largely from quotes taken from Sri Aurobindo's letters and the Mother's talks, the focus and logic of the chapters seem to be drawn from *The Mother* and *The Synthesis of Yoga*. In this, it appears the author gives primacy of position to *The Mother* as the principal practical text of the Integral Yoga – a refreshing and penetratingly direct approach seldom seen before in books of this kind.

After spending the first two chapters developing, from the Mother's practical hints, some basic daily attitudes and habits of sadhana (corresponding to the yamas and niyamas of other schools, though much more subtle and psychological in this case), the author launches into eight chapters based on the approaches developed by Sri Aurobindo in *The Mother*. The first five of these chapters elaborate on the famous triple formula of "aspiration, rejection and surrender." In the process the author clarifies context and specialized sense pertaining to these terms and repeatedly invokes the key inner movements of the yoga. For example, before embarking on a discussion of surrender (Ch. VII, "On Self-surrender to the Divine"), the author prepares the ground by interposing a chapter "On Opening and Receptivity." In this chapter, the primacy of these two terms "opening" and "receptivity," which Sri Aurobindo evokes as central in *The Mother* is discussed so as to awaken the reader to their meaning, importance and inner intuition. Quotations such as the following abound, which leave one in no doubt that (1) this yoga is done not by one's unaided effort but by reliance on the Mother's Force; and (2) becoming aware of the working of the Mother's Force as soon and as completely as possible is among the most important necessities of this yoga: "By remaining psychically open to the Mother, all that is necessary for work or Sadhana develops progressively, that is one of the chief secrets, the central secret of the Sadhana."

After these chapters on aspiration, rejection and surrender, the author returns to the first line of *The Mother* (which I have quoted earlier in this review). The two powers "that alone can effect ... the aim of our endeavour," the "call" and the Grace, are here taken up in separate chapters. In chapter VIII, the author engages in a most interesting and illuminating discussion relating to the "call" vis-à-vis prayer. The forms of and differences between aspiration and prayer are here brought out in bold relief. Grace is dealt with in two succeeding chapters – "How to Invoke the Divine's Grace?" and "Personal Effort and the Divine Grace." This focus on Integral Yoga as seen through *The Mother* is then followed by chapters which elaborate the sadhana as dealt with in *The Synthesis of Yoga*.

Here, the discussion revolves at first around the Yoga of Works, then the Yoga of Love and then the Yoga of Knowledge. Important elements of these aspects of sadhana are brought together in

these chapters, such as the problem of right action in the Yoga of Works, the place of human relationships in the Yoga of Love and practical and legitimate aspects and methods for meditation in the Yoga of Knowledge. The development and transformation of the will, the premier importance of equality and its constant practice and the meaning and methods of psychic awakening are succeeding concerns considered in following chapters before approaching the perfection of the mental-vital-physical-subconscient instrumentality of the sadhaka.

The perfection of the human instrumentality is a specific concern of the Integral Yoga not usually addressed by other spiritual paths. The necessity for perfecting the instruments arises in this yoga because it envisages a divine life on earth. For this a divine consciousness is not enough, a divine expression through divine instruments is also necessary. Sri Aurobindo deals with this aspect of the yoga in the section on the Yoga of Self-Perfection in *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Jugal Kishore addresses these instruments of experience and expression in the concluding chapters of his book. These are divided unambiguously into “Sadhana of the Mind”, “Sadhana of the Vital”, “Sadhana of the Body” and “Sadhana During our Body’s Sleep”. Each of these forms of consciousness is given a clear exposition, using an analytical intelligence and perceptive quotes. Particularly the sadhana of the body brings out the place of physical transformation in the Integral Yoga – its difficulties and its glorious future. Considering the earlier masterful full-length study *The Destiny of the Body* by the author, the chapter on the sadhana of the body here receives a clear and concise treatment.

The book finishes with a chapter on the hostile forces and how to overcome them and a last one on the right attitude to take towards the circumstances of life (framed as the question – “Is All that Happens in Life Always for the Best?”). All in all, I have no hesitation in saying that this is one of the best books written by anyone other than Sri Aurobindo or the Mother addressing the practice of the Integral Yoga. The themes it marshalls, its organization of chapters, the profusion of its carefully selected quotes and the easy and clear flow of its logic makes it perhaps the most comprehensive, approachable and useful study to the serious person interested in practicing the Integral Yoga. It is difficult to fault, with the minor exception of its sometimes over-analytical temper – an occasional idiosyncrasy of its author – which asserts its mental interference, though rarely, in the otherwise luminous clarity of unfoldment.

— **Debashish Banerji**

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Jugal Kishore Mukherjee - The Practice of the Integral Yoga

REVIEW by Debashish Banerji

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Publisher's Note

This is the latest book coming from the pen of Jugal Kishore Mukherjee who has been residing as an inmate for the last fifty-three years in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.

SAICE (Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, Pondicherry) has already published the following books in English written by Prof. Mukherjee:

1. The Destiny of the Body (The Vision and Realisation in Sri Aurobindo's Yoga).
2. From Man Human to Man Divine (Sri Aurobindo's Vision of the Evolutionary Destiny of Man).
3. Sri Aurobindo Ashram: Its Role, Responsibility and Future Destiny.
4. Sri Aurobindo: The Smiling Master (Humour in Sri Aurobindo's Writings).
5. Sri Aurobindo's Poetry and Sanskrit Rhetoric.

As with his other publications this particular book, *The Practice of the Integral Yoga*, covers a special field of research and is the product of a careful and sustained investigation. The book will, we hope, interest the growing circle of devotees and disciples of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, especially those who want to know the method of actual practice of the Integral Yoga of Self-perfection and Self-transformation.

We are thankful to Dr. A. S. Dalai for contributing a scholarly and perspicacious 'Foreword' to this book.

By Way of Explanation

The author owes a preliminary explanation to his readers; for, at first glance the title of the book may appear to some rather odd and utlandish, if not smacking of downright self-conceit.

Like a few of the author's earlier books, this book too owes its origin to the loving request of some of his students. During the last more than thirty years, in every academic Session many of the students of the Higher Course of SAICE ('Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education', Pondicherry) have studied under the guidance of the author various books of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother such as, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *Letters on Yoga*, *The Mother's Entretiens* (in 13 Volumes), *Mother's Commentaries on Sri Aurobindo's Thoughts and Aphorisms*, etc.

The students have studied these books with great love and concentration. They have approached these seminal works, not with some intellectual academic interest, but mainly for comprehending the basics of the Integral Yoga as ushered in by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

But a common complaint with many of these students has been that they often miss the beauty and the significance of the 'wood' because of concentrating on individual 'trees'. In other words, even after going through the hundreds of pages of many of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother dealing with the Purna Yoga, they somehow lack in their comprehension that precision and clarity which are very much needed for putting the principles into actual practice. They find themselves at a loss to know for certain how to begin the Sadhana of the Integral Yoga and from which point and how to proceed methodically thereafter.

Now, at the end of their academic studies in our Higher Course, some of the students decide to join the Sri Aurobindo Ashram as serious practitioners of the Integral Yoga of Self-transformation. But their problems get multiplied with the passage of time. Many new questions come up in their mind demanding precise and immediate clarifications.

When Sri Aurobindo and the Mother were present in their physical body, the sadhakas of those days used to put before them directly or in writing their individual questions and waited for specific replies. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo also, in their infinite Grace and Compassion, used to answer all those questions and the sadhakas concerned would be satisfied with these solutions and clarifications.

But now, when both of them have withdrawn from their physical body and many of the sadhakas have not yet been able to establish direct inner contact with the Master and the Mother, they wonder where to find the right solutions. Yet they vaguely feel that Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have already furnished relevant answers to all their possible problems and questions in their extensive writings on Yoga. But for many valid reasons many of these young sadhakas have neither the time nor the energy nor even the discriminating capacity to rummage through the voluminous writings of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo to find out the right and pertinent answer needed at that moment.

What these young sadhakas seek for in such situations of perplexity is a properly prepared handbook which would deal with all the essential facets of the Integral Yoga in a methodical way and present them in such a manner that they could be easily put into actual practice without much ambiguity.

So, some of the author's students old and new, in the age-group of twenty to forty years, requested him to consider their genuine need and prepare such a handbook in a single volume of moderate size.

Now, it is not only the student-sadhakas but some of the author's friends too who broached the same proposal to him now and then.

Then, there is a third category of people who come in the picture in this connection. These persons form the ever-growing fraternity of Sri Aurobindo's and Mother's devotees scattered throughout the world. Many of them would not like to remain content with being mere religious devotees. They have an aspiration to become practising sadhakas of the Integral Yoga. But they too are confronted with the same set of problems: How to begin? Where to begin? And how to proceed on the right track with sure steps in a sustained way?

After deep deliberation the author humbly decided to attempt the impossible. He prayed for the blessings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother in this rash venture of his and sought to encompass the entirety of their teachings on Yoga and Sadhana in the span of roughly three hundred and fifty pages.

The author can assure that all that is noted down in this book is authoritatively based on the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The whole matter has been treated subjectwise and each chapter has been made self-contained without any necessary dependence on other chapters of the book. Thus, any sadhaka-reader facing any problem or question at any time during his life of sadhana may conveniently refer to the topic in question and receive the needed answer therein

Now a few words as regards the style of composition of the book. The author has purposely refrained from writing this book purely from a detached impersonal point of view. He has at times sought to impart an intimate personal touch to his description and elaboration. And this is so because of the following reason.

In his own humble way the author has been a consistent wayfarer on the Path of the Integral Yoga for the last fifty-three years. And he believes with all his heart that most of the would-be readers of this book are also sadhakas of the same Path. This underlying common element and interest psychologically binds the author and his readers in a close relationship.

And this is especially so in the case of the young student-sadhakas referred to in the beginning of this explanation. Hence, the author, while making some specific remarks in course of his discussion, has often mentally placed himself in the company of these young sadhakas and made his observations in the 'First Person Plural Number', such as: "How is it that many of us who claim to be sadhakas of Sri Aurobindo's Path so easily lose our attitude of wakeful vigilance and fall prey to any and every invading temptation?" Readers are requested to excuse this sort of personal vein of writing.

Finally, the author hopes and even trusts that many sadhakas who are already relatively advanced on the path of Sadhana will find many points in this humble composition worth pondering over.

The twenty-six chapters of this book are like twenty-six garlands offered with love and devotion at the Feet of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. All the flowers have been culled from the celestial

gardens of the Master and the Mother: the author's modest role has been that of a conscientious weaver of the garlands only.

Sri Aurobindo Ashram

— **J. K M.**

Pondicherry

24.04.02

Foreword

It is an honour to write a foreword to this book authored by someone who is a veteran sadhaka of the Integral Yoga and a veritable walking encyclopaedia of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

In fact, *The Practice of the Integral Yoga* is a comprehensive treatise on the effective practice of the Yoga of Integral Transformation as propounded by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The book does abound in valuable hints, consisting in insights, approaches and perspectives which the author has found effective for his own sadhana spanning more than half a century. For, as will be evident to the perceptive reader, the book is not a product of armchair study, but an outcome of what has been assiduously shaped on the anvil of long practice, deep reflection and inner experience.

The author has remarked in the prefatory note about his role as merely that of a weaver of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But in writing this book Jugal Kishore Mukherjee has provided more than a connecting thread, for besides the actual teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother on which the book is solidly founded, *The Practice of the Integral Yoga* contains a wealth of the author's own reflections and insights which are a distillation from his lifetime's sadhana of the Integral Yoga.

Throughout all its chapters the book is studded with some of the choicest passages from the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. In selecting these passages, the author has gone beyond the commonly trodden ground of more familiar sources. So the reader is likely to discover gems of extracts not encountered before. Even some of the passages which may be familiar to the reader are apt to be better understood when read within the context of the author's lucid explanations.

The presentation of the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother has been enriched by copious references to other spiritual teachers and works, both Eastern and Western, including the perennial lore of such sources as the Gita and the Upanishads.

Unlike most other spiritual paths and disciplines, Integral Yoga does not prescribe any set of concrete practices such as āsana, prānāyāma, japa and the like to be followed by all its practitioners. Nor does it formulate a set of ethical norms and principles, do's and don'ts, yama and niyama, as part of its core discipline. Hence the difficulty experienced by many sadhakas who feel at a loss as to the what and how of the practice of Sri Aurobindo's Yoga.

One practice which most people associate with spiritual pursuit is that of meditation. This is specially true of the West where, particularly due to the influence of Zen Buddhism, spiritual practice is regarded as almost synonymous with the practice of meditation. Referring to this attitude in a critical vein, the Mother remarks, "...when they think of the spiritual life, they immediately think of meditation." (Questions and Answers '57-'58, Collected Works of the Mother, Vol. 9, p. 88.) However, even meditation, as a set practice, is not an indispensable part of the practice of Integral Yoga. The reader will, therefore, find that meditation is not included among the limbs of daily sadhana presented in the second chapter of the book, though an entire chapter is devoted to the topic of meditation. For, the attitude that looks upon spiritual life as consisting in following certain set practices tends to lead to a compartmentalisation of life, creating a division between the spiritual life and the ordinary life. However, from the viewpoint

of Integral Yoga, sadhana is not a part-time practice meant to be pursued during one's spare time while the major part of the day is devoted to the ordinary life. All of life has to be regarded as a field for sadhana. Therefore the ideal of sadhana is that all activities of one's daily life, and all moments of the day be pervaded by the spirit of sadhana, which lies in certain daylong attitudes and inner practices.

Distilled from long years of sadhana, such basic attitudes and practices have been excellently delineated in the opening two chapters of the book. Some of these inner practices are couched in the Mother's mantra-like maxims, such as "stepping back" and "remember and offer", for which the daily life affords constant reminders and countless opportunities for their application.

Many people, even among spiritual aspirants, fail to understand the distinction between the spiritual life and a life governed by morality or religion. The basic attitudes and the limbs of daily sadhana dealt with in the first two chapters of this book throw ample light on what is meant by leading a spiritual life from the viewpoint of Integral Yoga.

Regarding yoga and its method of practice, Sri Aurobindo states: "... the whole method of Yoga is psychological; it might almost be termed the consummate practice of a perfect psychological knowledge." (The Synthesis of Yoga, S A B C L, Vol. 20, p. 496) The significance of this statement can be understood from the fact that in writing about the practice of yoga, the author has drawn extensively from yogic psychology, as is seen particularly in his illuminating explanations of the nature of the mind, of the vital, the signs and symptoms of domination by the vital, the nature of the ego, the distinction between desire and aspiration, between will and desire, the nature of true renunciation, the psychology of inequality, etc.

Though the writing of *The Practice of the Integral Yoga* has been prompted primarily by the felt needs of students and beginners on the path of sadhana, there is much in the book from which a great deal of benefit can be derived by older and more "advanced" sadhakas. For, after all, from one viewpoint, all those who are following the path of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother are like mates in various grades of the same preparatory school of yoga, all striving for liberation, and only preparing for the yoga of transformation which is dealt with in this book, and which can begin only after a reversal of and liberation from our ordinary, ego-bound consciousness. As the Mother remarks: "... since we are speaking of that [reversal of consciousness], I shall remind you of what Sri Aurobindo has said, repeated, written, affirmed and said over and over again, that his yoga, the integral yoga, can begin only after that experience [reversal of consciousness], not before." (Questions and Answers '57-'58, C W M, Vol. 9, p. 337)

Combining the clear, analytical thought of a scientist with the psychic insightfulness of a sadhaka, Prof. Mukherjee has succeeded in producing a book that is at once lucid and profound. Its comprehensiveness, authenticity and compactness make *The Practice of the Integral Yoga* an ideal companion and an outstanding vademecum for the practice of the Integral Yoga.

— A. S. Dalal

24.9.02

I.

Eleven Basic Attitudes

When a traveller decides to undertake a long and rigorous journey, he first provides himself with all the requisites of the path; otherwise he may get into trouble any time in course of his voyage. The same thing applies in the case of a spiritual traveller. When he sets out on his spiritual pilgrimage whose ultimate goal is to be united with the Divine Consciousness and to turn oneself into a fit instrument for the Divine's manifestation, he too must have to gather at the very outset the essential requisites for the successful completion of the pilgrimage; for the path of sadhana is much more difficult, much more beset with difficulties and dangers than an ordinary journey in the outer life. Without these requisites supporting him all along the Way, the spiritual pilgrim will quite often fall into the pit of deep psychological confusion and depression; nay, he may even cut short his journey and leave the Path altogether; or, what is worse, he may be led into an alluring side-track which can seriously threaten his spiritual destiny.

But what are these requisites after all which the sadhaka has to provide himself with before he can hope to travel on the Path without being buffeted at every step with all sorts of psychological difficulties? The answer is: these are nothing but a certain number of essential virtues of character which should stand the sadhaka in good stead all through the varying vicissitudes of his inner undertaking.

For we know that our sadhana of the Integral Yoga does not reject the world and life; instead what we propose to do in our sadhana is to purify and transform the nature, our self-nature and world-nature, as far as possible, and then offer them to the Divine as a fit instrument for his divine manifestation upon earth. Our aspiration is not merely to enjoy the delight of spiritual realisation in our inner consciousness; what we aim at in our yoga is that our outer nature and being too should fully and integrally participate in the spiritual fulfilment. In the inimitable words of Sri Aurobindo: "...we have set out to conquer all ourselves and the world for God; we are determined to give him our becoming as well as our being..." (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 67-68)

Such being our goal, we are not allowed to turn our face away from nature and withdraw from it as far as feasible; nor are we permitted to step aside from the turmoils of life and seek the peaceful repose of a safe shelter in the quarantined outer and inner isolation. Our spiritual sadhana has to be undertaken in the very field of nature and in the arena of life. For that we should be ready to face and successfully grapple with all the serious difficulties intrinsic to this basic choice of ours.

All spiritual sadhanas are indeed difficult; their paths are 'sharp like the razor's edge hard to tread'. Ours is still more difficult, apparently most intractable. The reason is that our present nature is almost wholly under the siege of cosmic Ignorance; it is polluted by a million types of tamasic and rajasic corruptions. To accept this perverse nature as the field of our sadhana, which is tantamount to deciding to dwell in the same abode along with a venomous snake, runs the constant risk of being bitten at times by the inimical reptile. But we should not shrink away for that from our noble enterprise. For has not Sri Aurobindo reminded the sadhakas of the Integral Path?

“Life is the field of a divine manifestation not yet complete: here, in life, on earth, in the body ... we have to unveil the Godhead; here we must make its transcendent greatness, light and sweetness real to our consciousness, here possess and, as far as may be, express it. Life then we must accept in our Yoga in order utterly to transmute it; we are forbidden to shrink from the difficulties that this acceptance may add to our struggle.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 68)

Well, such is our aspiration in our Yoga, such the action plan vis-à-vis our present unregenerate nature. But the aspiration cannot be realised in a day, nor will our nature so easily respond to our transforming pressure upon her. Hence the sadhaka will have to wage his spiritual warfare for a long period of time. He will have to face and tackle many a difficult situation. Many types of obstacles, inner and outer, will block the path of his progress; many a serious test he will have to go through. What is more, it is not his own personal nature alone which will try to resist him with its recalcitrance at every step; even the universal Nature will seek to erect a wall of darkness across his path, for this Nature under the prompting of cosmic Ignorance is deadly opposed to the prospect of any sadhaka escaping from her prison and undergoing a new spiritual birth in supernal Light. We recall in this connection the warning uttered by Sri Aurobindo:

“When the soul draws towards the Divine, there may be a resistance in the mind and the common form of that is denial and doubt — which may create mental and vital suffering. There may again be a resistance in the vital nature whose principal character is desire and the attachment to the objects of desire... The physical consciousness also may offer a resistance which is usually that of a fundamental inertia, an obscurity in the very stuff of the physical... There is, moreover, the resistance of the Universal Nature which does not want the being to escape from the Ignorance into the Light.” (Letters on Yoga, Part IV, p. 1616)

In the same connection the Mother too has warned the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga:

“The integral yoga consists of an unbroken series of examinations which one has to pass without being given any previous intimation, which therefore puts you under the necessity of being always alert and attentive.” (Bulletin, February 1958, p. 69)

The Mother has further said as regards the sources of these tests:

“The three types of examination are (1) that set by the forces of Nature, (2) that set by the spiritual and divine forces, and (3) that set by the hostile forces. The last are the most deceptive in their appearance and if one is not to be taken by surprise or unprepared, one has to be constantly in a state of vigilance and sincerity and humility.” (Ibid., p. 71)

Now the pertinent questions that may trouble the sadhaka are: ‘How should one successfully pass these tests? How can one make the path of spiritual pilgrimage easy of treading? And, finally, what should the sadhaka do so that the unavoidable difficulties and ordeals of the Way will not act solely as negative obstacles but turn themselves instead into occasions of golden opportunities very much conducive to the flowering of the sadhaka’s spiritual consciousness?’

Here comes then the necessity of preliminary preparation in the life of sadhana and of the amassing, on the part of the sadhaka, of the basic requisites of the Path. We have already indicated that one very important part of the process of acquisition of these basic requisites is the cultivation by the sadhaka of a number of virtues that should constitute the pith of his character.

While speaking of the three categories of examiners constantly framing their tests for the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga, and of the virtues specially required for successfully passing these examinations on the Path, the Mother has particularly mentioned the following:

(1) Endurance; (2) cheerfulness; (3) fearlessness; (4) plasticity; (5) confidence; (6) enthusiasm; (7) generosity; (8) vigilance; (9) humility; (10) sincerity; (11) aspiration; (12) rectitude.

These and other virtues of the same kind will be constantly called for at every step of the spiritual journey, and, when firmly acquired, these will arm and fortify the sadhaka's character and act for him as so many armours and weapons in his relentless spiritual battle against the forces of established darkness.

We propose to discuss, although in brief, a few of these essential spiritual virtues in this very first chapter of this book, for they are apt to build up the solid foundation of sadhana and without them the superstructure of the edifice of the Integral Yoga cannot be erected at all.

The very first virtue the sadhaka has to cultivate in its integrality and maintain throughout his career of spiritual sadhana is

(1) An Absolute Love and Devotion for the Divine and His Shakti

We have to make this precious virtue the central feature of our nature and consciousness. Our love for the Divine must possess a pure simplicity and a psychic rectitude. This love and devotion has to be utterly unconditional not buttressed by any expectation in return, and has to be protected from all confusion created by the mists of intellectual questionings. We can very easily save ourselves from numerous psychological difficulties and disasters and from various perils and deceptive quicksands of the Path, if only we can make firm and constant and absolutely invariable our love and devotion, and faith and trust in the Divine Mother and her love. In that case we shall discover to our surprise that no misfortune, however grievous in its appearance and howsoever suddenly overtaking us on the Way and seriously afflicting our mind and heart and even the physical system will be able to raise in the sadhaka's consciousness even the slightest hint of protest and complaint, far be it to speak of any revolt and back-tracking; our faith and confidence in the Divine and his love will not suffer even the minimal dent; no peril of the Path will come to us as a peril at all; and no outer pain will occasion to the sadhaka any psychological distress.

Solidly established in this particular virtue of genuine love and trust in the Divine, we shall not fail to realise on the basis of the direct evidence of our personal experience that —

“God is our wise and perfect friend, because he knows when to smite and when to fondle, when to slay us no less than when to save and to succour... There must be faith in the love and wisdom of God, ... working out all for our good even when it is apparently veiled in evil.” (Sri Aurobindo, 1984 Ashram Diary, July 3 and August 22)

The second spiritual virtue we have to develop to help in the progress of our sadhana is:

(2) An Optimistic Attitude and a State of Constant Gladness

Sri Aurobindo has told us: *“A sattwic gladness and calm and confidence is the proper*

temperament for this yoga [the Integral Yoga]..." (Letters on Yoga, Part IV, p. 1358)

And this is easy to understand. For if we can once establish in us a permanent disposition of quiet equality, we shall be able to clearly perceive that all that happens in our life's tortuous journey, be it pleasant or unpleasant or even apparently disastrous, has invariably at the same time two different aspects; one, positive and auspicious and leading to future good; the other, ominous-looking and taking the form of apparent evil.

Now, it is only because we, in our ego-dominated mood, concentrate our attention on the negative elements alone, ignoring altogether the positive aspect of the situation, our consciousness gets easily clouded, judgments falsified, emotions bruised, and our heart filled with unbearable distress and disorder.

But if we would like to build up a genuine spiritual life, it is essential that we change our way of viewing things. Faced with any unforeseen event or situation in our life, we must learn to perceive at once the positive side of it in all its happy implication; the principal stress of our consciousness should fall upon this positive side and this will make us palpably cognisant of the great spiritual good that has been preparing behind the dark and evil appearance.

And if we can do so on every occasion by developing in us an inherently optimistic attitude, the course of our life will change its character and drip honey under all circumstances: we shall not fail then to become intensely aware of the light that is present even in the midst of suffocating darkness. Sri Aurobindo has termed this as the 'sunlit path' upon which the sadhaka will advance towards his Goal with sure and joyous steps, "*in absolute reliance on the Mother, fearing nothing, sorrowing over nothing...*" in "*...a glad equanimity even in the face of difficulties...*" (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, Part IV, pp. 1359. 1366)

(3) Joyous Resignation before Divine Providence

The way of sadhana cannot but be full of turmoils and difficulties. At any moment of the sadhaka's life any unapprehended misfortune may catch him napping. And it becomes very difficult for him to maintain his poise at these critical turning points. In order to be able to keep one's sang-froid in these difficult and dangerous situations, the sadhaka has to imprint in his heart from the very beginning of his sadhana the following cardinal truth of spiritual life concerning the Divine's dealings and immediately fall back upon it each time he feels like straying away from the right path:

"The ways of the Divine are not like those of the human mind or according to our patterns and it is impossible to judge them or to lay down for Him what He shall or shall not do, for the Divine knows better than we can know. If we admit the Divine at all, both true reason and Bhakti seem to me to be at one in demanding implicit faith and surrender." (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, p. 596)

Thus an absolute adaptability and joyous resignation before all dispensation of divine Providence should be the constant watchwords of a sadhaka. His mantra of all times, whether in weal or in woe, in periods of sunshine or in cloudy days, should be: "*Let Thy Will be done*", and this not in a grudging way nor even with stoical endurance but with the full adhesion of the whole being in a joyous assent and acceptance. Let us meditate on the following words of Sri Aurobindo:

“Remember the true basis of yoga... Obedience to the divine Will, nor assertion of self-will is the very first mantra ... learn thou first absolutely to obey.” (Sri Aurobindo, Ashram Diary 1984, August 21 and September 9)

(4) Absence of Worries and Anxieties

We should banish from the field of our consciousness all such futile and disabling thoughts as: ‘Who knows what is going to happen to me? and what misfortunes are ordained for me in the unfoldment of my unknown fate in the near future?’

No, a sadhaka must learn to be totally freed from all worries and anxieties vis-à-vis his future. His attitude should be: ‘When in the divine dispensation something happens to me ever in the future, that will be the right time for me to be occupied with that. Why nurture even from now all sorts of negative foreboding thoughts. Instead, my attitude should be to accept with gratitude all the pleasant things the Divine is offering me in his loving-kindness even at this very moment. Whatever the Divine wants me to be at the present moment of my life, I shall sincerely try to be that; whatever I consider to be my spiritual duty at this moment, I shall do that with perfect sincerity solely as an offering to my divine Beloved. And there ends my task and occupation. No need to have any anxious brooding as regards the uncertainty of my future, nor is there any justification for the shedding of vain tears over my past failings and failures. To concentrate only on the present and seek to maximise the realisation of its possibilities: this is all that I should do as a sadhaka.’

This is indeed a great virtue to acquire and to apply in actual practice, if the sadhaka would like to avoid many of the unnecessary and perfectly avoidable ills of life.

(5) Total Elimination of Ego-centricity

It is a deplorable but almost a universal fact of experience that most of us, facing an event or a situation or a circumstance or any contact with other beings, generally evaluate it solely in terms of whether it pampers or distresses, pleases or displeases, serves or does not serve our ego and its interests. This is a very serious defect afflicting many sadhakas and greatly vitiating the course of their sadhana. This noxious ego-centric attitude has to be done away with by every sadhaka of the Integral Yoga if he would like to make steady progress in sadhana. He has to replace it by a theocentric attitude vis-à-vis everything in life. ‘Not what I want but what the Divine wants at this moment’ should be the sole consideration before the sadhaka. Sri Aurobindo has made the point very clear. Here are his words:

“The ego-centric man feels and takes things as they affect him. Does this please me or displease, give me gladness or pain, flatter my pride, vanity, ambition or hurt it, satisfy my desires or thwart them, etc. The unegoistic man does not look at things like that. He looks to see what things are in themselves and would be if he were not there, what is their meaning, how they fit into the scheme of things — or else he feels calm and equal, refers everything to the Divine...”
“...he learns to make not the ego but the Divine the centre of his existence and thinks, acts, feels only for the Divine...” (Letters on Yoga, p. 1371)

So this is the fifth essential requisite of the Path: never to judge or rather misjudge anything whatsoever from the point of view of the personal ego but refer everything to the Divine’s all-wise all-loving Will.

(6) Right Attitude at All Times

Much of the progress in sadhana, if it is to be effected with the least disturbance to hamper it, depends on whether the sadhaka can take and maintain the right attitude under all circumstances, inner and outer, facing him on the Path. The Mother has pointed out that most people do not realise what a great determinative power right attitude possesses. It can simply work wonders and can completely change the course of determinism. But what do we mean by this right attitude?

Surely this is not an attitude considered right by ordinary ethical standard, or sanctioned by social or religious conventions, or dictated by one's so-called conscience. This is rather an attitude most conducive to the spiritual growth of the individual under the prevailing circumstances.

But how should the sadhaka determine what the right attitude is in a given situation? If his Guru is present before him in a physical body, the solution becomes relatively easy. He has only to place his problem before his Guru and ask for his direction. The only point of uncertainty in this case is whether the sadhaka would like or be able to carry out the Guru's guidance against all possible hesitations of his blindly arrogant egoistic promptings.

When the Guru is not present in his physical body, the sadhaka can adopt another course which is as sure as one can hope for. We are of course referring to the awakening of the psychic being and its coming to the front of the sadhaka's consciousness. About its supremely beneficial results for sadhana, Sri Aurobindo says:

“A guidance, a governance begins from within which exposes every movement to the light of Truth, repels what is false, obscure, opposed to the divine realisation: every region of the being, every nook and corner of it, every movement, formation, direction, inclination of thought, will, emotion, sensation, action, reaction, motive, disposition, propensity, desire, habit of the conscious or subconscious physical, even the most concealed, camouflaged, mute, recondite, is lighted up with the unerring psychic light, their confusions dissipated, their tangles disentangled, their obscurities, deceptions, self-deceptions precisely indicated and removed...”
(The Life Divine, pp. 907-08)

From the above citation from Sri Aurobindo we can easily see that, under the psychic's active guidance, it becomes a child's play for the sadhaka to know at every moment the nature of the right attitude he is required to adopt and effectively put into practice in the actual situation facing him.

But the snag is that this psychic emergence is a realisation the sadhaka can hope for only at a far advanced stage of his sadhana: it is beyond the accessibility of the novices in sadhana. And here, in this first chapter of this book, we are talking of those sadhakas who have no doubt seriously and sincerely resolved to follow the path of the Integral Yoga but are till now only in the stage of gathering the essential requisites necessary for the successful completion of the Journey.

Now, we have insisted, above, that to maintain the right attitude in all possible situations of life, is one of the most fundamental virtues every sadhaka should be able to present even in the preliminary stages of his spiritual undertaking. So the question comes up again: In the absence of the physical presence of the Guru, and in the as yet imperfect status of the psychic awakening,

how should the inexperienced sadhaka come to discern the right attitude?

Fortunately for us, both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have given in their extensive writings sufficient indications as regards what attitude to keep in what particular situation. A perspicacious study of these writings will surely solve the problem for any seriously inquisitive sadhaka.

However that may be, a sadhaka has to acquire this dexterity of keeping the right attitude at every moment of his daily life including its occasional crisis-hours.

(7) Courage and Fearlessness

Sri Aurobindo once wrote to a sadhaka that courage and love are the twin virtues absolutely indispensable for the progress in sadhana: even if all other virtues get dimmed or fall asleep, these two virtues will suffice to save the sadhaka.

It is almost a truism that every sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to be fearless, if he would like to advance with safety on the path of spiritual sadhana. For without the constant support of this virtue of intrepidity, he is apt to make a slip and stumble almost at every step. All the hostile forces of the subtle worlds are ever on the alert to detect even the slightest trace of fear and trepidation in the sadhaka's consciousness so that they can use it as a convenient point d'appui to throw down the already built edifice of the sadhaka's sadhana, and drive him off from the Path by dangling before him the unreal prospect of mostly imaginary threats and warnings. Hence it is imperative that a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga devote all his attention to the development of an unwavering fearlessness in his character. He has to be self-poised under all circumstances however serious may be their outward impact.

Here are some words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother insisting on the indispensability of the virtue of fearlessness in the life of a sadhaka:

(1) *"If you want to do yoga, you must get rid of fear."* (Letters on Yoga, p. 1416)

(2) *"The first condition of progress in sadhana is not to fear, to have trust and keep quiet..."* (Ibid., p. 1189)

(3) *"Fear is the first thing that must be thrown away..."* (Ibid., p. 550)

(4) *"To put away fear and have confidence in the divine working is indispensable."* (Ibid., p. 1148)

(5) *"... the yogi must be fearless, abhi; it is absurd to have a fear because one can control one's states; that is a power very much to be desired and welcomed in yoga."* (Ibid., p. 1149)

Now an excerpt from the Mother concerning the same issue: *"No protection, no Grace can save those who refuse the indispensable purification. And I would add this: that fear is an impurity, one of the greatest impurities, one of those which come most directly from the anti-divine forces which want to destroy the divine action on earth; and the first duty of those who really want to do yoga is to eliminate from their consciousness, with all the might, all the sincerity, all the endurance of which they are capable, even the shadow of a fear. To walk on the path, one must*

be dauntless, and never indulge in that petty, small, feeble, nasty shrinking back upon oneself, which is fear." (Questions and Answers 1956, MCW Vol. 8, p. 261)

After dauntless courage, which has to be clearly distinguished from a spirit of haughty rashness, come the virtues of patience and persistence which stand almost on the opposite poles but are equally indispensable for the smooth pursuit of sadhana. We propose now to speak a few words about these humble virtues.

(8) Patience and Persistence

They say, Rome was not built in a day; the goal of the Integral Yoga too cannot be attained in a short span of time. Every sadhaka of this Path has to clearly understand from the very beginning that a spirit of impatience on the one hand and the building up of the spiritual life on the other are totally incompatible with each other. If one steps on the Way with the vain hope that he will conquer the fort in a day and attain to his realisation in a relatively short time, he will very soon face the fate of a hapless bird which would like to fly through the heavens with both its wings clipped.

We should never forget that the Integral Yoga aims at the total transformation of our being and nature in all their parts leaving no corner untouched. Surely this cannot be done in a day. We have to keep the fire of our tapasya burning bright for many years to come: we have to fight against the same difficulty and weakness of our nature many times over. It is because of this well-known phenomenon of sadhana that Sri Aurobindo has reminded us: "*Patience is our first great necessary lesson... a patience full of a calm and gathering strength.*" He has also said: "*Those who hope violently, despair swiftly: neither hope nor fear, but be sure of God's purpose and thy will to accomplish.*" (1984 Ashram Diary, November 19 and 15)

The sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should not miss the import of the following words of Sri Aurobindo

"The road of Yoga is long, every inch of ground has to be won against much resistance and no quality is more needed by the sadhaka than patience and single-minded perseverance with a faith that remains firm through all difficulties, delays and apparent failures." (Letters on Yoga, p. 630)

(9) Absence of Greed and Desires

Spiritual consciousness can almost be defined as a state of perfect egolessness. And where there is no ego with its inevitable sense of privation and wants of a million varieties, there cannot be any desires. And where there are no desires, attachment cannot arise. Ego, desire and attachment are the three principal badges of a life of Ignorance. And that is what we suffer from in our present unregenerate state. Sadhana means nothing else but a deliberate and conscious effort on the part of the individual to escape from this prison-house of Ignorance and to be new-born in the Freedom of the Spirit.

And if that is so, the basic programme of sadhana for a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga is always to discourage any manifestation of ego and desire however slight and innocuous that may be. He should not make any tempting discrimination between big desires and small desires, noble desires and ignoble desires, spiritual desires and worldly desires. In that way he will surely fall

into the dangerous trap laid by the Adversary. Desires are desires, equally detrimental to the spiritual well-being of the sadhaka. Aspiration he must have ardent and ceaseless; but desires which are the unholy progeny of the principle of Ego should not be given the slightest indulgence. Sri Aurobindo warns us:

“If there are good desires, bad desires will come also. There is a place for will and aspiration, not for desire. If there is desire there will be attachment, demand, craving, want of equanimity, sorrow at not getting, all that is unyogic.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 567)

One other point: A sadhaka worth the name should always refrain from probing and judging how much he has received in life and how much he has not, or in which areas his attainments compare unfavourably with those of other men. Otherwise peace and contentment will desert him altogether and a suffocating sense of injustice and deprivation will gnaw at his heart constantly.

No, we have to be fully indifferent to all the egoistically manipulated personal wants and inconveniences and discomforts. Instead, we must learn to be happy with whatever comes to our lot in divine dispensation, or in however little a measure that may come. We should make a sincere effort to conform ourselves to the description of an ideal sadhaka as given by Sri Aurobindo:

The liberated sadhaka of the Integral Yoga *“has no personal hopes; he does not seize on things as his personal possessions; he receives what the divine Will brings him, covets nothing, is jealous of none: what comes to him he takes without repulsion and without attachment; what goes from him he allows to depart into the whirl of things without repining or grief or sense of loss. His heart and self are under perfect control; they are free from reaction and passion, they make no turbulent response to the touches of outward things.”* (Essays on the Gita, Cent. Ed., p. 171)

(10) Rejection of Indolence and Procrastination

If a sadhaka would not like to limit his sadhana to a mere book-knowledge or, to some superficially satisfying intellectual convictions, or to religious ‘fervour’, if he resolves to really advance towards the attainment of his spiritual goal, he has to divest his character of the twin defects of indolence and procrastination. Whatever and whenever he should sincerely feel that a spiritual duty is lying before him, he should try to accomplish that at once without seeking to put that off to a later time. In the same way, if he ever comes to realise that he has to give up a particular weakness, he must do that without any undue delay; on no account, under no alibi, should he condone the continued existence of that failing even for a short period of time. He must always follow the Mother’s instruction: *“You must make haste to do your work here and now... Never put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.”* Otherwise the sadhaka will find to his utter dismay that at the end of his life his sadhana has been reduced to a vain nothingness. For, as the Mother has warned, *“The path of later-on and the road of to-morrow lead only to the castle of nothing-at-all.”* (Words of Long Ago, MCW Vol. 2, p. 1). The fate of these procrastinating sadhakas will be in the words of the Mother: *“...the hours, circumstances, life pass in vain, bringing nothing, and you awake from your somnolence in a hole from which it is very difficult to escape.”* (Questions and Answers, MCW Vol. 3, p. 203)

So every sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to resolve from the very first day of his sadhana that

he will resolutely and thoroughly put into living practice the following advice of the Mother:

“While walking on the path of spiritual advancement, whenever you come face to face with a weakness — a weakness which is seeking self-expression through your thought and feeling and speech or action, immediately you take the resolve not to indulge it in any way, not even for once, not even for this time alone. Otherwise you will never realise your goal.” (Based on pp. 212-14 of Questions and Answers 1953)

(11) Not to Forget the Goal

We now come to one of the most vicious vices which has not only endangered but completely destroyed the spiritual life of many a sadhaka. It is what we may call a deplorable state of ‘self-oblivion’, of forgetfulness of one’s goal.

It is not that the sadhaka theoretically loses sight of the spiritual goal. He quite remembers the precise nature of this goal which he set before himself when he first entered the spiritual path. He continues to have a clear intellectual conception about what as a sadhaka he is expected to do. He may even eloquently talk to others about the responsibilities of a sincere sadhaka. But the tragedy is that so far as he himself is concerned, he neglects in practice what he believes in theory. And, who does not know, without serious and assiduous practice sadhana is no sadhana at all. Has not the Mother sharply reminded us? — *“A drop of practice is better than an ocean of theories, advices and good resolutions.”*

But why do many sadhakas forget about their true goal in life after some lapse of time? The reason lies in the basic imperfection of the present human nature. The Mother has lucidly analysed the situation in her commentary on Sri Aurobindo’s Thoughts and Aphorisms. (Vide MCW Vol. 10, pp. 200-201)

The following paragraph derives its substance from that commentary:

‘Many come to the Path, attracted by the True Thing, but after some time one lets oneself go. When everything is easy and peaceful, one falls asleep. The human nature is still so crude that it becomes difficult for many to keep the inner attitude unmixed for a long time and to hold firm in one’s original position of ardent aspiration. Almost inevitably laziness takes the place of this aspiration — not for everyone, but in quite a general way — and licence and libertinism take the place of true freedom. There are no moral constraints and so one acts foolishly. It seems it is almost impossible for many an aspirant to make their first aspiration last long.’

Such being the lethal consequences of an attitude of *laissez-aller*, the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should arm himself from the beginning with an amulet of safety whose other name is ‘constant vigilance’. But what is this virtue of vigilance which can act as a safeguard on the Path? In the Mother’s words:

“Vigilance means to be awake, to be on one’s guard, to be sincere — never to be taken by surprise. When you want to do sadhana, at each moment of your life, there is a choice between taking a step that leads to the goal and falling asleep or sometimes even going backwards, telling yourself, ‘Oh, later on, not immediately’ — sitting down on the way.” [Questions and Answers, MCW Vol. 3, p. 202)

Thus it is absolutely essential that every sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should always remain “sleepless” and react effectively against any tendency to somnolence and to going astray. Otherwise three types of tragedies may easily befall him on the Path. These are:

(A) He may slacken down his spiritual effort and be quite content with leading an ordinary worldly life taking care, of course, to clothe it outwardly with a conventional religio-spiritual garb.

(B) The sadhaka may get sidetracked and, after forgetting his real goal which is the attainment of union with the Divine Consciousness, may concentrate his efforts on some senseless secondary achievements such as (a) being a great ‘spiritual’ scholar, or (b) an effective exponent of the doctrine of Sadhana, or (c) a successful preacher of the Path, or (d) turning into a miniature ‘Guru’, etc., etc.

(C) The most serious tragedy of all that may strike the self forgetful sadhaka is for him to give off the life of spirituality altogether, declaring it to be a utopian dream, and fall back into the old accustomed rut.

The three tragic eventualities (A), (B) and (C) mentioned above loom large before any sadhaka who carelessly lulls himself to sleep and by and by forgets the goal. In order that we may not fall a victim to such danger, all of us should take to heart the following admonition of Sri Aurobindo:

“...if we desire to make the most of the opportunity that this life gives us, if we wish to respond adequately to the call we have received and to attain to the goal we have glimpsed, not merely advance a little towards it, it is essential that there should be an entire self-giving. The secret of success in Yoga is to regard it not as one of the aims to be pursued in life, but as the whole of life.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 65)

We have come to the end of our survey of the basic spiritual virtues a sadhaka should develop and bring into active operation at every step of his Way, if he would like to advance with minimum storms and stresses threatening him.

It is not that no danger or difficulty will ever stalk him in the life of his sadhana. He cannot hope to have such a charmed journey; no sadhaka can. For the very nature of the world and our present way of life are moulded out of Ignorance, and this will prevent that happy prospect.

But what is of relevance to us is that, if he is armed with the eleven above-mentioned basic virtues, a sadhaka of the Integral Path can surely hope to face all the unavoidable rigours and difficulties with a smiling face and in a spirit of adventure. And when there is zeal for progress and inner gladness in the sadhaka’s heart, what does it matter even if his spiritual Path gets occasionally crossed by some difficulties? For in such a situation all the outer sorrows and sufferings, perils and disasters, cannot but lose the venom of their sting.

II.

The Ninefold Daily Sadhana

It is often seen that although many of us would like to lead a spiritual life and have for our Goal the union with the Divine, yet days and months and years pass without contributing in any way to our progress on the chosen Path. To our utter dismay we discover that we have been almost stagnating at the same spot, if not actually regressing. But what is the reason behind this bizarre but nearly universal phenomenon?

The only reason is that our seeking for the Divine and for spiritual life lacks in genuine commitment and sufficient intensity. It is not supported by any ardent will; it arises out of a tepid wish and an easily dispensable thirst for the attainment. The normal attitude of an average sadhaka takes this regrettable form: 'If the spiritual life comes to me, well and good; but for whatever reason if it does not come, it does not matter very much. I can be quite content with offering lip-homage to my aspiration; the non-realisation of my aspiration in actual practice is a rather secondary matter and will not disturb my peace at all.'

With such a fervourless anaemic wishing none should expect to build up the life of sadhana: that is well-nigh impossible. So the very first thing a sadhaka should attend to, if he seriously yearns to make any perceptible progress, is to create and maintain in his consciousness in an uninterrupted way a very sincere and living impetus towards the Divine and divine Manifestation. The following words of the Mother should open our eyes and help us shake off any mood of easy-going complacency:

"Is the Divine the supreme fact of your life, so much so that it is simply impossible for you to do without it? Do you feel that your very raison d'être is the Divine and without it there is no meaning in your existence? If so, then only can it be said that you have a call for the Path."
(MCW Vol. 3, p. 1)

In his *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo too has fixed the same pre-condition: "*The ideal Sadhaka should be able to say in the Biblical phrase, 'My zeal for the Lord has eaten me up.'*" (p. 52)

Thus the building up of this "*zeal for the Lord*", "*the zeal of the whole nature for divine realisation, the heart's and the mind's total eagerness for the attainment of the Divine*", should be the constant pre-occupation of the sadhaka throughout the daily round of his life. And for this he has to adopt a ninefold daily sadhana.

1. "To Be Conscious"

Our present unregenerate nature is full of defects and foibles and imperfections of many a sort, known and indulged in, or unknown and hidden behind the veils in the subconscious. In a successful sadhana we have to become conscious of all these failings and eradicate their manifestation, constantly and assiduously, if we would make our sadhana really effective. When the Mother was once asked what one is to do to prepare oneself for the Yoga, she replied thus:

"To be conscious, first of all. We are conscious of only an insignificant portion of our being; for the most part we are unconscious. It is this unconsciousness that keeps us down to our

unregenerate nature and prevents change and transformation in it. It is through unconsciousness that the undivine forces enter into us and make us their slaves. You are to be conscious of yourself, you must awake to your nature and movements, you must know why and how you do things or feel or think them; you must understand your motives and impulses, the forces, hidden and apparent, that move you; in fact, you must, as it were, take to pieces the entire machinery of your being.

“Once you are conscious, it means that you can distinguish and sift things, you can see which are the forces that pull you down and which help you on.

“And when you know the right from the wrong, the true from the false, the divine from the undivine, you are to act strictly up to your knowledge; that is to say, resolutely reject one and accept the other.

“The duality will present itself at every step and at every step you will have to make your choice. You will have to be patient and persistent and vigilant — ‘sleepless’, as the adepts say; you must always refuse to give any chance whatever to the undivine against the divine.” (MCW Vol. 3, p. 2)

2. “To Be Vigilant”

But rejecting the undivine forces and accepting the divine ones at every step requires a constant vigilance on the part of the sadhaka throughout the entire period of his waking daily life. And this vigilance has to act in two different ways both of which are equally essential for maintaining a steady progress on the path of the Integral Yoga. These two ways are: (i) to check the temptations and never to fall; and (ii) to be on the look-out for opportunities to register an advance forward. Let the Mother elucidate this twofold sadhana procedure:

“When you want to do sadhana, at each moment of your life, there is a choice between taking a step that leads to the goal and falling asleep or sometimes even going backwards, telling yourself, ‘Oh, later on, not immediately’ — sitting down on the way.

“To be vigilant is not merely to resist what pulls you downward, but above all to be alert in order not to lose any opportunity to progress, any opportunity to overcome a weakness, to resist a temptation, any opportunity to learn something, to correct something, to master something. If you are vigilant, you can do in a few days what would otherwise take years. If you are vigilant, you change each circumstance of your life, each action, each movement into an occasion for coming nearer the goal.

“There are two kinds of vigilance, active and passive. There is a vigilance that gives you a warning if you are about to make a mistake, if you are making a wrong choice, if you are being weak or allowing yourself to be tempted, and there is the active vigilance which seeks an opportunity to progress, seeks to utilise every circumstance to advance more quickly.

“There is a difference between preventing yourself from falling and advancing more quickly.

“And both are absolutely necessary.” (Questions and Answers, MCW Vol. 3, pp. 202-03)

3. “Stepping Back”

Vigilance will make the sadhaka aware of the situation facing him. But that is not enough. For, after being aware, how one is going to evaluate the situation and decide on his course of action and reaction, that is the most important element and will be determinative of the sadhaka's spiritual destiny. Therefore, along with exercising a spirit of constant vigilance, the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga will have to conduct another psychological sadhana at every moment of his daily life. This is what the Mother has picturesquely called "*stepping back*". In practice it comes to never acting or reacting on the spur of the moment whenever one is confronted with any event, situation or circumstance. Rather, one must learn how to allow a sufficient time interval between the stimulus received at any moment and the response to it to be offered by him. One must acquire the capacity of going deep within, of 'stepping back' into oneself, and watching and judging in a perfectly dispassionate and impersonal way what is really helpful for sadhana and what not. No rationalisation or legitimisation should be permitted here so far as one's weaknesses and preferences are concerned. Here are the Mother's words concerning what a sadhaka should do:

"Do not lend yourself to the superficial forces which move in the outside world. Even if you are in a hurry to do something, step back for a while... Always keep your peace, resist all temptation to lose it. Never decide anything without stepping back, never speak a word without stepping back, never throw yourself into action without stepping back." (Ibid., p. 160)

One other important point needs to be mentioned here: the sadhaka has to develop at the same time the sense of proportion and of proper perspective. He should not unduly magnify the importance or gravity of the present happening overtaking him. He should evaluate it in the background of infinity of Space and of eternity in Time. This will have a most salutary effect on his consciousness and attitude. For, the present will then lose all its acuity and insistence and will fail to loom large before his perception. After all, as the Mother has so trenchantly put it,

"All that belongs to the ordinary world is impermanent and fugitive, so there is nothing in it worth getting upset about. What is lasting, eternal, immortal and infinite — that indeed is worth having, worth conquering, worth possessing. It is Divine Light, Divine Love, Divine Life — it is also Supreme Peace, Perfect Joy and All-Mastery upon earth with the Complete Manifestation as the Crowning. When you get the sense of relativity of things, then whatever happens, you can step back and look; you can remain quiet and call on the Divine Force and wait for an answer. Then you will know exactly what to do." (Ibid., p. 160)

Now comes another daily sadhana which a sadhaka should never be negligent about. It is 'not to manifest in action'.

4. "Not to Manifest in Action"

Let us try to explain the technique of this sadhana. All of us know that a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga accepts life in its entirety but only in order to transform it altogether. He does not follow the escapist path of traditional sadhanas which advise the spiritual aspirant to quarantine himself as far as feasible in order to escape the impact of the temptations and difficulties that are bound to overwhelm the sadhaka because of his unavoidable contact with other persons and confrontation with diverse events and situations of life.

But, so far as our sadhana is concerned, we have fixed for our goal the divine transformation of

our present human nature and a victory over the forces of life. For, as Sri Aurobindo has reminded us:

“The Divine that we adore is not only a remote extracosmic Reality, but a half-veiled Manifestation present and near to us here in the universe. Life is the field of a divine manifestation not yet complete: here, in life, on earth, in the body ... we have to unveil the Godhead; here we must make its transcendent greatness, light and sweetness real to our consciousness, here possess and, as far as may be, express it.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 68)

Such being the purpose of our sadhana, we have to plunge headlong without any fear or hesitation into the fields of activities of life. But this will have its negative consequences: this acceptance of life cannot but immensely add to our struggle. For our nature with all its failings, and impulses and instincts, known and unknown, overt or covert, will be provoked almost at every step to act and react in unspiritual way, for that is its present svadharma. All the dark elements inherent in present human nature will come out of their lairs at the contact of life and surge up and invade our outer dynamic existence seeking an unbridled manifestation there.

At any point of time, especially in moments of critical decision, the sadhaka of the Integral Path will discover that his psychological field is turning into the jostling ground for many different forces and influences past or present, inner or outer, one's own or imported from others. They create by their combined operation a psychological resultant which forcefully pushes the sadhaka to a particular course of action or reaction. The sadhaka loses for the time being all freedom of choice and rests incapable of thinking, feeling, willing, acting and reacting except in the particular way dictated by the resultant. What should he do then in such a precarious situation?

Let the worldly-minded people succumb to the resultant push and give it a free expression. But the sadhaka being a sadhaka cannot mortgage his freedom in such an ignoble way. He has to reject without exception all the pushes which are incompatible with his avowed aim of leading a spiritual life. But rejection is never an easy affair. It inevitably encounters a very serious resistance from ingrained habits and the promptings of the instincts. At these moments the sadhaka may feel tempted to give vent to the overwhelming impulse, vainly hoping that working it out in experience may perhaps exhaust its power of recurrence in future. But the result will be just the opposite. The weakness in question will thereby get intensified, receive a further lease of life and continue to trouble the sadhaka more and more. Sri Aurobindo once admonished a sadhaka against such false theorising. This is what he wrote:

“... you have always had an idea that to give expression to an impulse or a movement is the best way or even the only way to get rid of it. But that is a mistaken idea. If you give expression to anger, you prolong or confirm the habit of the recurrence of anger; you do not diminish or get rid of the habit. The very first step towards weakening the power of anger in the nature and afterwards getting rid of it altogether is to refuse all expression to it in act or speech. Afterwards one can go on with more likelihood of success to throw it out from the thought and feeling also. And so with all other wrong movements.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 1410)

The method of scoring victory over wrong impulses, as suggested above by Sri Aurobindo, is what the Mother has termed as “Ne pas manifester dans Vacation” — “not to give expression in act.” In one of her class talks of 1953, she expounded in detail the technique of this sadhana. What follows below draws its inspiration from what she said to the Ashramites on that occasion.

(Vide pp. 212-15 of Questions and Answers 1953, MCW Vol. 5)

Whenever faced with a surging wrong impulse in oneself, which is strongly seeking an outlet of expression, one often offers a lame excuse whose form is somewhat like this: “Well, if I do it this time, I shall be convinced that it is after all bad and I shall do it no longer. As a matter of fact this is the last time I am allowing myself to do it, and that with the laudable intention of being convinced of its undesirability through actual experience which will surely purify me by effective purging.”

But this method does not work at all; for the theory is not based on psychological facts of human nature. Instead of being purified, one gets still more engrossed in the impulse and weakness, making a future deliverance much more difficult.

No, instead of indulging in the weakness even for once, what the sadhaka has to do is to take a very firm resolve on the very first occasion itself and say to oneself:

“Well, this time itself, I shall not do it; I shall apply all my strength to prevent its expression in speech and action.”

Yes, one must concentrate only on scoring this first stage of victory over the impulse. Whatever outlet the moment’s impulse is seeking from the sadhaka for its expression, has to be blocked altogether: one need not for the time being waste one’s energy or effort in tackling its inner turmoil in the sadhaka’s consciousness.

Of course, the urge, the desire, the passion will still be there in the sadhaka’s heart producing churning and whirls there, but outside one does resist its manifestation. This is not suppression; it is only a stratagem of battle. One should stand like a rock and resolve not to carry out the dictate in action suggested by the impulse.

If the sadhaka can do this every time the resultant impulse becomes strong, it will be found that the insistent urge is gradually losing its intensity; also, the frequency of its appearance will progressively diminish. For, as the Mother has pointed out,

“All forces upon earth tend towards expressing themselves. These forces come with the object of manifesting themselves, and if you place a barrier and refuse expression, they may try to beat against the barrier for a time, but in the end, they will tire themselves out and not being manifested, they will withdraw...” (MCW Vol. 5, p. 214)

The sadhaka will then proceed to the next stage of the operation of clearing. He will now try to rid his consciousness of the turbulence of desire. There will still be many battles to wage on the psychological plane, but if the sadhaka seriously and sincerely practises being detached from the disturbance, little by little there is bound to come a time when the negative vibration will return no longer.

The Mother concludes her elaboration with these words of advice:

“The effective order is to begin from the outside: ‘The very first thing is that I do not do it, and afterwards, I desire it no longer and next I close my doors completely to all impulses: they no longer exist for me, I am now outside all that.’ This is the true order, the order that is effective.

First, not to do it. And then you will no longer desire and after that it will go out of your consciousness completely.” (Ibid., pp. 214-15).

This “ne pas manifester dans l’action” — “not to manifest in action” — should be a practice with the sadhaka not once in a blue moon or on infrequent occasions but constantly, many times a day, through his entire sadhana-career.

5. “To Integrate the Being”

One of the great tragedies compromising the spiritual progress of many sadhakas is that they do not take sufficient care to harmonise the different members of their being. In their sadhana-life they function as self-divided personalities who are being pulled and pushed at the same time along contrary directions by widely divergent forces and influences.

As a matter of fact, every human being, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, is in his normal constitution a compound not of one but many personalities; and each of these has its own demands and differing nature. The same situation prevails in the case of a sadhaka too when he first begins his sadhana and for a long time thereafter. His being presents the appearance of a roughly constituted chaos: every part of the sadhaka’s subjective being — his intellect, will, sense-mind, desire-self, the heart, the body — has each, as it were, its own complex individuality independent of the rest; it neither agrees with itself nor with the others. As a result the habitual surface consciousness of a sadhaka acts as a discordant heterogeneous mixture, not a single harmonious and homogeneous whole. And *“this is the reason why there is a constant confusion and even a conflict in our members which our mental reason and will are moved to control and harmonise and have often much difficulty in creating out of their confusion or conflict some kind of order and guidance; even so, ordinarily, we drift too much or are driven by the stream of our nature and act from whatever in it comes uppermost at the time and seizes the instruments of thought and action,... even our seemingly deliberate choice is more of an automatism than we imagine...”* (Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, p. 897)

The sadhaka has to mend this state of affairs with all the perspicacity he can command. Otherwise, so far as his sadhana is concerned, he will be liable to demolish constantly by one hand what his other hand has built up. “Integration of the being” should be his watchword. He should not act like a weathercock changing its orientation with every passing breeze. His heart and mind and will should not have separate contrary fascinations: ‘All his members should worship the same Sun’. The ‘Sun’ here is of course the Divine and the divine life. This should be the sadhaka’s constant and conscious effort in course of his conduct of daily life.

6. “To Observe, to Watch Over, to Control, to Master”

As a part of his regular daily sadhana the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to learn to develop in himself the witness consciousness which constantly observes in a detached and dispassionate way all that occurs in his Nature part. This witness consciousness has to grow in time into an anumantā consciousness which has a double role of giving the consent to the movement of nature or withdrawing this consent from it depending on the free choice of the Witness. It is a very helpful stage in our sadhana of transformation; for in this way the detached inner being of the sadhaka can bring the force of the higher consciousness to act to change the nature wholly, observing all the time the action of nature without being in any way affected by it, putting the force for change wherever needed and setting the whole being right as one does with a machine.

The sadhaka of our Path has to do this psychological exercise constantly in course of his daily life. He should not act or react mechanically, being involuntarily carried away by the stream of his nature with which he gets completely identified. He must keep an observant eye always fixed on the movements of nature and actively intervene each time the need arises. Sri Aurobindo has explained the rationale of this sadhana-procedure in one of his letters on Yoga. Here is a relevant passage from that important letter:

“The Purusha above is not only a Witness, he is the giver (or withholder) of the sanction; if he persistently refuses the sanction to a movement of Prakriti, keeping himself detached, then, even if it goes on for a time by its past momentum, it usually loses its hold after a time, becomes more feeble, less persistent, less concrete and in the end fades away... This refusal of sanction need not mean a struggle with the lower Prakriti; it should be a quiet, persistent, detached refusal leaving unsupported, unassented to, without meaning or justification, the contrary action of the nature.” (Letters on Yoga, p.1009)

The Mother too has in a very simple way expounded this fourfold sadhana which she has christened as the method of “observing, watching over, controlling and mastering.” The Mother’s exposition was purposely made very simple because she addresses her words to the Green Group children of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram who were less than twelve years in age. All that follows below is a free adaptation of the procedure delineated by her:

‘There are four movements which are usually consecutive, but which in the end may be simultaneous: to observe one’s thoughts and feelings is the first, to watch over one’s thoughts and feelings is the second, to control one’s thoughts and feelings is the third, and to master one’s thoughts and feelings is the fourth. To observe, to watch over, to control, to master. All that to get rid of an evil mind.

‘A purified mind is naturally a mind that does not admit any wrong thought and feeling, and the complete mastery to gain this result is the last achievement in the four stages.

‘The very first stage, to observe one’s thoughts and feelings, is not such an easy thing. For to observe your thoughts and feelings, you must first of all separate yourself from them. The first movement then is to step back and look at them, so that the movement of the observing consciousness and that of thoughts and feelings may not be confused.

‘Now comes the second stage of watching over one’s thoughts and feelings. Learn to look them as an enlightened judge so that you may distinguish between the good and the bad, between those thoughts and feelings that are useful and those that are harmful, between constructive movements that lead to victory and defeatist ones which turn us away from it. It is this power of discernment that we must acquire at this second stage.

‘Now comes the stage of control; this is the third step of our psychological discipline. Once the enlightened judge of our consciousness has distinguished between useful and harmful thoughts and feelings, the inner guard will come and allow to pass only approved thoughts and feelings, strictly refusing admission to all undesirable elements. It is this movement of admission and refusal that we call control and this constitutes the third stage of the discipline.

‘The fourth stage, that of mastery over the wrong movements, follows almost automatically upon the successful completion of the three previous stages. For, a total sincerity on the part of

the sadhaka will make him immune for all practical purposes from the attacks of the undesirable forces.'

An authentic sadhaka has to put into operation at all times this fourfold discipline of 'observing, watching over, controlling, and mastering'. He must shun at all costs being insincere in his profession. For insincerity is, as the Mother has pointed out, "*to pretend that you want to live the spiritual life and not to do it, to pretend that you want to seek the truth and not to do it, to display the external signs of consecration to the divine life... but within to be concerned only with oneself, one's selfishness and one's own needs.*" (Questions and Answers, MCW Vol. 3, p. 190)

7. "To Take Life Seriously"

Wishing to wake up certain sadhakas of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram from their accustomed torpor and lethargy, the Mother once administered them a stern warning in these words:

"You must make haste to do your work here, for it is here that you can truly do it.

"Expect nothing from death. Life is your salvation.

"It is in life that you must transform yourself. It is upon earth that you progress and it is upon earth that you realise. It is in the body that you win the Victory." (Questions and Answers, MCW Vol. 3, p. 198)

Such being the importance of human life upon earth in a material body, the question arises: Are the sadhakas in general aware of this importance? Do they utilise every moment of their life to fulfil their responsibility? Or do they simply pass their days as most other ordinary human beings do?

The answers to these questions are not very gratifying. For the fact is that most of us who have deliberately taken to the path of spiritual sadhana forget about our goal after some time or, losing all ardour in our will, we become prone to relegate the fulfillment of our primary aim to a later old age of our life. We start living a routine existence and fail to remember for all practical purposes why we are here upon earth and what is expected of us as sadhakas of the Integral Path.

As a matter of fact there are three classes of people among human beings. Most men are well content to lead an ordinary material and animal life. A few, maybe ten per cent of all men, try to lead a more mental but still a highly limited way of living. And there is a negligible minority which aspires after a greater spiritual life, a life divine.

What distinguishes man from other subhuman species is a consciously felt ideal of perfection that one can hopefully yearn after and attain to with adequate and proper personal efforts.

But what is the exact nature of this perfection? — There is no universal agreement amongst men; they differ widely in their view. Most seek after an adequate mundane change; some yearn after a religious conversion and fix for their goal a sufficient self-preparation in this life for another existence after death; only a few dare to envisage as their life's goal the leading of a spiritual way of life having for its ultimate consummation the union with the Divine. Amongst

these spiritually-minded people we, the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga, are specially distinguished by our bold aim of achieving divine perfection of the human being here upon earth itself. After all, that is the real purpose of life, for that is the secret goal set before herself by the terrestrial Nature since the time she started operating her life evolution upon this planet. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

“All life is a secret Yoga, an obscure growth of Nature towards the discovery and fulfillment of the divine principle hidden in her which becomes progressively less obscure, more self-conscious and luminous, more self-possessed in the human being by the opening of all his instruments of knowledge, will, action, life to the Spirit within him and in the world.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 591)

We who have deliberately chosen the Integral Yoga as the way of our life should not forget that the goal of human life is not just to lead a sumptuously laid glorious animal existence but to hasten the advent of the supreme divine object of existence upon earth. It is true most men are totally unaware of this deeper meaning and essence of human existence. So let them lead their life in the way they think best. But what about us who have declared ourselves to be practitioners of the synthetic Yoga of integral divine perfection? As sadhakas, are we discharging our responsibility in right earnest? Alas, no. Many of us while away our time in vain mundane activities in the spirit of the common run of self-forgetful beings. We keep our spiritual undertaking almost marginalized, relegating it to the status of a mere foot-note of our life.

But this will not do. We have to take life more seriously and fulfil the real purpose of our human embodiment. We must learn what the Mother has termed as “Science of Life” and apply its tenets to every hour of our daily existence so that our pilgrimage upon earth does not get frustrated. We have to take life with the seriousness it deserves if we would call ourselves sadhakas of the Integral Path.

8. “Remember and Offer”

Karma Yoga, sadhana through works, is an absolutely essential part of the Integral Yoga. Our goal being the entire transformation of our nature in all its details, mere sedentary meditation or an outpouring of ecstatic devotion will not help us in the fulfilment of our goal. In that way we may gather some inner experiences but our outer nature will mostly remain untransformed as before. For the entire transformation we have to achieve dynamic union with the Divine. And this can be effected only through our self-offering to the Supreme through the medium of actions. And not a few actions big and momentous but all the actions of our daily life, trivial or important, covering the whole of our existence have to be offered to the Divine in a spirit of utter self-consecration. All works have to be done for the Divine and for the Divine alone.

Sadhana of the Integral Yoga cannot be done in a slipshod way or in a spirit of levity. There is no such thing as a part-time sadhana: it has to be entire and encompass the whole of life. As Sri Aurobindo so trenchantly put it: *“The secret of success in Yoga is to regard it not as one of the aims to be pursued in life, but as the whole of life.”* (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 65)

So this is the attitude the sadhaka has to grow into: “The whole of my life shall be absolutely given to the Divine. All my efforts will be devoted to the realisation of a truly spiritual life. I

must feel at every step that I belong to the Divine and to none or nothing else. I have no longer anything that I can call my own. I should know and feel that everything is coming to me from the Divine and I have to offer it back to its unique Source. All I am, all I have, and all I do must be offered to the Divine in a spirit of utter dedication.’

If the sadhaka can remember this resolution at every moment of his daily life and can carry that in practice in an uninterrupted way, his whole life will turn into a dynamic living sadhana, and even the smallest thing to which he used to pay not much attention before will cease to be trivial and insignificant; it will become full of meaning and open up a vast horizon beyond.

To make his life sadhana wise, vibrant, and fruitful the sadhaka has to dedicate all his actions to the Divine through the entire period of his waking existence. He must offer all his movements to the Supreme, not only every mental action, every thought and feeling but even the most ordinary and external actions. Walking on the road, talking with friends, reading and writing, taking one’s bath, having one’s meals, brushing one’s teeth, preparing one’s bed, all, all, without exception have to be consciously consecrated to the Divine, doing them with the constant remembrance that his supreme Beloved is always looking at him: he has to perform every action, even the most trivial one, as perfectly as he can, with as much conscious attention as he can command, for he is going to offer it to the Divine as a flawless bouquet of flowers fragrant and beautiful. It is worth recalling here what Sri Aurobindo has said in connection with the daily duty of a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga:

“This, in short, is the demand made on us, that we should turn our whole life into a conscious sacrifice. Every moment and every movement of our being is to be resolved into a continuous and a devoted self-giving to the Eternal. All our actions, not less the smallest and most ordinary and trifling than the greatest and most uncommon and noble, must be performed as consecrated acts. Our individualised nature must live in the single consciousness of an inner and outer movement dedicated to Something that is beyond us and greater than our ego. No matter what the gift and to whom it is presented by us, there must be a consciousness in the act that we are presenting it to the one divine Being in all beings.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 102-03)

9. “Pray and Pray and Pray”

The life of a sadhaka should be a life of constant prayer. Call it a ‘prayer’, call it an ‘aspiration’, call it even a ‘call’; that does not matter much. What matters most is an earnest and persistent appeal to the Supreme on behalf of the sadhaka for the Divine’s help and intervention.

After all, from the spiritual point of view, it is not what the Divine gives us in response to our call, which is of cardinal importance. What is of essential value is the establishment of a loving and intimate relationship with the divine Beloved. As Sri Aurobindo has put it:

“It is not ... the giving of the thing asked for that matters, but the relation itself, the contact of man’s life with God, the conscious interchange. In spiritual matters and in the seeking of spiritual gains, this conscious relation is a great power; it is a much greater power than our own entirely self-reliant struggle and effort and it brings a fuller spiritual growth and experience.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 543)

This should be the aspiration of every sadhaka that he should reach sooner or later a state of consciousness in which he will seek the Divine not for any possible gifts, however great or

noble, which the Supreme can possibly offer him, but purely and simply for the sake of the Divine himself and not for anything else, and this because such is the intrinsic call of his being, the deepest truth of his Spirit.

But this entirely motiveless seeking for the Divine is a distant possibility for most sadhakas, accessible only to very advanced Yogis. At a somewhat less advanced level a sadhaka can surely pray for the purity, force, light, love, wisdom and calm of the divine consciousness and its insistence to transform and perfect his mind and life and body. He can surely call for the Supreme Peace, Perfect Joy, and the All-mastery over his nature.

At a still lower level it is perfectly permissible for the sadhaka to formulate his prayers in the following way:

‘O Divine, guide me on the path of rectitude at every step of my life. Take charge of my entire existence and remould it in the spiritual way. Grant that my psychic being be brought to the front and govern luminously all the movements of my nature. Fulfil my prayer that I may be enabled to keep the right spiritual attitude before every circumstance of my life. Envelop me, O Divine, with Thy transforming Presence and change my heart and mind and body so that they may act as perfect instruments for Thy manifestation.’

We may also formulate some specific prayers to the Divine; there is no harm in that. These prayers may take the form of:

‘Teach me always more and more; give me more and more of light; dispel my darkness. Grant that I may be equal to my spiritual task, that nothing in me, conscious or unconscious, may betray Thee by neglecting to serve Thy sacred mission. Grant that I may be an efficient and clear-sighted collaborator in Thy Work, and that everything within me may foster the plenitude of Thy manifestation. O my Beloved, fill my heart with the delight of Thy love, and flood my mind with the splendour of Thy light.’

If we want to pray more impersonally, we may formulate our call in this way: ‘Grant that Thy sovereign Power may manifest upon earth and Thy Work be accomplished; let everything become resplendent and transfigured by the knowledge of the Truth.’ (We may mention here that some of the prayers cited above have been taken from the Mother’s Prayers and Meditations.)

The point is that there is no dearth of prayers to engage the consciousness of the sadhaka if he is eager to search for them. Let the whole course of his daily life take the form of an uninterrupted canticle of prayers ardently rising to the Divine Beloved, while the sadhaka may remain occupied with various outward activities.

One other point: Even if some of the objects sought after by the sadhaka in different situations of his life concern his mundane interests and possess no more than a passing value, there is no special objection to their being placed before the Divine. The only point the sadhaka should be careful about is that he should not, in his prayers, insist on their fulfilment, only to gratify his personal egoistic desires. His attitude should rather be: ‘O Divine, I am asking for this in my ignorance; I place my problem before Thee with the innocence and candour of a child. Now you are free to do whatever you will to do in your divine wisdom. I shall in all cases accept your decision with a joyous heart.’ The sadhaka will remain always spiritually safe with this attitude.

To conclude: Prayers are very important elements in the life of a sadhaka. If tendered with love and a trustful simplicity, they help the aspirant to develop a close intimacy with the Divine. Through the instrumentality of sincere prayers the sadhaka will by and by come to feel the supreme Beloved enveloping him all the time with the warm ambience of a most rapturous love.

We have come to the end of our rather long chapter on the eightfold daily sadhana a sadhaka should put into practice in an unremitting way if he would wish that his progress on the spiritual path advance steadily with a solid foundation. The eight limbs of this ceaseless sadhana are, as we have seen above:

(1) "To be conscious of oneself"; (2) "to be always vigilant"; (3) "to step back and examine"; (4) "not to manifest in action"; (5) "to observe, to watch over, to control, to master"; (6) "to take life seriously"; (7) "to remember and offer"; and (8) "always to pray". A faithful observance of this eightfold sadhana in one's daily life cannot but change the whole tenor of the sadhaka's existence both inner and outer and turn him into an aspirant worth the name.

III.

On Aspiration

Aspiration is one of the most essential elements conducive to the success in sadhana. Without an aspiration to support the sadhaka at every step, any meaningful progress on the spiritual path is not only difficult but highly improbable. Sri Aurobindo has reminded us that aspiration is one of the two crucial factors which open wide the window of spirituality, the other one being the progressive eradication of the ego-centric attitude. He has also affirmed that the difficult task the Integral Yoga has taken in hand, that is to say, the establishment of a divine life upon earth itself, can only be achieved with the conjunction of two forces: (i) a steadily mounting ardent aspiration from the side of the sadhaka, and (ii) from the Divine's side an answering Grace descending from above in response to the sadhaka's call. And the significant fact is that wherever there is the flame of aspiration burning bright in the sadhaka's heart, the Grace of the Divine Mother cannot but respond.

But what is after all this aspiration? The sadhaka should not make any confusion here. For aspiration is not the exuberance of the vital nor the insistent hungry demand of Desire. It has a special quality of its own, also its characteristic movement and manifestation. We shall come to the discussion of these points in right time in course of this essay. For the moment let us briefly state that a veritable aspiration represents the pure and sacred flame of the psychic fire rising from the depths of consciousness. But this fire envelopes our heart and mind and body too and then mounts upward with an unwavering orientation. Under its vivifying influence all the different parts of our being start aspiring in their characteristic fashions. Thus an effective aspiration in the case of a sincere sadhaka comprises in its wide sweep the indomitable willpower of the mind, the insatiable thirst of the heart, the plenary consent of the vital, and the perfect opening of the physical consciousness.

All of us know that aspiration is one of the three basic limbs of the sadhana of the Integral Yoga, the other two being 'rejection' and 'surrender'. Viewed from one angle, aspiration excels the other two in its value. For without aspiration to vivify it, the sadhaka's effort at rejection of wrong movements will very soon degenerate into a hard and dessicated ascetic exercise not very effective in actual practice. And the movement of self-surrender to the Divine? Why should the sadhaka feel at all any urge to surrender himself to the Divine unless the fire of aspiration burns out the resistance and recalcitrance of his lower human nature? Is it such a simple affair to make an unreserved surrender to the Divine?

It is because of this interconnection that we ventured to state above that a genuine aspiration precedes in its importance the other two movements of rejection and surrender. For it is undeniable that if the sadhaka's aspiration becomes sincere and ardent, and all-enveloping, 'rejection' and 'self-surrender' too are bound to follow suit in no time.

Did not Sri Aurobindo make the point explicit in one of his exchange of letters with Nirodbaran, his beloved disciple? Here is what the exchange was like:

Nirodbaran, to Sri Aurobindo: "In your letter to Somnath you said that what is most needed is an upward aspiration. But then what about the other two movements: rejection and surrender you mention in *The Mother*... You can see that aspiration per se, however strong and true, cannot achieve much.

Sri Aurobindo laconically replied: “*Who says no?*”

Nirodbaran, being puzzled, asked his Master again: “Do you mean that a strong aspiration will necessarily bring in rejection and surrender?”

Sri Aurobindo’s two-word reply: “*Of course.*”

No further explanation is needed as regards the essentiality of aspiration. Yet, in spite of this categorical assertion made by Sri Aurobindo, some sadhakas may at times harbour in their mind a lurking thought like: “Is a constantly maintained ardent aspiration so very essential in the life of sadhana? Can it not be that the Grace of the divine alone will suffice to bring about all the necessary fulfilment? Why should we limit the potency of grace and make its action conditional on the sadhaka’s call?”

The questions thus put suffer from some fallacy. For it is of course true that the Grace of the Divine is omnipotent and self-existent: its effectivity does not depend in any way on any other factor. But and this but is a big ‘But’, for the Divine Grace acts with all its Power only in the case of a sadhaka who has eliminated all his separative ego-consciousness, overpassed all sense of being a personal actor, and realised by actual experience that the Divine alone is the agent at all times. In such a sadhaka’s case no other condition need be imposed for the effective intervention of the divine Grace.

But have we, most of us, reached that state? Surely not. We, novices on the Path, are still dominated by the sense of ego. All our actions arise out of a sense of personal motivation and urged by a separate-seeming personal will. Now, so long as we dwell in such a state of ego-dominated consciousness, we have to make some personal effort for our spiritual progress. We cannot pass on everything to the action of the divine Grace. This will be an act of sheer self-deception, of *mithyācāra* as the Gita would say. Sri Aurobindo has clarified the situation in these words:

“In Yoga... it is the Divine who is the Sadhaka and the Sadhana; it is his Shakti with her light, power, knowledge, consciousness, Ananda, acting upon the Adhara and, when it is opened to her, pouring into it with these divine forces that makes the Sadhana possible. But so long as the lower nature is active the personal effort of the Sadhaka remains necessary.” (The Mother, Cent. Ed., P-6)

And in the very next sentence Sri Aurobindo has included the ‘labour of aspiration’ as the primary element of this necessary personal effort.

The Mother on her part speaks more bluntly and seeks to disabuse our mind of any false complacency in this regard. This is what she says in substance:

‘It is absolutely ludicrous to think that all that is necessary in the life of sadhana will come to you automatically through the magical power of divine Grace. No, this is not true at all. You must not lapse into sleep with this vain thought: “Oh, everything will be done for me by the Divine; I need not do anything at all except that I glide along the stream of time.” No, this is never true to fact; nothing will be done for you automatically.’

No, an ardent aspiration is very much needed for the speedy advancement on the path of Yoga.

As a matter of fact every sadhaka has to engage himself in a twofold sadhana:

(i) to keep constantly burning in one's heart a living aspiration for the attainment of the Divine and for belonging only to the Divine; and

(ii) to make a constant and sincere effort to offer oneself fully to the Divine and consecrate to him all that one is, one has, and one does without the slightest expectation of any fruit in return.

If the sadhaka can do this in all earnestness, the Divine Mother herself will take charge of his life and sadhana and lead him along a sunlit path to the ultimate attainment of union with the Divine.

The place of aspiration is so very important in the building up of a genuine spiritual life that once when a disciple complained to Sri Aurobindo that he was not being able to call and aspire sufficiently strongly, the Master emphatically advised:

“Well then, aspire weakly and phantasmally — but anyhow aspire.” (Nirodbaran, Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, p. 315)

‘But anyhow aspire’, that should be the mantra of ‘open sesame’ in our sadhana-life. And we, the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga, should often meditate upon the following encouraging words of the Mother as regards the miraculous potency of aspiration:

“We can, simply by a sincere aspiration, open a sealed door in us and find... that Something which will change the whole significance of life, reply to all our questions, solve all our problems and lead us to the perfection we aspire for without knowing it, to that Reality which alone can satisfy us and give us lasting joy, equilibrium, strength, life.” (MCW Vol. 9, pp. 374-75)

Such is the great contribution of the sadhana-movement called aspiration. But this has to be kept pure and free from all alien admixture. For a strong and insistent desire can very often take the garb of an aspiration and grievously deceive the sadhaka, thus leading to his spiritual downfall. So it is advisable to devote some time here to the discussion of the basic difference between a movement of demand and desire and that of a genuine aspiration.

There is a gulf of difference between a desire and an aspiration. Desires are the manifestation of the insatiable thirst and appetite of the separative ego-consciousness. Ego would like to remain an ego; it stubbornly refuses to dissolve its sense of separativity. But any separativity cannot but lead to an inevitable contraction and limitation. And because of this limitation it cannot but be that the actual possessions of the ego have to suffer from many a lacuna and imperfection. Yet the occult truth remains that behind his outward ego-consciousness every individual human being has within him, deeply hidden behind the veil of Ignorance, the eternal Godhead with his intrinsic Will to possess the universe; for, that is his inherent divine right.

Here we meet a strange mysterious phenomenon. Man's superficial ego, being obscurely aware of the inner Godhead's right to infinite and absolute possession, claims for itself the same divine right but because of its inherent limitation in power and capability it cannot fulfil its urge in actual practice. Hence arises for the separative ego an unbridgeable gap between its insistent demands and actual attainments. This creates a sense of constant discontent.

Ego forgets that without the abolition of the sense of separativity and the restitution of the experience of divine unity and universality, it cannot hope to possess the world. For this possession can be effected only in the spiritual way. But ego mistakenly follows its own impossible way which amounts to gathering from outside, from what it feels as not-self, more and more of objects of enjoyment and bringing all these to its voraciously hungry mouth. Ego's tendency is to pull everything to its own centre. But in that way it cannot satisfy its insatiable appetite: its parching thirst remains basically unquenchable.

To take an arithmetical analogy: So long as the decimal point immediately after the initial zero of a decimal number is maintained, any number of nines, however inordinately large that number may be, added to the right of this decimal point cannot reach the value one. For that one has first to knock out the decimal point which is psychologically equivalent to the separative and divided ego-consciousness.

Wherever there is the sense of ego, there is bound to appear with it the centripetal urge to grab and devour, in a vain bid to replenish itself to fulness. And this is the genesis of the movement of desire. Thus, however high and noble it may be in its frontal appearance, however generous and apparently self-sacrificing may be its movement, every desire is basically ego-oriented.

A genuine aspiration is just the opposite of this. It is intensely aware of the insufficiencies and imperfections of the ego-bound existence; hence it tries to come out of this sordid prison house. All its urges are dovetailed to the realisation of this fundamental release. Each of its movements is directed not to the ego-centre but away from it.

And by this sole sign a sadhaka can recognise whether his governing impulse of the moment is of the nature of a desire or of an aspiration. Thus, an aspiration is, in its origin, a thirst arising from the soul, a yearning towards the divine love, light and progress. There can be, nay should be, a great intensity in an aspiration but never any froth and spume of egoistic fervour. In an aspiration there is constant turning to the Divine but no impatience nor any sense of frustration if the fulfilment is delayed. For there is no intrusion of ego here with its spoiling antics.

In other words, an aspiration is an upward elan of our consciousness towards all that is essentially good and pure and beautiful; it is a thirst for spiritual knowledge; it is a quiet and steady seeking for the Divine and divine life; it embodies an indomitable courage to fight against all that tries to prevent the sadhaka's progress by exercising upon him a gravitational pull downward and backward.

Here are some characterisations given by Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which will make abundantly clear what a true aspiration is and how it is distinguished from the movement of a desire.

Sri Aurobindo defines aspiration as "*a spiritual enthusiasm, the height and ardour of the soul's seeking.*" Now from the Mother:

An aspiration is "*an inner enthusiasm towards the New, the Unknown, the Perfection.*" It is "*a yearning, a longing for the contact with the Divine Force, divine Harmony, divine Love.*" An aspiration is "*an inner flame, a need for the light... A luminous enthusiasm that seizes the whole being... An unquenchable thirst, an elan, a luminous drive towards all that is high, all that is noble, all that is divine.*" It is "*a courage with a taste for the supreme adventure, the adventure*

of consciousness.” Aspiration is a “silently mounting column of fire that carries in its tip what one wants to be, one wants to have, one wants to do.” Finally, an aspiration is “a purifying Will, an evermounting drive.”

What we have given above are abstract definitions and generalisations. But how does an aspiration make its appearance in the life of an individual? What impact does it make upon the quality of his life? And what is the result of this aspiration? — All these and other allied questions the Mother discussed in one of her last classes held in the Ashram Playground. It was on 13 August 1958. This is what she said inter alia:

“One day... just imagine, you are going to wake up all of a sudden to something you never noticed but which is deep within you and thirsts for the truth, thirsts for transformation and is ready to make the effort required to realise it. On that day you will go very fast, you will advance with giant strides...”

“You will suddenly feel an irresistible need not to live in unconsciousness, in ignorance, in that state in which you do things without knowing why, feel things without understanding why, have contradictory wills, understand nothing about anything, live only by habit, routine, reactions — you take life easy. And one day you are no longer satisfied with that.

“It depends, for each one it is different. Most often it is the need to know, to understand; for some it is the need to do what must be done as it should be done...”

“One suddenly feels that everything one does, everything one sees, has no meaning, no purpose, but that there is something which has a meaning; that essentially one is here on earth for something, that all this — all these movements, all this agitation, all this wastage of force and energy — all that must have a purpose, an aim, and that this uneasiness one feels within oneself, this lack of satisfaction, this need, this thirst for something must lead us somewhere else...”

“You no longer live like a little machine, hardly half-conscious. You want to feel truly, to act truly, to know truly...”

“The starting-point: to want it, truly want it, to need it.” (Questions and Answers 1957-58, pp. 373-75)

So this is aspiration, and the Mother in her infinite compassion cited her own personal case to exemplify the thing. She told the inmates of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram that the first time, between the age of eighteen and twenty years, when she came to know that there was a discovery to make within her, the discovery of the inner Godhead, that became the most important thing for her: that was put before everything else. And she rushed like a cyclone to make the discovery, and nothing could have stopped her. And the result was that in one month the whole work was done. (MCW Vol. 6, pp. 298-99)

Such was the case with the Mother, but what about us, her children, who have declared ourselves to be sadhakas on her Path? Do we have even a thousandth part of her aspiration? Actually, she sternly scolded the Ashramites on the lack of sufficient ardour in their aspiration. This is what she said in substance on August 23, 1954:

‘How many years you have been here, half asleep!... Everything has been explained to you, the whole work has almost been chewed up for you, you have been not only with words but with psychic aids, in all possible ways, put on the path to this inner discovery, and still you let yourselves live, like that (gesture) it will come when it comes!... Where is that ardour, that will which conquers all obstacles, that concentration which overcomes everything!’ (Adapted from pp. 298-300 of MCW Vol. 6)

Yes, where is that ardour? where is that intensity of aspiration? Yet it has been made clear by now that without proper aspiration nothing tangible can be achieved on the path of spirituality. So all of us would like to know whether there is any sadhana-procedure following which a sadhaka can awaken his dormant aspiration and make it in time all-enveloping and all-conquering?

In fact, there is one, and the Mother has elaborated it at many places of her extensive writings. The interested reader can refer to those portions of her Works. We give below a gist of her teaching in the barest outline.

First Step: Either through the Grace of the Divine, or because of some good Karma done in past lives, or through the luminous exercise of one’s power of discrimination, the sadhaka becomes convinced of the vanity and transitoriness of all that an ordinary ego-dominated life of desires can offer him, of the futility of its love and power and happiness and enjoyments. A strong mood of disenchantment grips him so far as the normal human life of lower nature is concerned.

Second Step: The sadhaka ardently seeks to come out of this hollow human living, to escape from the prison-house of lower nature. He does not as yet know what he really wants or wherein lies the solution to his malaise and discontent. But this he knows that release he must have from the present state of nauseating imperfections. Such is the sign of the second stage.

Third Step: Because of the persistent insistence of the aspirational seeking on the part of the sadhaka for something else, although as yet vague and unknown, sooner or later the divine Grace responds and creates a chink in the wall of ignorance surrounding the sadhaka or removes for a short while the impenetrable veil obscuring his vision. Through this chink and because of this removal, the sadhaka gets a glimpse of the higher consciousness, of the glories and opulence of the supernal realms. And that begins attracting the amazed sadhaka as a powerful magnet and he loses very soon even the vestiges of his previous fascination for the lower life of the common run of humanity.

Fourth Step: The chink may be covered up again; the veil may again come back to block the sadhaka’s vision. Now the sadhaka has to be extra careful, not to lose the remembrance of the glimpse. He has to keep it vibrant and living before his consciousness and constantly direct his aspiration for the re-emergence of the glory from behind the clouds and its stay for a greater length of time.

Fifth Step: The sadhaka will now find that by and by the attraction for the higher order of life is gaining in more and more of intensity and the attachment to the hold lower life is falling off like a withered leaf. A new brand of yearning and resolution fills his heart and mind whose form expressed in words will be some what like this:

“O Divine, I want you alone. I do not want anything or anyone else except through you and for

you. I want to belong entirely to you and will never allow anyone or anything else to stake a separate claim on my consciousness. I want to be reborn in you: let the dead skin of my personality drop off and disintegrate.”

Sixth Step: When the sadhaka arrives at this step, the whole up his life turns into a brazier of sacred fire of aspiration. In this stage there is no uttered sound of prayers, vocal or mental, there is only the mounting flame or spiritual fire rising steadily upward in the background of a profound silence. An intense seeking to belong to the Divine, to be united with him, and to serve him as a perfect instrument of his manifestation. A great Hunger, an insatiable Thirst, the constant sense of a supreme Need permeates the entire being of the aspirant. The Mother has described this wonderfully delectable state in one of her “Notes on the Way” of 1965. Here is what she said:

“...the thirst for progress, the thirst for knowledge, the thirst for transformation and, above all, the thirst for Love and Truth... Truly a thirst, a need. All the rest has no importance; it is that one has need of.

“To cling to something one believes that one knows, to cling to something that one feels, to cling to something that one loves, to cling to one’s habits, to cling to the world as it is, is that which binds you. You must undo all, that, one thing after another. Undo all the ties... No more bond-free, always ready to change everything, except one thing: to aspire, this thirst... [for] the ‘Something’ one is in need of, the Love one is in need of, the Truth one is in need of, the supreme Perfection one is in need of — and that is all... a need, which the Thing alone can satisfy — nothing else, no half-measure, only that. And then, you go !” (MCW Vol. 11, p. 6)

Such is the nature of an all-accomplishing aspiration, for “all-accomplishing” it surely is. The Mother has assured us that a sincere aspiration introduces in the events another higher determinism and thus can altogether change the course of things. But for that the sadhaka has to pay attention to a few points:

(i) The object one aspires after has to be constantly held before the sadhaka’s consciousness. To aspire for a couple of minutes and then go to sleep for ten hours will not do. The sadhaka has to remove the two stumbling-blocks of laxity and forgetfulness.

(ii) One should not mix up a spirit of impatience with aspiration; for, impatience is bound to breed the undesirable moods of depression and rebellion.

(iii) The aspiration should be fortified with the power of concentration: this concentration should be focussed on the object sought after. The sadhaka’s mind should be prevented from wandering about hither and thither; his heart should be restrained from knocking at all possible doors for its supposed satisfaction. They should be constantly brought back from their wayward wanderings to dwell fixedly on the object of aspiration.

(iv) An aspiration, to be effective, should be strengthened by a constant practice of rejection of all the negative elements of the sadhaka’s nature, that try to nullify the potency of the aspiration. One should remember that a sincere and all-encompassing effort at rejection cannot but make the fire of aspiration burn bright more and more and reach its goal of fulfilment by consuming to nothingness all the dirt and scum on the way.

Our next essay will be devoted to the elaboration of this sadhana of rejection.

IV.

On Rejection

Sri Aurobindo, in the second chapter of his book *The Mother*, has drawn our attention to the interesting fact that although in Yoga the Divine is considered to be the Goal of attainment, he himself at the same time acts as the sadhaka, also the sadhana.

Still, so long as a sadhaka remains under the control of his lower human nature, it becomes altogether imperative that he make some personal effort for his progress. This personal effort comprises the three operations of aspiration, rejection and surrender. The preceding chapter of this book dealt with the sadhana of aspiration; we propose to speak now of the sadhana of rejection.

Sri Aurobindo has insisted that a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to renounce all the habitual movements of the lower nature. These include 'the Mind's ideas, opinions, preferences, habits, constructions'; 'the vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, sensations, passions, selfishness, pride, arrogance, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, hostility to the Truth'; and 'the physical nature's stupidity, doubt, disbelief, obscurity, obstinacy, pettiness, laziness, unwillingness to change, Tamas.'

The goal the Integral Yoga has set before itself is, we know, the total divine transformation of man's whole being and consciousness and nature. But to achieve this task is supremely difficult. And the very first condition a sadhaka of this Path has to satisfy is that he should turn to the Divine with the entirety of his being. This 'entirety' is not just a glib term used as a cliché. 'Entirety' means 'entirety'. It englobes literally the entire field of the sadhaka's nature down to its obscurest recesses. Thus it is expected that a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga will not allow even for once, anywhere in his being and nature, in the inner as well as in the outer field, any movement, however slight it may be, which is not genuinely God-oriented but rather ego-centred.

Now every impulse and movement arising at any time in the sadhaka's consciousness, which does not satisfy fully this criterion of unreserved orientation towards the Truth and the Divine, is to be considered as an obstacle on the Path.

Given this sweeping definition of an 'obstacle' in the spiritual way of life, we can easily understand that the obstacles harassing a sadhaka can act like chameleons and their variegated manifestations may fall into all sorts of categories. As a matter of fact, for a sincere and serious sadhaka all that in his psychology pulls him backward and downward, throws a spanner into the unimpeded progress of his sadhana, and resists in some way his efforts at a total and unreserved surrender to the Divine, represents for him a serious obstacle. In particular, these obstacles include in their sweeping ambit all sorts of evil tendencies, all the weaknesses of the lower nature, and all actions and reactions which, however trivial or good-looking in their appearance, contradict the spiritual ideal.

Such being the situation it is no exaggeration to say that an ordinary sadhaka's life is constantly troubled with a ceaseless stream of obstacles. Now all these psychological impediments the sadhaka has to take cognizance of and remove; and that is the sadhana of rejection.

But the question is: How should the sadhaka confront these diverse obstacles and gain victory over them?

Before we come to a serious discussion of these important issues, we have first to recognise that these obstacles differ from sadhaka to sadhaka in their forms and characters. For although all these obstacles with no exception arise from the same basic source of ignorant egoistic consciousness, they greatly differ in their quality, quantity, intensity and frequency, depending on the actual stage of the evolving consciousness of the particular sadhaka. And because of the variability of this underlying factor my obstacles may not be the same as yours, and that is well and good. Yet it is a fact that every sadhaka can group the totality of his own obstacles under three distinct categories. And what is interesting is that there is for each of these three categories a particular course of sadhana of rejection, sadhana for waging successful battles against and scoring a definitive victory over them. We propose to discuss in this fourth chapter these common procedures for the three categories, applicable in the case of all aspirants, although the individual constituent obstacles may widely vary in different sadhakas' cases.

We have been speaking about three different categories or classes of obstacles, but what, after all, are these categories? How are they distinguished from each other? Let us probe the phenomenon of obstacles a little deeper and try to find out the rationale behind this categorisation. It would be advantageous for our comprehension if we adopt a simple analogy here.

Let us consider the case of a pedestrian traveller who is walking along a rather long route dotted with many road-marks distinguishing different segments of the way. Along the path there may be a banyan tree here, a culvert there, a steep hill-side here, a thorny bush there, a stagnant pool here, a canal crossing there, a lotus pond here, a thick small woodland there, etc., etc. Now if the traveller maintains his journey onward he is bound to successively encounter all these road-marks. Also, for any given location of the pedestrian on the long meandering road, all these road-signs can be considered to belong to three categories. Some of these road-marks were at one time met by the traveller but now left behind and almost forgotten; some are facing him just now at the present point of his journey; and some others are in front of him remaining unknown on the as yet untrodden part of the road. These last road-marks will surely appear in time and confront the traveller if he does not interrupt his journey.

Let us now apply this journey-analogy to the case of a sadhaka on the spiritual path; and let us interpret the various obstacles he progressively meets on the way as these different road-marks lining the long route of the traveller.

Now consider the case of any individual sadhaka at random. His consciousness has been advancing forward, however slowly, following the course of the universal evolutionary movement. This movement forward can be split up into two distinct phases. The first phase concerns the progress of the individual, registered in the course of a single life-time limited between the two pillar-posts of physical birth and physical death. But the second phase extends over many successive lives of the individual, separated by a series of births, deaths, rebirths, and re-deaths.

This forward journey of the consciousness of the individual has begun long ago from the deep dark pit of the original Inconscience and has been slowly progressing through the vicissitudes of life, encountering various experiences, happy or unhappy or indifferent. This tortuous journey

of the individual can only end when his impure and limited ego-consciousness transforms itself and attains to the status of the supernature of the divine Consciousness.

Now along this long long track of this meandering adventure of the individual's evolving consciousness, he is bound to encounter many obstacles at different stages of his spiritual journey. For these obstacles are part of the process of growth. Obstacles are not accidentally brought about in an individual's life. Their appearances are governed by a supreme wisdom which has been surely leading the individual on to his divine destination.

Now every individual's nature is shot through and through with a legion of weaknesses, of which only a few are barely known to the individual's surface consciousness but most of them remain submerged below and act in a stealthy subterranean fashion to damage the growth of the being.

Now with the inexorable evolutionary progression of the sadhaka's consciousness, these hidden weaknesses and tendencies, called by us 'obstacles', emerge from their lairs and by and by come up to the surface, for the sadhaka to tackle and eliminate them. And all this is done under the guidance of a divine Providence. Thus, every obstacle has a time, necessity and significance of its own: none is altogether fortuitous. Now, viewed from the present status of a sadhaka's evolving consciousness, all his obstacles can be ranged into three classes which we can simply call: (i) obstacles of the past; (ii) obstacles of the present; and (iii) obstacles of the future. Psychologically rendered, these categories represent (i) weaknesses already conquered by the sadhaka; (ii) weaknesses that are being tackled at this moment; and (iii) weaknesses potent but hidden which are to be confronted in the future with the further growth of the sadhaka's consciousness.

By the way, by obstacles we do not mean so much the undesired and unapprehended events and situations of life but the psychological reactions of the sadhaka vis-à-vis those events and circumstances. Thus somebody abusing and insulting me is not an obstacle for me, but my reaction of anger and irritation and ill will is an obstacle on my path. Illnesses striking me down do not count as obstacles, but my worries and anxieties and impatience under their harassing onslaughts do represent obstacles that require to be rejected. So on and so forth.

Be it noted that the present chapter concerns itself solely with these undesirable manifestations of the nature's weaknesses, and offers effective methods of successfully resisting and, when not altogether impossible, eliminating them. For, for the ultimate attainment in the Integral Yoga, the sadhaka's consciousness has to be completely rid of all these inner weaknesses and impediments, if he would like to have a new birth in the Divine.

Now we can deal with the above-mentioned three categories of obstacles which trouble the sadhaka's consciousness at different stages of his spiritual journey.

For the facility of discussion let us adopt for all these obstacles a system of nomenclature not so felicitous but rather convenient. The obstacles of the first category may be called 'anachronistic'; those of the second class may be simply called 'present-day' and, finally, the obstacles of the third grouping may be designated as 'prospective'. Let us explain why we have selected these queer-sounding epithets.

For a particular sadhaka and for a particular stage of his development, the anachronistic

obstacles are those obstacles which belong to the past and should be normally left behind and forgotten. They are no more needed for the growth and development of the particular sadhaka and hence their appearance in the sadhaka's life is no longer imperative and unavoidable. That they are still coming and harassing the sadhaka is only because of the fact that the spiritual aspirant is still clinging to them due to some lax inertia and calling them back again and again although they have the tendency to disappear in the past. The defect the sadhaka is suffering from is that he has made an about-turn with his attention fixed behind. The inevitable consequence is that his spiritual progress gets slowed down or even completely halted.

The obstacles of the second category, the 'present-day' obstacles, are those which the divine Providence has brought about to test and strengthen the sadhaka at the present stage of his development. These the sadhaka cannot avoid, cannot run away from, for that can be done only by interrupting the journey forward or even going backward. The sadhaka has to muster courage, confront these obstacles intrepidly and gain victory over them. Then these 'present-day' obstacles will change their character and turn into enfeebled 'anachronistic' ones which can be easily shaken off if the sadhaka is sincere.

Now we come to the case of the third category of obstacles. These obstacles are the most difficult to tackle; for in their nature they are neither past nor actual but rather 'prospective', waiting in front of the sadhaka's consciousness, still hidden in his future. Psychologically interpreted, this means that these weaknesses and attachments have struck deep roots into the recesses of the sadhaka's consciousness, corrupting it from there with their noxious miasma. It is well-nigh impossible for the sadhaka to make a prematurely planned frontal assault on these weaknesses and subdue them. Such an ill-advised attempt is fraught with very serious risks which have proved disastrous in the case of many a sadhaka.

Now, in the course of his advancement on the path of sadhana, being faced with any event or situation, whenever the sadhaka becomes aware of any weakness or failing in his psychological reaction, or whenever he feels himself to be propelled by an evil impulse, the first thing the sadhaka has to do is to find out, in the light of his calm and detached and dispassionate discrimination, to which of the three categories this presently arrived impulse or weakness belongs. For the method of its eradication will vary depending on the discovery of its class. We now proceed to indicate, albeit in brief, the right attitudes a sadhaka should adopt when faced with any obstacle belonging to any of the three categories.

Let us begin our discussion with the 'anachronistic' weaknesses. In reality, they pertain to the outer domain of the consciousness. That these weaknesses and impulses are basically evil and are therefore to be rejected, is already well known to the central part of the consciousness of the sadhaka. And it is not limited to theoretical knowledge alone: a great part of the sadhaka's working consciousness has been freed from the fascination and attachment that it previously felt towards the impulse or weakness in question. That it is still there to harass the sadhaka at times is because of some momentum of past habits and a lax indulgence on the part of the sadhaka due to an unhealthy attitude of *laissez-aller*. But it goes without saying that such laxity and such a mood of *laissez-aller* are totally incompatible with a sincere pursuit of sadhana. Hence the right attitude for a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga, each time he is faced with an 'anachronistic' weakness and impulse, should be:

"I shall not give the slightest indulgence to any of these weaknesses even for a moment, even for once; I must nip them in the bud as soon as they appear. I must be a loyal child of the Divine

Mother; I must develop in me the proper psychological disposition which will automatically incline me to become a joyous and faithful collaborator of the Mother's work in me. Do I not claim that I love the Divine? Then, does not this love demand that I eradicate from my consciousness every trace of these avoidable 'anachronistic' weaknesses and attachments of the past?"

We have to note here a very important point in connection with these 'anachronistic' weaknesses of the past. With the evolutionary growth of the consciousness of the sadhaka, the Divine arms him progressively with the necessary strength of rejection so that he can successfully fight against and throw away these no-more-needed impediments. Hence the sadhaka cannot rightfully offer any alibi of helplessness vis-à-vis these obstacles of the past. For the real fact is that he feels helpless because he wants to remain helpless. Otherwise he is quite capable of rejecting these 'anachronistic' obstacles.

Also, he should not unduly fear any possible risk of suppression attendant on this effort at rejection. For here there is no question of any forceful pushing down of the wrong impulse below the threshold of awareness; the process of rejection here is almost as simple as that of flipping a particle of dust off one's coat.

So the procedure of tackling any of these 'anachronistic' weaknesses or impulses or attachments is:

- (i) to nip it at its very moment of sprouting;
- (ii) never to brood on it;
- (iii) to take as little notice of it as possible; and
- (iv) even if you happen to think of it, to remain indifferent and unconcerned.

If the sadhaka follows these four principles in the right manner, he will find that these weaknesses of the past are becoming for all practical purpose non-existent for him.

We now come to the second category of obstacles, the category of obstacles and difficulties 'at hand'. The signs and symptoms of these weaknesses and impulses are as follows:

They are often appearing before the sadhaka's consciousness, affecting some parts of it, and even overwhelming it for some time. But yet, if the sadhaka tries with some sincerity, he finds that he can keep a major portion of his consciousness free from their baneful influences.

Of course, there is still some conflict, for the sadhaka is not yet integrated in his consciousness, he is still a divided being. As a result some parts of his functional personality go to the side of the enemy camp and invidiously attempt to justify the manifestation of these weaknesses. As a result there is at times much doubt and confusion and vacillation in the sadhaka's consciousness. Yet, let us repeat, a reasonably sincere effort at leading a spiritual life makes the sadhaka immediately convinced of the basic undesirability of the impulses in question, and this has this agreeable result that a necessary gap is created separating the impulse to act or react from its actual execution in action. The resolve not to manifest it in action, although the impulse is raging there in the heart of the sadhaka, becomes strong and effective and the situation is

saved.

Such being the situation with the difficulties of the second category, what should be the right attitude of a sadhaka when he is face to face with a weakness of this class? This attitude can be resolved into a few essential elements which are as follows:

(i) to apply one's awakened will-power constantly to the task of resisting the impulsion leading to its ultimate rejection;

(ii) never to rationalise or legitimise the appearance of the weakness in question but rather to withdraw all inner consent from its manifestation;

(iii) never to yield any ground, however limited in extent, even under the strongest prompting of the impulsion; for this impulsion is often liable to tempt the sadhaka with the prospect of some immediately available pleasure or fulfilment;

(iv) always to act as a heroic warrior against the dark tendencies on behalf of the upward-oriented forces of light.

(v) Along with these rather negative personal efforts at rejection, the sadhaka has to turn immediately to the Divine and his Shakti and pray fervently and constantly that these weaknesses and impulses of his nature be vanquished and removed.

Now this combined operation of a sincere effort at rejection on the sadhaka's part and the Divine Mother's intervention as a response to his earnest prayer will, sooner or later, weaken the intensity of the wrong impulse and reduce its injurious influence on the sadhaka's consciousness. The weakness itself will lose by and by all its insistent urge and fall behind to be turned into an innocuous 'anachronistic' obstacle of the past.

While tackling the obstacles and difficulties of the second class, that is to say, those weaknesses and impulses which are confronting him now at the present station of his consciousness, the sadhaka should note a few occult facts concerning the operation of these weaknesses.

Number one: The sadhaka has not to wage a hard battle against all the possible weaknesses and impulsions of his nature. If he sincerely resists the manifestation of one particular weakness and scores victory over it, many other unknown weaknesses, not yet manifested in the sadhaka's consciousness, get automatically scorched out; they will not sprout in the future as fried seeds do not.

Number two: A successful rejection of one weakness provides the sadhaka with added strength to gain mastery over many others.

Number three: Instead of fighting the weakness, which is expected of him, if the sadhaka indulges in it in a mood of lax inertia, it is not only that this particular weakness will gain in its ferocity and become intractable in future, but the sadhaka will lose much of his fervour and strength in successfully tackling other impulses and weaknesses.

Number four: A sincere and prompt effort on the part of the sadhaka to confront and conquer all his present-day weaknesses as soon as they make their first appearance will make the life of

sadhana full of a joy which is independent of the outer situation in which the sadhaka is placed. Sadhana will then lose its aspect of a hard onerous journey along a thorny stone-strewn road; it will be like a blissful gliding down a gurgling brook.

We come now to the consideration of the deeply hidden potential difficulties of the future. These constitute the third category of our classification. Psychologically speaking, these difficulties comprise all the deep-lying intractable impulses and attachments of the sadhaka, all his irrational fears and worries and complexes, and all the extra-insistent egoistic claims and passions and ambitions. But what are their signs? How to know that they belong to the third category in the case of a particular sadhaka?

Well, they are those weaknesses at whose very first appearance, almost the entire portion of the sadhaka's being gets abnormally disturbed, agitated and churned up. They have struck their roots so deep in the sadhaka's being and these roots have spread themselves over such an extensive portion of his nature that these weaknesses seem to the sadhaka almost as an intrinsic and ineradicable part of his being and not just as an undesirable assault from outside. Hence the sadhaka has the strong feeling that any attempt at their eradication will leave an unbearable void within him.

As a matter of fact, these particular weaknesses and difficulties are like so many icebergs of which ten-elevenths remain submerged and hidden beyond any reach of the sadhaka's perception. As a result he is not as yet at all persuaded of the basic undesirability of these weaknesses. These impulses and attachments have pitched their camps in the subterranean region of the sadhaka's consciousness, and from there they surge up at times to the surface and violently agitate the sadhaka.

The sadhaka is then thrown into a great confusion; he loses for the time being the lucidity of his consciousness; his mind forfeits all impartiality of judgment; and his dissatisfied vital chases him around like a wild boar. In short, at these critical moments the sadhaka falls an easy prey to the destructive fury of a psychological storm.

But why does this adverse situation develop? It is because the sadhaka is not yet an integrated being. A preponderant portion of his consciousness is still deeply infatuated with these surging weaknesses and blindly hankers to fulfil some strong desires through the medium of their manifestation.

Now the question is: What attitude should the sadhaka adopt towards these deeply ingrained impulses and weaknesses which are sure to meet him on the Way, today or tomorrow, with the further development of his consciousness?

Well, the first thing the sadhaka should try to do is to quietly avoid these intractable difficulties as far as practicable and not to permit them any occasion for manifestation. "Let the sleeping dog sleep" should be the principle here. On no account should the sadhaka rush forward, in a state of unpreparedness, to challenge these strong impulses and weaknesses to come forward to an open battle.

For it is most arduous, almost impossible, to gain victory over them by the application of one's unaided personal effort alone. No durable and effective result can be expected in that way.

Not only that; a very serious danger looms before the sadhaka each time he is confronted by one of these vicious weaknesses of the third category. He may be foolishly tempted to suppress by force the outer manifestations of these deep-seated attachments, that too mostly through the agency of a momentary exuberance of the vital or by being spurred to action through the egoistic expectation of receiving some cheap accolades from others as if he is proving himself to be an ideal sadhaka of the Path! But the result of such an enterprise will be simply disastrous for the sadhaka.

For any premature attempt at copying the examples of some great beings of the past, even when one is not psychologically ready for that, even when a major portion of the sadhaka's nature obstinately clings to the attachment, cannot but lead to a sudden explosion, sooner or later, disrupting the balance of the being. The deplorable result of this Sancho Panza-type misadventure will be that further progress of the sadhaka will be halted for the time being or even reversed.

No, the method of successfully tackling these ruthless and hurtful difficulties of the third category has to be somewhat different. There should be no gesture of bravado nor any attempt at suppression and pushing them under the carpet. The sadhana-procedure in these cases should be rather as follows:

(1) To hold the difficulty or weakness or attachment, as the case may be, in front of one's consciousness, without for that matter either getting scared by it or being identified with it;

(2) to go assiduously in search of its root-cause or source;

(3) to try to discover what are the parts of the sadhaka's being and nature which are nurturing a powerful secret fascination for this particular weakness and are so sensitive to it that the slightest beckoning from this weakness throws those parts into serious turmoil;

(4) always to maintain a spirit of sufficient detachment behoving a sadhaka, throughout this persistent effort at self-searching, and never to be depressed or disturbed even if some ugly corners of one's being are exposed or some specially dark elements of one's nature are revealed.

This calm and quiet and detached observation, this illumined spectral analysis of the hidden weakness and attachment will gradually make it float up to the surface as detachable scum and lose all its previous importunate sting. Real knowledge is after all a very effective agent for purification and liberation.

(5) Along with this persistent clairvoyant search for the roots, the sadhaka has to keep alive in his heart a very sincere and ardent aspiration for the eradication of the weakness in question. He has to address his earnest prayer to the Divine Mother that through the active intervention of her Grace these deep-rooted and recondite weaknesses and attachments may give up their malignancy and become quite innocuous in nature so that they can be easily faced and overcome.

Such a prayer and aspiration coupled at the same time with a thorough self-examination referred to above will progressively turn these intractable obstacles first into manageable obstacles of the second class and finally into easily detachable obstacles of the past.

Here ends our elaboration of the sadhana of rejection so very essential for the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga. He has to reject at every step of his Journey all that in his nature resists his spiritual New Birth and continuous progression. It is worth quoting here as a reference list all that the sadhaka has to mercilessly reject. The list is quite long and that is as it should be. For the sadhaka should not ignore any of his weaknesses and imperfections out of inattention and forgetfulness. We have already alluded to this enumeration in the very beginning of this chapter. It will be good if we do it once again. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

"...rejection of the movements of the lower nature — rejection of the mind's ideas, opinions, preferences, habits, constructions, so that the true knowledge may find free room in a silent mind, —

rejection of the vital nature's desires, demands, cravings, sensations, passions, selfishness, pride, arrogance, lust, greed, jealousy, envy, hostility to the Truth, so that the true power and joy may pour from above into a calm, large, strong and consecrated vital being, —

rejection of the physical nature's stupidity, doubt, disbelief, obscurity, obstinacy, pettiness, laziness, unwillingness to change, Tamas, so that the true stability of Light, Power, Ananda may establish itself in a body growing always more divine..." (The Mother, Centenary Edition, p. 7. Paragraphing ours.)

V.

Renunciation in the Integral Yoga

Traditionally speaking, the life of an authentic spiritual person is always conceived of as a life of renunciation. In our times Sri Ramakrishna, the Saint of Dakshineswar, never tired of stressing the importance of *tyāga* or renunciation. Also, the quintessence of Krishna's teaching in the Gita lies in the process of entire renunciation. "Peace comes out of renunciation", '*tyāgāt śāntih*', such is the declaration of the Bhagavad-Gita.

Indeed, it cannot be denied that renunciation is absolutely essential for the building up of a life of sadhana and for the acquisition of any realisation worth the name in the spiritual Path. Sri Ramakrishna referred to this essentiality when he spoke in his simple way: "*Renunciation is necessary. If something is covering a certain other thing, you have to remove the first thing in order to perceive the second thing. How can you expect to attain the latter unless you remove and renounce whatever is covering it?*"

Let us grant, then, without any cavil that for attaining the spiritual Goal we have to renounce 'the other things' that stand on the way. But the question is: What are these 'other things'? The traditional spiritualist will immediately put a counter-question "What not? You have to renounce all, all, everything; renounce, for example, money and prosperity; renounce all enjoyment; renounce all human relationships; renounce all activity; renounce the world; renounce even the thirst for life. Renunciation! Renunciation! Renunciation entire and without reserve!"

Yes, it is a fact that we come across such teachings of uncompromising renunciation in the history of spirituality both in the West and in the East. But it goes without saying that this is not the way of sadhana we follow nor the nature of the Goal we envisage for our spiritual endeavour. Our lifestyle is altogether different. We do not change our secular names like the Sannyasins nor do we dye our clothes in saffron or in any other distinctive colours to signify that we have been following a life of spiritual sadhana. We engage in the normal activities of life and we do not shun the company of the members of the opposite sex. We are prone to quote in this connection Sri Aurobindo's famous dictum: "*All Life is Yoga.*"

But a valid question arises: Are we interpreting Sri Aurobindo's saying in the right way? Can it not be that we are perhaps using Sri Aurobindo's words as a shield of protection in order to indulge behind it in our worldly propensities? For if our activities are in their outer appearance the same as those of an ordinary man of the world, in which way can we claim to be distinct and different as spiritual seekers of the Divine? Surely we would not dare advance the hypothesis that the spirit of renunciation is now outdated in the life of sadhana. An unbridled enjoyment by the senses can never be the trait of anyone living the life of the spirit. And if that is so, we have to be absolutely clear on one point. What is the mutual relation between Renunciation and Enjoyment in our Integral Yoga? What do we mean by enjoyment and possession and what is to us the real connotation of renunciation?

For it should be stated at the very outset that renunciation remains the sine qua non of any type of genuine spiritual life including the spirituality envisaged by the Integral Yoga. There should not be the slightest doubt about it. Sri Aurobindo has made this point absolutely unambiguous in the following words:

“...by renunciation we seize upon the falsehoods, pluck up their roots and cast them out of our way so that they shall no longer hamper by their persistence, their resistance or their recurrence the happy and harmonious growth of our divine living. Renunciation is an indispensable instrument of our perfection.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 311)

So, admitting fully that renunciation is absolutely essential even in the pursuit of the Integral Yoga, we have to examine closely what we mean by renunciation, what are the things we have to renounce in our sadhana, and how to effectuate this renunciation. We must also be very clear in our mind as regards the attitude we as sadhakas should adopt towards life in the world in general, towards riches and prosperity, human relationships, conduct of activities, enjoyment of objects, and such other important matters.

But even before we attempt any discussion of these issues, we have first to know why, for what compelling reasons, traditional ascetic spirituality prescribes outer renunciation to the sadhakas of the spiritual Path. Surely it cannot be that the old Yogis have been obsessed with some irrational prejudices. There must have been some sound reasons behind their uncompromising attitude.

And once we come to know these reasons, we shall be in a position to understand fully the differences in the goals set before themselves by the traditional Yogas and the Yoga of Integral Transformation propounded by Sri Aurobindo. Not only that, we shall comprehend at the same time the nature of the renunciation that is called for in our Yoga. For, renunciation we must have; only, its nature will be different from that of the renunciation prescribed by ascetic spirituality.

Spiritual Perception of the Ascetic: According to the ascetic a sadhaka's renunciation has perforce to be entire, absolute, and covering both the fields outer and inner. At the end he has to renounce life in the world, even the very world-consciousness itself. And from the point of view of practice this renunciation on the part of the aspirant should take the form of self-denial, inhibition of pleasure and the rejection of the objects of enjoyment. But why so? Why this stern rejection?

The reasons are many and are of different orders. There are first, reasons arising out of a very genuine spiritual realisation; there are at the same time metaphysical reasons, psychological reasons, pragmatic reasons, even reasons issuing forth from what Krishna terms in the Gita as *ksudram hrdaya-daurbalyam*, 'petty weakness of the heart'. One by one we shall touch upon these various reasons contributory to the spirit of entire renunciation of life and the world.

The deepest and the highest reason prompting the way of renunciation is based on the concrete experience spiritual seekers have when they follow a particular line of spiritual sadhana. For, it is not merely a philosophical hypothesis or the idle speculation of an imaginative heart but a very compelling and utterly convincing spiritual experience that, once the sadhaka, escaping from the prison of his ego-bound consciousness, enters the cosmic consciousness, and then proceeding further, transcends that cosmic consciousness too, he enters a status which is timeless, spaceless and changeless. If the realised soul, standing at the junction of the cosmic consciousness and the Transcendence, looks back upon the world he has transcended, this world existence appears to his liberated consciousness as something utterly devoid of any reality.

And if this experience of unreality is in fact a just transcription of the real state of things, why should the sadhaka be interested at all in anything pertaining to the world when this world itself is nothing but a dream-like figure, a mirage or a hallucination? ‘Vanity of vanities, all is a vanity.’

And even if we grant, for the sake of argument, that the world existence has some sort of lesser reality and offers us some scope of happy enjoyment, why should the sadhaka be interested in that, once he has tasted the absolute bliss and peace of the Transcendent? For he knows by experience that even the highest and the intensest worldly pleasure stands no comparison with Brahmananda, the Bliss of Brahman. Any enjoyment of worldly objects, whatever they may be or of whatever high order, cannot but be to the spiritual man absolutely hollow and utterly tasteless.

There is more to say in support of the ascetic spirituality and its message of outer renunciation. For even if the world existence is accepted as real, is it not a fact that human life and nature, as they are now, cannot be an object of attraction to any sane person? First of all, life in the world is full of pain and sorrow and unhappiness, *samsāra eva duḥkhānām sīmānta* (Yogavasistha, V.9.52). Secondly, nothing is permanent here, everything is a passing show; transitoriness is its very character, *yascedam drśyate kincit tat sarvam asthiram* (Ibid., 1.28.1). And life of man in the world? — is that anything more than the momentary flash of a lightning? Lastly, everything in life and in the world, always and everywhere, is tainted with a thousand defects and imperfections.

There is more in the world to disconcert a spiritual seeker. For if any heroic soul, accepting the transitoriness of man’s life, tries all the same to change this human life into something better and nobler, he finds to his utter consternation that human nature is basically incorrigible: it may admit of some cosmetic whitewashing but will never shed its unholy spots. We may recall in this connection the famous simile given by Vivekananda to carry home the point of impossibility of the transformation of human nature. It was the simile of a dog’s tail: alas, straighten it as much as you like, but release it — and the moment after, the wretched thing becomes curled again! Citing his own personal case the great Vedantin wrote towards the end of his earthly life: “*Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my purity was fear, behind my guidance thirst for power!*” (Complete Works, Vol. VI, p. 424)

If such is the case with a great spiritual giant like Swami Vivekananda, the detractors may declare: “Is it not vain to engage in any sadhana of transformation? Knowing that it is a task beyond all possibility of realisation here upon earth in an embodied existence, is it not the right course for a spiritual seeker to renounce the world and all it contains, and prepare instead for a post-mortem supraphysical existence or, better still, for the Transcendence? Where, then, is the justification for any Integral Yoga of Transformation?”

The ascetic spirituality’s plea goes still further. It is opposed to any life of dynamism on the part of the spiritual seeker. For, according to its analysis, all action, however high, noble and impersonal it may be in appearance, hides behind it in a subtle and elusive form the inevitable play of ego, desire and the triple modes of the lower nature, *aparā Prakriti*. And so long as ego and desire are not eradicated, how can a veritable spiritual consciousness be established? For are they not diametrically antithetical in nature? It follows, then, that a sadhaka who would aspire to have spiritual realisation worth the name must shun action as far as it is compatible with the bare maintenance of embodied life.

These then are some of the principal reasons which have induced the spokespersons of ascetic spirituality to advise all seekers of the Spirit to take to the path of utter renunciation including its outer application. There are, of course, many other ancillary and secondary factors which have led to the reinforcement of the spirit of renunciation in man. Sri Aurobindo has referred to these factors at many places in course of his extensive writings. There is a passage in his *Synthesis of Yoga* which groups together at one place all these reasons and factors in their descending order. What follows below is an abridged version of that passage:

“There is first the profounder cause of the radical opposition between the sullied and imperfect nature of life in the world as it now is in the present stage of our human evolution and the nature of spiritual living... A second cause is the soul’s hunger for personal salvation, for escape into some farther or farthest height of unalloyed bliss and peace... or else it is its unwillingness to return from the ecstasy of the divine embrace into the lower field of work and service. But there are other slighter causes incidental to spiritual experience, — strong feeling and practical proof of the great difficulty... of combining the life of works and action with spiritual peace and the life of realisation... Lowest causes of all are the weakness that shrinks from the struggle, the disgust and disappointment of the soul baffled by the great cosmic labour, the selfishness that cares not what becomes of those left behind us so long as we personally can be free from the monstrous ever-circling wheel of death and rebirth...” (pp. 311-12)

Elsewhere, in his book *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo mentions that once the head and mind and soul of a seeker is overpowered by (i) spiritual enthusiasm, (ii) by the ardour of aspiration, (iii) by the philosophic aloofness, (iv) by the eagerness of will, or (v) by a sick disgust in the vital being discouraged by the difficulties or disappointed by the unexpected results of life, the sadhaka may be led to experience *“a sense of the entire vanity and unreality of all else than this remote Supreme, the vanity of human life, the unreality of cosmic existence, the bitter ugliness and cruelty of earth, the insufficiency of heaven, the aimlessness of the repetition of births in the body.”* (p. 675)

The spirit and practice of utter renunciation is but a small step from this sense of vanity and uselessness. But we who follow the path of the Integral Yoga cannot accept this pessimistic view of the world nor for that matter can we approve of this way of utter outer renunciation as the only possible path of spiritual fulfilment. We hold a different view of the world existence, of life in the world, and of the destiny of human birth.

Yes, we admit that some sort of renunciation is necessary on the part of the sadhaka in order to come out of his present blind subservience to the dictates of the lower nature. But we cannot admit that renunciation has to go so far as to cancel out the very world consciousness, life and Nature. If someone suffers from a headache, he has to seek some remedy for its cure; up to that point it is all right. But what sort of strange advice is that which prescribes decapitation as a remedial measure? We are afflicted with the sense of sorrow and suffering and it is also a fact that most men turn to the spiritual path in order to be freed from this consciousness of pain and be admitted into the consciousness of eternal bliss. But for that we cannot subscribe to that destructive solution which recommends the annihilation of the world-consciousness itself as a means of attainment of the goals. No doubt that we seek to disentangle the knots of life but we would not accept the short-cut procedure of cutting the Gordian knot.

If somebody asks us: “But why not? If this is the only solution to the riddle, why should we shun it? Will it not prove that we are still caught in the meshes of the delusion of Ignorance?”

If the voice of ascetic spirituality asks us this question, what answer should we or can we give it? A mere assertion of “We don’t want it, we don’t like it”, will not serve the purpose. We have to offer spiritual justification for our attitude. And for that we have to explain our characteristic philosophical positions vis-à-vis the world, Nature and human life.

Spiritual Perception of the Integral Yoga: The Yoga-Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo starts from the basic spiritual position that there is an absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (*Sachchid-ananda*) beyond all Time and Space and outside of all manifested relativities. To know That and to be united with That is the primary aim of all spiritual sadhana. But what is important to note in this connection is that this absolute Existence-Consciousness is not utterly and absolutely a Transcendent Reality; it is no doubt beyond Time and Space but it is at the same time immanent in world-existence and governing and guiding the manifestation as the Lord of cosmos, *Viśveśvara*.

The question, then, is: “Is there any goal towards which this divine guidance is directed? Yes, the goal is to manifest all the divine Sachchidananda in the bosom of Time and Space, in earthly embodiments, here is the material world. The evolutionary movement that we see unfolding upon earth is the appointed means for that progressive manifestation of the immortal divine life in the field of matter-bound mortality. And man the mental being has appeared at a crucial turning-point of that evolutionary ascension. For, this man, the transitional being, is destined to become the vehicle of the establishment and manifestation of divine life upon earth. And for that, the Transcendent-Universal Lord of existence has come down into the heart of every human being to take His permanent position there as the inner Controller, *Antaryāmī*. He is guiding man from there towards his future destiny, the destiny of life divine in the frame of earthly life.

So we see that the world-existence is not something unreal, nor is it of the nature of a prison or mad-house in which to detain the human soul. Human life too is not without profound significance nor are human activities of the nature of a delirium of high fever. It is true that our present nature is obscure and impure but this obscurity and this impurity do not constitute the unalterable fundamental essence of Nature. The world, the life, and the Nature, each of them has a divine counterpart; each of them possesses an as-yet-unrealised supernal form and functioning. To bring that out into overt manifestation through the process of progressive evolution is the whole labour of earthly Nature. And man’s actions as at present are not the ignorant agitations of a beguiled soul; they are the tentative and awkward preparatory steps to the ultimate undistorted expression of the divine Will in the world. Will it then be right to consider the first crawl of a baby to be its only and ultimate permanent destiny?

By this time, let us hope, it has been made sufficiently clear that according to the Vision of the Integral Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, the earthly existence or the field of life here is not just describing a futile circular movement repeating the same imperfections ad infinitum. It is an ascending spiral movement that earthly Nature is following without any interruption. So, it is not right to assert that human life has been flawed and imperfect in the past, it is so at present, and it will always be so even in the future, and there cannot be any escape from this intrinsic law of existence. As a matter of fact, we have, so to say, reached the middle stage of the evolutionary movement. The journey has begun from the absolute nescience of Matter and, passing through the vicissitudes of an enormously complex bio-psychical evolution, has reached at last the state and status of man the mental being.

But mind is not the last possible term of this evolutionary progression. It is too limited and imperfect a consciousness to be considered that. And that explains why there is still so much obscurity and ignorance, sorrow and suffering, in human life. But the evolution has not stopped; it is marching inexorably towards its destined goal, to the full emergence of the plenary consciousness of Sachchidananda with all its attendant glorious results. To establish Life Divine upon earth itself, such is the secret urge and the ultimate consummation of the movement of evolution.

Renunciation in the Integral Yoga: Now, to collaborate actively with the ascending evolutionary movement and prepare for the divine life upon earth is the life-goal set before the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga. So we are not entitled to follow the escapist tendency and step back from the world-process by declaring with the traditional ascetics that *sarvam dukkham vivekinah*, that is, everything in life is an occasion of suffering for those who have their eyes opened. We want to stay in the world and live the human life but only with the aim of transforming them into their divine forms.

But this is easier said than done. The task is rendered immensely difficult because of the inveterate resistance and the blind downward pull exercised by our unregenerate present lower nature. If we would like to succeed in this spiritual adventurous endeavour, we have to be ready to pay the requisite price for that. And in the language of sadhana that price is called *Vairāgya* and *Tyāga*, ‘Dispassion and Renunciation’. For it is an axiomatic truth that unless and until we remove the outer covering, we cannot hope to discover the jewel inside; unless we take away the ugly-looking veil, we cannot feast our eyes and heart on the celestial beauty that lies hidden behind. If we would like to have plenitude within, we have to agree to be denuded in the outer self. In the Mother’s luminous words, “*faut savoir tout perdre pour tout gagner*” — “*You must know how to lose all in order to gain all.*”

Yes, lose we must everything but let us hasten to add that our renunciation has to be principally an inner one in its nature and not so much outer as in the case of the ascetics. We must renounce and renounce completely all our egoistic cravings and desires but not necessarily outer objects. For, a true and effective renunciation is always a renunciation in consciousness; a mere external renunciation cannot deliver the goods. Spiritually speaking, renunciation is equivalent to detachment and desirelessness. If that is secured, an outer renunciation becomes otiose; and if that is not acquired, no amount of external renunciation will help the sadhaka to take even a single step on the path of advancement of the spiritual consciousness.

We have to renounce all in order to gain All: that is the ultimate verdict of all the Yogis and mystics through all the ages. In this classic statement the second ‘All’ signifies the Divine, for one of his designations is *Sarva*, the All. But what about the first ‘all’? This ‘all’ cannot but mean *Aham*, the Ego. In fact, this ego-sense and its two progenies *Vāsanā* and *Āsakti*, ‘Desire’ and ‘Attachment’, make up by themselves the whole of our actual ignorant unspiritual consciousness of division, dualities and mortality. Ego renounced, *sarva* or all is renounced; and if the ego-sense is retained, all other renunciations amount to nothing, and one cannot hope to attain to the ‘All’, *Sarva*. The sage Vasishtha has made this point abundantly clear through the narration of two interesting stories. These stories occur in his famous Vedantic treatise, *Yoga-Vasishtha-Maharamayanam*. We give below the gist of one of the two stories; readers will surely appreciate it.

Kacha, the son of Brihaspati the preceptor of the gods, had adopted the procedure of external

renunciation in order to attain to the supreme peace. He had left everything behind, sought shelter in the solitude of a deep forest, and dwelt there all alone. Eight years rolled by but nothing substantial he could gain. Spiritual peace and self-knowledge eluded his grasp altogether. He was very much worried. Accidentally, one day Brihaspati entered that forest and met his son Kacha in that confounded state. Kacha asked his father: “I have renounced everything; at the end I have given up even the stick and the rag the only permissible possessions of a Sannyasi. But to what end, father? I have failed to reach *svapade viśrānti*, ‘the absolute repose of spiritual self-knowledge’. Tell me what I should do now.”

The wise Brihaspati then addressed his son and told him: “My son, you claim to have made *sarvasva-tyāga*, ‘the renunciation of all your possessions’. But what you have done so far is not what is called *sarva-tyāga*. Now proceed to renounce ‘all’ and you will surely attain to your goal. You have been following a wrong track from the very beginning. Outer renunciation can never lead to *sarva-tyāga*, ‘the renunciation of all’, so highly prized by the great Yogis.”

Here commences the teaching of the Sage Vasishtha concerning the true content and significance of spiritual renunciation. The essence of this teaching is:

True renunciation is always a renunciation in consciousness, a relinquishment in the heart of the seeker. What gain can one achieve if he misses this essential point and concentrates instead on the giving up of outward things? An external renunciation, even if it is entire, cannot be equated with *sarvatyāga*, ‘the renunciation of all’. Hence, a mere relinquishment of the house or the property or even of the body cannot procure to the aspirant any spiritual benefit worth the name.

On the other hand, a man’s *citta* or heart is the commander of the foot-soldiers called the *indriyas* or the ‘senses’. If one manages to conquer this *citta*, one gets victory over all the five senses; one need not in that case struggle separately with the turbulent senses. For analogy, we may take the case of someone who would like to avoid thorn-pricks on his soles. To serve his purpose he need not cover the whole of the earth with leather; it is enough to cover his two feet with leatherware.

But the question is: What is exactly meant by *citta-jaya*, ‘the conquest of the heart’? The answer is: The sadhaka has to become *utkrānta-vāsanāh*; that is to say, he has to renounce all his desires. After that, he has to eradicate the *aham-bhava* or ego-sense which constitutes the essence of *Chitta*. That will amount to the renunciation of ‘all’, *sarva-tyāga*. Without achieving this inner renunciation, even if a sadhaka renounces everything external but somehow retains a shred of *aham* or ego-sense, his renunciation falls short of being entire or genuine.

And to cap it all a true integral renunciation is effected only when the spiritual seeker surrenders all he is and all he has to Him who is the ‘All’ and from whom all has issued. (Yogavasishtha, VIA.93.30)

In order to make unambiguously clear the essence of Sri Aurobindo’s and Mother’s teaching as regards the place and nature of renunciation in the Integral Yoga, we give below an abridged and adapted version of what Sri Aurobindo has written on pages 314-19 of his *Synthesis of Yoga*:

Renunciation must be for us merely an instrument and not an object; nor can it be the only or the chief instrument since our object is the fulfilment of the Divine in the human being, a positive aim which cannot be reached by negative means. The negative means can only be for the

removal of that which stands in the way of the positive fulfilment. It must be a renunciation, a complete renunciation of all that is other than and opposed to the divine self-fulfilment and a progressive renunciation of all that is a lesser or only a partial achievement.

Again our renunciation must obviously be an inward renunciation; especially and above all, a renunciation of attachment and the craving of desire in the senses and the heart, of self-will in the thought and action, and of egoism in the centre of consciousness. For these things are the three knots by which we are bound to our lower nature and if we can renounce these utterly there is nothing else that can bind us.

Therefore attachment and desire must be utterly cast out; there is nothing in the world to which we must be attached, not wealth nor poverty, nor joy nor suffering, nor life nor death, nor greatness nor littleness, nor vice nor virtue, nor friend, nor wife, nor children, nor country, nor our work and mission.

And this does not mean that there is nothing at all that we shall love, nothing in which we shall take delight; for attachment is egoism in love and not love itself. A universal love we must have, calm and yet eternally intense beyond the brief vehemence of the most violent passion.

Self-will in thought and action has to be quite renounced. This self-will means an egoism in the mind which attaches itself to its preferences, its habits, its past or present formations of thought and view and will.

But the centre of all is egoism and this we must pursue into every covert and disguise and drag it out and slay it; for its disguises are endless and it will cling to every possible self-concealment.

The criteria of renunciation is within. It is to have the soul free from craving and attachment, but free from the attachment to inaction as well as from the egoistic impulse to action, free from attachment to the forms of virtue as well as from the attraction to sin. It is to be rid of "I-ness" and "My-ness" so as to live in the one Self and act in the one Self.

It will thus be seen that the scope we give to the idea of renunciation is different from the meaning currently attached to it. The rejection of the object ceases to be necessary when the object can no longer ensnare us because what the soul enjoys is no longer the object as an object but the Divine which it expresses. The inhibition of pleasure is no longer needed when the soul no longer seeks pleasure but possesses the delight of the Divine in all things equally without the need of a personal or physical possession of the thing itself; self-denial loses its field when the soul no longer claims anything, but obeys consciously the will of the one Self in all beings. It is then that we are freed from the Law and released into the liberty of the Spirit.

Let us close this essay on Renunciation with a significant passage from the Mother's *Commentary on Sri Aurobindo's Thoughts and Aphorisms*:

"No, the solution is to act only under the divine impulsion, to speak only under the divine impulsion, to eat only under the divine impulsion. That is the difficult thing, because naturally, you immediately confuse the divine impulsion with your personal impulses.

"I suppose this was the idea of all the apostles of renunciation: to eliminate everything coming

from outside or from below so that if something from above should manifest one would be in a condition to receive it... From the individual point of view, it is possible; but then one must keep intact the aspiration to receive the true impulsion — not the aspiration for ‘complete liberation’, but the aspiration for active identification with the Supreme, that is to say, to will only what He wills, to do only what He wants: to exist by and in Him alone...

“All these things are means, stages, steps, but... true freedom is to be free of everything — including means.” (MCW, Vol. 10, pp. 197-98)

VI.

On Opening and Receptivity

When we look around or even study the spiritual history of mankind, we often find that some aspirants are progressing very fast in their sadhana while some others are registering a rather slow progress or, what is worse, even stagnating on the Path, although, apparently, all of them have the equal privilege of being close to the Divine and receiving his Grace. On noting this discrepancy we often feel tempted to impute a charge of partiality on the all-powerful Divine. We wonder why the Divine Shakti cannot make us progress equally when outwardly all of us fulfil the same conditions and religiously adhere to the same practices.

But there is no use throwing the blame on the Divine and charging him with the vice of bias and partiality as if he suffers from the same imperfections as ordinary human beings. No, the blame and responsibility lie entirely with us, with the state of our consciousness. Even if the Divine wants to give us more, he cannot do so because we are not sufficiently open to his action nor are we adequately receptive to his gifts. Sri Aurobindo once wrote to one of his close disciples:

“The fundamental principle and the whole method of the Integral Yoga is to open wide the consciousness to the divine Influence. Only those sadhakas who can sufficiently open themselves to the divine Power and Action and receive them in themselves, can cherish a hope for the ultimate realisation, not others.”

Such being the capital importance of the allied virtues of opening and receptivity in the matter of building up a life of sadhana and spiritual fulfilment we have to pay a great attention to the acquisition of these twin aptitudes. For it is a fact that the divine Mother has been incessantly pouring on every sincere sadhaka of the Path her Love and Power and Knowledge and Grace but that is coming to nought because most of us have kept completely closed all the doors and windows of our consciousness with the notice hung up: “No entrance, please.”

Our second disability is that the capacity of our reception is very much limited. We vainly hope to hold in our one-litre vessel the infinite downpour of the Divine’s gifts.

The third failing we suffer from is that, even if we receive at times some knowledge, power, love and grace of the Divine, a major part of it we spill out from the *ādhāra*, the vessel of our consciousness: our retentive power is almost next to nothing.

The net result is that days and months and years pass by in our life without our gaining any spiritual benefit worth the name. For it is only the opening and receptivity which can make us ready to gather the treasures of spiritual experiences and realisations. Without these two prerequisites sufficiently developed, all our external efforts at “doing sadhana” will produce a very meagre result. On the other hand, if we can become sufficiently open and receptive in our inner consciousness, our sadhana cannot but proceed in an unimpeded way, garnering more and more of spiritual wealth. Two different sadhakas may have the same intensity of seeking but there may occur a gulf of difference between their attainments, simply because of the presence or absence of this essential aptitude of opening and receptivity.

A sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should never forget that as soon as he takes to the path of sadhana with even a moderate sincerity of purpose, he becomes immediately enveloped with an

atmosphere of active divine Grace which presses upon his consciousness with all the bounty of its divine attributes. He can then so easily imbibe this light, and love and power and what not almost at every step, with each inhalation, most spontaneously, without any conscious effort, if only he maintains himself in a state of constant openness and receptivity. But most of the sadhakas fail to do so. And therein lies the avoidable tragedy in many sadhakas' lives.

Yet it is not a fact that we do not know how to open ourselves or how to receive. For, although we do not open ourselves to the divine Influence, we keep ourselves all the time wide open to the intrusion and infiltration of all sorts of unspiritual adverse forces: we receive with facility and contentment all that hampers our progress in sadhana. This is the second tragedy striking down many sadhakas.

In order to avoid this double tragedy, every sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to be constantly vigilant to cancel on the one hand any opening to the action of the wrong forces, and on the other to create a perfect unobstructed opening to all that is helpful to the sadhana.

About the barring of the first type of opening, we have sufficiently spoken in our chapter on rejection. And, how to develop in full the opening to the divine Influence will be the subject-matter of the present one.

Let us emphasise once again that without this unhindered opening to the spiritual forces any hope of advancing sufficiently in sadhana will prove futile and illusory. As Sri Aurobindo has reminded us:

“The aim of the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga is not to become a great Yogi or Sannyasi or Tapasvi but to bring about a total divine transformation of his life and consciousness. And this can be done only with the aid of a divine Power which is infinitely more potent and effective than the sadhaka's puny personal efforts. It is the height of folly and absurdity to think that one can attain to the realisation of the Integral Yoga through one's unassisted power of Tapasya: no human being can do that.”

Instead, what the sadhaka has to do is to open himself integrally to the Divine Mother's Shakti and offer himself to the Divine without the slightest reserve or hesitation with the simple candour of an innocent child.

If one can effectively do that he will find that it is the Divine Mother herself who will start working in the sadhaka's *adhara*: all that is needed at each step of the Path either for the sadhana or for the *siddhi* will then be brought about by the Divine himself. And this is what Sri Aurobindo has pointed out as the central truth, the supreme secret, of the sadhana of transformation. *“By remaining psychically open to the Mother, all that is necessary for work or Sadhana develops progressively, that is one of the chief secrets, the central secret of the Sadhana.”* (Sri Aurobindo, *On the Mother*, p. 121)

We have by now understood the greatness and the essentiality of the sadhaka's openness to the Divine Action. But what is actually meant by this openness of consciousness? How should a sadhaka know that he is in a state of opening? A few short extracts from Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings will make the position clear:

(1) *“Openness is that state of consciousness, free and unresisting, in which the divine Light and*

Power can work in the sadhaka without encountering any obstruction.” (The Mother)

(2) Openness to the Divine *“is a state in which the sadhaka is conscious of the Divine Force working in him or of its results at least and does not obstruct its descent or its action by his own mental activities, vital restlessness or physical obscurity and inertia.” (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, p. 603)*

(3) *“Openness is a state of consciousness which keeps it turned to the Mother, free from other movements expecting and able to receive what may come from the Divine.” (Ibid., p. 604)*

(4) *“Openness is the will to receive and to utilise for progress the force and influence; the constant aspiration to remain in touch with the Consciousness; the faith that the force and consciousness are always with you, around you, inside you and that you have only to let nothing stand in the way of your receiving them.” (The Mother, Words of the Mother, MCW Vol. 14, p. 151)*

So this is ‘opening’ and in our sadhana of the Integral Yoga this opening has to be effected along two different directions: an opening inward and an opening upward. In Sri Aurobindo’s words, *“an opening inwards of the inner mind, vital, physical to the inmost part of us, the psychic, and an opening upwards to what is above the mind.”*

The necessity of this double opening can be easily understood if we remember that the superficial outward-looking life and existence that we normally function with is not our true real being. *“The real self is not anywhere on the surface but deep within and far above.” (Sri Aurobindo)*

It becomes then necessary that the sadhaka of our Path should open himself more and more inward till he establishes a direct contact with his psychic being; he has to, at the same time, open himself more and more upward till he discovers his highest spiritual Self.

What the sadhaka has to do next is to make the roads of communication with the psychic and the Self free from all clogging and impediments.

The third step the sadhaka has then to take is to seriously and persistently invoke the psychic and the Self so that they can respectively emerge and come to the front, and descend from above into the *ādhāra* of the sadhaka, and be dynamically operative there to transform it.

Well, such is the double opening the aspirant has to make. But are there any signs and symptoms by which the sadhaka can discern that his consciousness has been progressively opening day by day, or, on the contrary, it is more and more shutting up?

Yes, there are clear signs both positive and negative. About the negative signs, Sri Aurobindo has indicated:

“If it is found that the mind of the sadhaka remains shut up in its own ideas and preferences and because of that acts as an obstacle to the action of the divine Shakti in its ādhāra;

“if it is found that the vital being of the sadhaka is whirling in the vortex of its greeds and desires;

“if it is found that the physical being of the sadhaka has mortgaged itself to the inert movements and habits that normally activate it, and because of that is unwilling to admit within itself any action of the divine Light and Force;

“then understand that the sadhaka has not yet been able to be open.” (Adapted.)

A few other baneful consequences of the lack of opening on the sadhaka's part are: restlessness; depression; loss of energy; mood of constant whining; dryness in life; diminution of faith and confidence; cynicism about any future fulfilment; etc. If any of these defects is chronically found in any sadhaka, he should pay heed and take immediate steps to remedy the situation.

Now, let us consider some of the positive signs of opening. Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have spoken about them. First let us listen to what Sri Aurobindo has to say about the matter:

“It can be easily understood whether any sadhaka has been able to open himself or not. If it is found that he is becoming day by day aware of the nearness of the Divine Mother; or that he is having some particular experience of the action of the Mother in him; or that he is having some concrete touches, however meagre, of divine calmness, equality, light, bliss, knowledge, power and wideness; then it can be assumed that the necessary opening has been growing in the sadhaka. It is the extent and intensity of these experiences which will indicate how open the sadhaka has been.”

The Mother also has given a beautiful description of the state of openness on the sadhaka's part. Here is a paraphrase of what she said:

“When you will find that everything around you has been tinged with a superbly beautiful colour; when you will feel that every moment and every experience of your life, happy or unhappy, is bringing a necessary lesson for your growth; when you will have the sensation that all load has been taken off your consciousness and you are flying in the blue expanse of the heavens of progress; when you will see that you are thrilling with a sense of sane optimism strong and joyous; above all when you will have the distinct experience that a divine consciousness is enveloping you always and everywhere and under all circumstances; then you can be sure that you have been open.”

But no sadhaka can expect to attain to such a state of perfect opening in the early period of his spiritual career. If he looks within himself with an observant eye, he will find there bristling about hundreds of serious defects and imperfections. With all these present is it not obvious that openness to the divine action is a far cry for him?

It may be a far cry; but for that the sadhaka should not get disheartened or give up all hope for a total opening. ‘Rome was not built in a day’ and this ideal perfect openness too has to be acquired by and by through a progressive development of sadhana.

Not only that. It may so happen that one part of the sadhaka's being and consciousness is already quite open to the higher forces but some other part has continued to remain closed up and resistant. What to do in such a situation? Here is Sri Aurobindo's advice to the sadhaka:

“The principle of total opening has to be accepted from the beginning. But in practice there must be a central opening in each part and a dominant aspiration and will in each part (not in

the mind alone) to admit only the Mother's workings: the rest will then be progressively done."

Sri Aurobindo has said also that if a sadhaka cannot open himself immediately, he should at least keep up this constant aspiration that this opening be progressively effected. For if the sadhaka's aspiration is sincere, and if at the same time he is earnest in his sadhana of rejection of all that is in him opposed to this opening, then it is absolutely true that perfect opening is bound to come sooner or later. There is no doubt about it.

Now we come to the central issue of the present chapter. Is there any specific sadhana procedure by following which a sadhaka initially deficient in his openness can hope to arrive at a state of full opening? What are the conditions conducive to the building up of openness and what conditions are inimical to it?

Well, the principal obstacles to opening are the following moods and attitudes: (1) vanity and self-satisfaction; (2) doubts and hesitations; (3) complaining attitude; (4) deliberate gap between profession and practice; (5) insistent clamour of the mind's ideas and opinions and of the vital's desires and preferences; above all, the tendency of the ego-sense to occupy the central and front place in everything and dictate terms from there.

On the other hand, the particular attitudes that are helpful to the process of opening are: (1) an unvacillating and unquenchable upward aspiration; (2) an ambience of calm and quiet in one's consciousness not liable to be easily disturbed; (3) widening of the consciousness; (4) an uncompromising rejection of all that is in oneself opposed to the Divine and divine life; (5) an unshakable faith and trust in the Power and Love of the Divine Mother; (6) to keep the Divine always in one's thought under all situations of life; (7) an attitude of glad enthusiasm free from all excitement; (8) a spirit of self-surrender to the Divine, and its effective application in the form of a constant self-consecration to his Shakti; (9) a perfect humility in the spiritual sense of the term.

Let us discuss a little more in detail three or four of these beneficial attitudes. On the top of the list comes the virtue of genuine humility.

Every sadhaka should be able to address the Divine in the following way and affirm in all sincerity: "O Lord, without Thee I am nothing, I know nothing, and I can do nothing." This sort of humble feeling of self-insufficiency is very helpful for the openness of consciousness. To remain always acutely conscious of the great gulf between what I am now and what I can be and should be in future, is very conducive to the effectuation of opening. On the other hand, an attitude of tamasic *laissez-faire* such as: "I am quite all right; my days are passing reasonably smoothly; what else do I need?" — this sort of self-patting attitude and a mood of deluded self-contentment are completely detrimental to the opening of consciousness.

Next comes the essential element of aspiration. For the bringing about of a state of perfect opening of his consciousness, a sadhaka should keep burning in his heart an ardent fire of constant aspiration. This will make the Grace of the Divine Mother come down in his being and open wide all the closed nooks and corners of his nature. Sri Aurobindo has assured us:

"If there is a sincerity in the aspiration and a patient will to arrive at the higher consciousness in spite of the obstacles, then the opening in one form or another is sure to come." (Letters on Yoga, p. 605)

But while speaking about the necessity of aspiration we must remind that what the sadhaka has to do is only to aspire and pray, in an attitude of perfect tranquillity, and never be agitated or impatient in his yearning. All impatience and tension and anxious expectancy will go counter to the state of opening.

After aspiration comes the highly positive qualities of faith and trust. The sadhaka has to grow into the following confidence:

“The Divine Mother is there always present near me, actually enveloping and pervading my consciousness. She loves me much more than I can love me myself, and that always and under all circumstances. She wills to do my good at all times; hence it cannot but be that she will give me all that is spiritually necessary for me — of course, under the necessary pre-condition that I should make myself ready for her gifts.”

Such a spirit of unslackening faith and confidence in the action of the Divine Mother is greatly conducive to the opening of the sadhaka’s consciousness. The following brief formula given by Sri Aurobindo epitomises the whole position: “*It is by confidence in the Mother that the opening needed will come when your consciousness is ready.*” (Letters on Yoga, p. 604)

After this faith and confidence comes the necessity of a unified will. “My life should be wholly governed by the Divine’s Will and not in any way by my personal ego-shaped fancy. I shall not allow any alien influence to intrude into the field of my consciousness; there, the divine Influence alone will reign supreme.” — Such a strong and unified resolution on the part of the sadhaka and, what is more important, its being put into effective practice, will lead to a very powerful opening. It is worth remembering in this connection the following words of the Mother:

“*You find it difficult to open because you have not yet made the resolution to allow my will, and not your own, to govern your life. As soon as you have understood the need for this, everything will become easier.*”

Now comes the fourth pre-condition for a successful opening: the elimination of ego-insistence in all its forms. For, any mixing up of the ego’s demands and desires with the life of sadhana will completely block the opening. A sadhaka has to come to the path of sadhana with the total transparency of motive. This should be for the Divine alone. Instead of that, if any aspirant seeks to satisfy his rakshasic hunger of desires, demands and ambitions, either openly or from behind the guises of apparently good intentions, while ostensibly following a ‘spiritual’ discipline, he is heading towards a precipice: his misguided folly will lead him to a disastrous fall and all his opening will be lost in a quagmire. Sri Aurobindo’s note of unequivocal warning uttered for the timely waking of the heedless sadhakas is worth recalling in this connection:

“*If there is any kind of egoistic turn or insincerity of motive, if yoga is done under a pressure of vital demands, or partly or wholly to satisfy some spiritual or other ambition, pride, vanity or seeking for power, position or influence over others or with any push towards satisfying any vital desire with the help of the yogic force, then not much of opening is possible.*”

Concerning this dampening effect of an ego-centric attitude on the opening of one’s consciousness, the Mother too has made it clear that if a sadhaka habitually comes under egoistic impulses, it becomes well-nigh impossible for him to acquire either the opening or the

receptivity. He must free himself from the slavery of his ego and replace his present ego-centric attitude with a predominantly theo-centric or God-oriented attitude. “Not I but you, O Divine; not for me but for you alone” — this should be the constant guiding principle of the life of a sadhaka.

And here comes the necessity of self-offering to the Divine and its possible effect upon the opening of consciousness. This has been the universally validated axiom of spiritual life that the act of self-surrender to the Divine is the best and most effective way of bringing about the necessary opening.

But a question may be raised here: “Psychologically speaking, what is exactly meant by this surrender to the Divine?” The answer may be given in Sri Aurobindo’s formulation:

“Surrender means to consecrate everything in oneself to the Divine, to offer all one is and has, not to insist on one’s ideas, desires, habits, etc., but to allow the divine Truth to replace them by its knowledge, will and action everywhere.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 603)

While speaking of the great contribution made in the life of sadhana by a genuine self-surrender to the Divine, Sri Aurobindo has written in his Essays on the Gita that once the true will of surrender becomes operative in the sadhaka’s consciousness, that by itself opens very soon all the doors and windows of the being and — what is more wonderful — makes possible in its turn the self-giving of the Divine himself in the sadhaka’s *ādhāra*. Then, the Light and Force of the Divine Shakti become active the sadhaka’s consciousness and remoulds him into a completely new being through a process of rapid transformation. As an ultimate attainment, the mind and the heart and the body of the sadhaka undergo a radical change and assume a divine nature. Sri Aurobindo concludes: “The will of self-giving forces away by its power the veil between God and man; it annuls every error and annihilates every obstacle.” (p. 320)

So far for the ‘opening’ of consciousness. We have spoken about the essentiality of this openness in the life of sadhana, its very good consequences and the conditions to be fulfilled for the bringing about of this opening. Now a few words about its cognate virtue, ‘receptivity’.

For a mere ‘opening’ is not sufficient. It is obvious that even if a sadhaka is open in his consciousness, if his receptive and retentive power remains limited, he will ultimately derive not much of spiritual benefit. For even if the Divine Mother pours aplenty in the sadhaka’s *ādhāra* her Light and Power and Love and Grace, much of it will be spilt and thus wasted in vain.

Hence it is very much necessary that a sadhaka should pay great attention to the augmentation of his power of receptivity and retentivity along with that of his openness.

Now how to increase one’s receptivity? The answer is simple. For it can be briefly stated that all the specific conditions we have mentioned above as conducive to the act of opening or inimical to it are equally so in the case of receptivity. Thus, doubt and disbelief, revolt and depression, restlessness of the mind and heart, the calculating habit of the ego — all these moods and attitudes act against the increase in receptivity. On the other side, a quiet gladness in the heart, faith and courage and sincerity, one-pointed aspiration, a sense of great humility, and an unwavering trust and confidence in the Mother’s Love and Power — all these are helpful for the building up of one’s receptivity and retentivity.

These are of course general statements. But along with the cultivation of these qualities and as a supplement to it, one can attend to a few processes of sadhana which can increase a hundredfold the sadhaka's receptivity. These sadhana can be formulated in the words of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother as follows. The formulations are quite self-explanatory and need no elucidation.

Formula One: *"Lack of unification of the being creates difficulties in reception."*

Formula Two: *"It is with the widening of the consciousness that the receptivity increases."*

Formula Three: *"Relax and receive."*

Formula Four: *"The more you give, the more you receive."*

Here ends our chapter on opening and receptivity.

VII.

On Self-surrender to the Divine

Self-resignation to the Divine, entire and sincere, at all moments and under all circumstances, is the key-element in the process of Sadhana on the path of the Integral Yoga. ‘My God and my all!’ should be the all-comprehensive Mantra arising from the depths of the heart of every serious sadhaka. The act of self-resignation cannot but fill the whole life of a sadhaka with the tranquil and spontaneous rasa of delight.

And why should it not be so? The day a sadhaka genuinely surrenders himself to the Divine in a spirit of entire self-resignation, the Divine too from his side actively intervenes in the life of this sadhaka and helps to remove all his difficulties and weaknesses, both outer and inner, and gladdens his consciousness with the ambiance of his constant divine presence.

But the essential requisites for that to happen are that (1) the sadhaka has to utterly feel the vanity of his self-potency, thus engendering in him a mood of genuine and all-round humility; (2) he has to believe with all his heart that there is Someone called the Divine who really exists, loves him, and has the omnipotence to do anything and everything according to his divine Wisdom; and finally, (3) the sadhaka has to turn to the Divine and Divine alone as his sole and ultimate refuge.

In the constant turmoils and vicissitudes of one’s earthly existence a man looks around and seeks in vain for someone who can afford a sure insurance against all his possible perils and disasters. But seek he as much as he likes, he will find none to fulfil his expectations; for, in reality, there is none, there can be none except the Divine who alone can fulfil all the needs of man if the latter takes refuge in him with the simple and candid abandon of a child without any reservation.

While contrasting the unhappy existence of an ordinary man with all his worries and anxieties, with the happy sunlit state of someone who has resigned himself to the Divine’s care for everything in his life, the Mother has said many important things in her commentary on Dhammapada. Here is a rather long passage from her exposition:

“...there is a certain state of consciousness — which one can acquire by aspiration and a persistent inner effort — in which joy is unmixed and light shadowless, where all possibility of fear disappears. It is the state in which one does not live for oneself but where whatever one does, whatever one feels, all movements are an offering made to the Supreme, in an absolute trust, freeing oneself of all responsibility for oneself, handing over to Him all this burden which is no longer a burden.

“It is an inexpressible joy not to have any responsibility for oneself, no longer to think of oneself. It is so dull and monotonous and insipid to be thinking of oneself, to be worrying about what to do and what not to do, what will be good for you and what will be bad for you, what to shun and what to pursue — oh, how wearisome it is! But when one lives like this, quite open, like a flower blossoming in the sun before the Supreme Consciousness, the Supreme Wisdom, the Supreme Light, the Supreme Love, which knows all, which can do all, which takes charge of you and you have no more worries — that is the ideal condition.” (MCW, Vol. 3, pp. 256-57)

Yes, such is indeed the ideal condition. But this condition cannot be so easily attained. There is much resistance and obstruction in the sadhaka's habitual consciousness and nature which militates against the attainment. The Divine can surely take full charge of an individual's life in all its aspects, relieving him entirely of all burden and personal responsibility but only on one condition. That condition is that the Sadhaka on his part should completely and unreservedly resign himself to the sole guidance of the Divine. But the relevant question is: Is there any sign by which one can know that one has really done so? Luckily for the novices like us, Sri Aurobindo has given a detailed description of the inner mood of a really self-resigned surrendered sadhaka. Here is a passage from his writings:

“I want the Divine and nothing else. I want to give myself entirely to him and since my soul wants that, it cannot be but that I shall meet and realise him. I ask nothing but that and his action in me to bring me to him, his action secret or open, veiled or manifest. I do not insist on my own time and way; let him do all in his own time and way; I shall believe in him, accept his will, aspire steadily for his light and presence and joy, go through all difficulties and delays, relying on him and never giving up... All for him and myself for him. Whatever happens, I will keep to this aspiration and self-giving and go on in perfect reliance that it will be done.” (Sri Aurobindo: Letters on Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 587)

Such is then the attitude the Sadhaka has to grow into and maintain it always and in all situations of our daily life. And the wonderful results that will follow out of this pure and unreserved attitude of self-resignation and surrender are simply indescribable. Here is what the Mother has written in her *Prayers and Meditations* in this connection:

“Last night I had the experience of the effectivity of confident surrender to Thy guidance; when it is needful that something should be known, one knows it, and the more passive the mind to Thy illumination, the clearer and the more adequate is its expression... Thou canst make of me all that I need to be, and in the measure in which my attitude allows Thee to act on me and in me, Thy omnipotence has no limits. To know that at each instant what must be surely is, as perfectly as is possible, for all those who know how to see Thee in everything and everywhere! No more fear, no more uneasiness, no more anguish; nothing but a perfect Serenity, an absolute Confidence, a supreme unwavering Peace.” (p. 9)

Now, if we turn to Sri Aurobindo's writings, we shall come to know the supreme benefit that may accrue to a sadhaka in the matter of building up of his life of sadhana, if only he can turn to the Divine in a spirit of confident and sincere self-surrender. In that case it is the Divine himself who takes charge of the entire course of the Sadhaka's sadhana: no other ancillary aid is needed any more. Here are two representative passages from Sri Aurobindo making this point explicit:

“If one wanted the Divine, the Divine himself would take up the purifying of the heart and develop the sadhana and give the necessary experiences; it can and does happen in that way if one has trust and confidence in the Divine and the will to surrender. For such a taking up involves one's putting oneself in the hands of the Divine rather than relying on one's own efforts alone and this implies one's putting one's trust and confidence in the Divine and a progressive self-giving. It is in fact the principle of sadhana that I myself followed and it is the central process of yoga as I envisage it...”

“All can be done by the Divine, — the heart and nature purified, the inner consciousness awakened, the veils removed, — if one gives oneself to the Divine with trust and confidence and

even if one cannot do so fully at once, yet the more one does so, the more the inner help and guidance come and the experience of the Divine grows within. If the questioning mind becomes less active and humility and the will to surrender grow, this ought to be perfectly possible. No other strength and tapasya are then needed, but this alone.” (Letters on Yoga, Cent. Ed., pp. 586-88)

Now a second long passage from Sri Aurobindo’s writings. It is an adaptation of pages 537-538 of his Essays on the Gita. The whole thing has been expressed in a particular literary style as if the Supreme Divine is directly addressing the aspiring sadhaka and expounding to him the sadhana of surrender and self-resignation.

“All this personal effort and self-discipline will not in the end be needed,... if thou canst make a complete surrender to Me, depend alone on the Spirit and Godhead within thee and all things and trust to his sole guidance. Turn all thy mind to Me and fill it with the thought of Me and My presence. Turn all thy heart to Me, make thy every action, whatever it be, a sacrifice and offering to Me. That done, leave Me to do My will with thy life and soul and action; do not be grieved or perplexed by My dealings with thy mind and heart and life and works or troubled because they do not seem to follow the laws and Dharmas man imposes on himself to guide his limited will and intelligence. My ways are the ways of a perfect wisdom and power and love that knows all things and combines all its movements in view of a perfect eventual result... Whatever difficulties and perplexities arise, be sure of this that I am leading you to a complete divine life in the universal and an immortal existence in the transcendent Spirit.” (Essays on the Gita, Cent. Ed., pp. 537-38)

At this point an intriguing question may haunt the sadhaka’s mind: If so great is the all-fulfilling capability of self-surrender to the Divine, why does man fail to pass on the burden of his worry-racked life to the omnipotent omnipresent Divine Consciousness? Is it not foolish on his part not to do so? Yes, it is indeed an absurd folly and it arises out of obscuring ignorance and disabling lack of faith and trust in the Divine. It is worth recalling in this connection the luminous words the Mother addressed to the students of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the year 1958:

“And why is it not done? One does not think of it, one forgets to do it, the old habits come back. And above all, behind, hidden somewhere in the inconscient or even in the subconscious, there is this insidious doubt that whispers in your ear: ‘Oh! if you are not careful, some misfortune will happen to you. If you forget to watch over yourself, you do not know what may happen’ — and you are so silly, so silly, so obscure, so stupid that you listen and you begin to pay attention to yourself and everything is ruined.

“You have to begin all over again to infuse into your cells a little wisdom, a little common sense and learn once more not to worry.” (MCW, Vol. 3, p. 257)

A second nagging question may often confuse the sadhaka’s mind, which may prevent him from making an effective surrender to the Divine. The question is: Is self-surrender to divine action tantamount to cessation from all personal initiative to action? If so, will it not turn me into an inert piece of clod? How can I lead my life then in a fruitful and meaningful effective way?

This salt of confusion in the sadhaka’s mind is quite understandable and this should be cleared at the very earliest.

The sadhaka has not already become a Siddha Yogi who has attained to the union with the Divine's Consciousness; his personal will is far from being identified with the Divine's Will. So he cannot try to behave in a way as if he has reached the end of the spiritual path. He is still living in his separative ego-consciousness ever impelled by the motions of desires; he is full of personal likes and dislikes, preferences and antipathies, and seeking always after fruits of action which interest his personal ego. So, in his present state of ignorant egoistic consciousness, surrendering to the Divine should not mean the cessation of activities. It is he who has to choose the actions and try to do those actions in a perfect way but with a different attitude. All works should be performed as a consecrated offering to the Divine. Sri Aurobindo has made this point clear in a significant paragraph of his *Synthesis of Yoga*:

“The work itself is at first determined by the best light we can command in our ignorance. It is that which we conceive as the thing that should be done. And whether it be shaped by our sense of duty, by our feeling for our fellow-creatures, by our idea of what is for the good of others or the good of the world or by the direction of one whom we accept as a human Master, wiser than ourselves and for us the representative of that Lord of all works in whom we believe but whom we do not yet know, the principle is the same.” (p. 209)

Yes, “the principle is the same” and it is this underlying principle supporting all action of the sadhaka, which will turn an ordinary mundane worker into a self-surrendered aspirant. But what is this principle? Let us listen to Sri Aurobindo:

“The essential of the sacrifice of works must be there and the essential is the surrender of all desire for the fruit of our works, the renunciation of all attachment to the result for which yet we labour. For so long as we work with attachment to the result, the sacrifice is offered not to the Divine, but to our ego. We may think otherwise, but we are deceiving ourselves; we are making our idea of the Divine, our sense of duty, our feeling for our fellow-creatures, our idea of what is good for the world or others, even our obedience to the Master a mask for our egoistic satisfactions and preferences and a specious shield against the demand made on us to root all desire out of our nature.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 209-10)

So this is what the sadhaka has always to do in the choice of his actions and in the spirit in which these actions have to be done. But whatever the actions he may do, whatever procedures he may adopt, and whichever ancillary aids he may take recourse to in the accomplishment of these actions, the sadhaka has to maintain in the depth of his consciousness the following attitude:

‘The Divine is my sole refuge; I trust in Him and rely for everything on His aid and His alone. Let Him do whatever He wants to do with me and my life; I am utterly resigned to His Will. I will see to it that no obstacles on the way nor any dark mood of desperation ever make me waver from my absolute reliance on the Divine. He is my All and He will be my All for ever and for ever under all possible circumstances.’

Such an attitude and its effective application will distinguish from all others a sadhaka who has genuinely taken refuge in the Divine.

Yes, ‘genuinely’ is the key-element in the whole affair. For there are many misleading varieties of mock-surrender leading to self-deceptive complacency on the part of the sadhaka. For example, it is a fact that many easy-going sadhakas unwilling to fulfil the necessary conditions

for the building up of a spiritual way of life lull themselves into the unrealistic belief that once they have repeatedly affirmed that they would take refuge in the Divine or in their Guru, all their labour should be over and that it is the Divine Himself who should do everything else for them. For so they ask with feigned innocence: “Is this not the declared principle of sadhana based on the method of self-surrender?”

How facile becomes then the sadhana! Alas, the fact is otherwise; there is a blatant fallacy vitiating this type of escapist reasoning. One quotes indeed in this connection the supreme promise of assurance offered by Lord Krishna to his disciple Arjuna: “I shall deliver thee from all sins,” but conveniently forgetting the necessary pre-condition imposed by the Divine: “Take refuge in me renouncing everything else.”

Most of us would like to derive the full benefit of the Divine’s intervention on our side without, at the same time, caring to ‘pay’ any spiritual price for that. But this can never do. For there is a mutual ‘give-and-take’ between the Divine and the Sadhaka. Did not Sri Aurobindo give us the stern warning? —

“But the supreme Grace will act only in the conditions of the Light and the Truth; it will not act in conditions laid upon it by the Falsehood and the Ignorance. For if it were to yield to the demands of the Falsehood, it would defeat its own purpose...”

“If each time the Power intervenes and brings in the Truth, you turn your back on it and call in again the falsehood that has been expelled, it is not the divine Grace that you must blame for failing you, but the falsity of your own will and the imperfection of your own surrender.”
(SABCL, Vol. 25, The Mother, pp. 1, 3)

We cannot but recall in this connection two short series of significant exchanges of notes between Sri Aurobindo and his disciples.

The first case concerns a sadhaka who was very very close to the Master. This disciple once wrote to Sri Aurobindo: “It may be a ‘comfortable doctrine’ but that’s my philosophy of sadhana. What is the good of the Avatar if we do everything by ourselves? We have come to you and taken shelter at your feet so that you may, as the Gita says, deliver us from all sins.”

Sri Aurobindo did not endorse the view of his self-complacent disciple. He cryptically commented with his characteristic touch of humour: *“But what if the Avatar gets frightened at the prospect of all this hard labour and rushes back scared behind the veil?”* (Nirodbaran: Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, Volume One, p. 197)

The second case concerns Dilip Kumar Roy. Roy was indeed a most beloved disciple of Sri Aurobindo. The Master considered him to be his friend and son and once declared that not a day passed when he did not think of Dilip Kumar. Sri Aurobindo wrote hundreds of pages of letters to his worried and anguished and questions-racked disciple and tried to help him in every way in the various ordeals of the Path. Yet the apparently puzzling fact is that the disciple always complained that Sri Aurobindo, his loving and compassionate Guru, was not giving him any experiences or realisations worth the name. He even went to the absurd extent of calling Sri Aurobindo ‘an impotent Guru!’

It goes without saying that this sort of aspersion did not prick Sri Aurobindo’s amour-propre. He

simply put the matter straight and placed everything in its proper perspective, when Nirodbaran, a close friend and brother-disciple of Dilip Kumar wrote to the Master:

“Is it really impossible for you to give him [Dilip] some experience of peace, silence or meditation? Then the Divine is not all-omnipotent...”

Here is what Sri Aurobindo wrote in reply: “*My dear sir, what has the omnipotence of the Divine to do with it? In this world there are conditions for everything — if a man refuses to fulfil the conditions for Yoga, what is the use of appealing to the Divine’s omnipotence?*” (Ibid., pp. 601-02)

The upshot of all the foregoing discussion is that a mere lip-assertion or a mental repetition of formulas like ‘*Sri Aurobindom śaranam gacchāmi*’ or ‘*Om Sri Aurobindo-Mira śaranam mama*’ do not and cannot constitute the sadhana of *śaranāgati* (‘surrendering of oneself to the Divine and taking refuge in Him alone’), and hence it is vain to expect that such a sham self-resignation will make the Divine directly intervene and take full charge of the sadhaka’s life and sadhana. Right psychological pre-conditions for effective *śaranāgati* have first to be fulfilled; then only the promised all-sufficiency of the Divine’s help can be tested in practice.

Such being the case we must first enquire what these essential pre-conditions are which can make our surrender authentic and fruitful. Let us refer to a statement of Sri Aurobindo which clarifies the issue in the short span of a few significant words:

“*To walk through life armoured against all fear, peril and disaster, only two things are needed, two that go always together — the Grace of the Divine Mother and on your side an inner state made up of faith, sincerity and surrender.*” (SABCL, Vol. 25, The Mother, p. 9)

We find here mentioned three essential factors: sincerity, surrender and faith. It goes without saying that a basic sincerity is the very sine qua non of all true sadhana; without it the sadhaka cannot take even a single small step on the Path. He will stagnate on the spot for ever and for ever. So let us not waste here our time and space by stressing the obvious. Next comes surrender. And it is precisely what is the subject-matter of the present essay. The third essential element is ‘faith’ and it is indeed the lynchpin of the whole process of sadhana based on *śaranāgati* or self-surrender. Whether the spiritual progress of the sadhaka will be made or marred depends entirely on the corner-stone of faith being firmly and rightly laid or not.

But the question is: Faith in whom and what are its constitutive limbs? The answer is: Of course, faith in the Divine and in the operative power of His Shakti. Now in order that this faith be an entire and truly effective one it has to cover and be firm in five different elements. These elements are:

(1) Faith in the existence and omnipresence of the Divine; (2) faith in the love that the Divine bears towards the sadhaka; (3) faith in the all-wise Will of the Divine; (4) faith in the omnipotence of the Divine; and finally, (5) faith in the Divine’s full and unpartitioned sovereignty over us. In other words, this fivefold faith implies that the truly self-surrendered sadhaka should at all moments believe with all his mind and heart and active consciousness that there is Someone called the Divine who is always present in him and near him, who loves him and seeks his good always and under all circumstances, and who has the capacity of utterly realising all that he wills. Finally, the sadhaka has to feel that he belongs to the Divine and to the

Divine alone: he should not allow anything or anyone else to be a rival to the Divine in his heart.

When a sadhaka succeeds in establishing and maintaining unimpaired this five-limbed faith in his consciousness, he may be sure that his *śaranāgati-sādhanā* has taken the right orientation and he will thenceforward progress on the Path with assured steps. But this faith has to be entire and unreserved and must simultaneously cover all the five elements. If the faith is found lacking or deficient even in one element, the *śaranāgati-sādhanā* is not yet perfect for the sadhaka and he is apt to encounter many difficulties on the way and many a type of suffering is apt to trouble him again and again. In that case, the sadhaka should stop and step back, be vigilant and watchful, search his consciousness, find out the flaws and foibles, and restore the well-being of his faith.

But a ticklish question may confound the sadhaka at this point: What is faith after all? and how should I know that my professed faith is indeed a true faith and not the misleading mask of some other psychological movement? Let us discuss this point in brief and try to clear away the cobwebs of confusion.

True faith is not just a conviction created by intellectual argumentation and rational reasoning based on some sense-evidenced data and factors; nor is it something brought about by a strong and forceful exercise of the will-power; nor is it again a fair-weather 'trust' displayed by our impure heart when it is favoured by a turn of events momentarily pampering its interests and desires. There are many other forms of imitation-faiths which are bound to make ineffectual the so-claimed *śaranāgati-sādhanā*.

Then what is the nature of genuine faith which the sadhaka is asked to cultivate? It is a deep and quiet illumined feeling of conviction arising from the depths of the consciousness when the outer mind and heart are stilled and made pure of all admixture of egoistic desires and expectations. True faith is never misled by the adverse appearances of the moment. It can pierce through the darkening haze of the present and concentrate its steady vision on the truth of the future.

Most of us actually harbour superstitious beliefs, when we falsely claim that we are men possessed of faith. Belief easily crumbles whenever unexpected sorrows and sufferings, difficulties and ordeals, confront us on the Path. But true faith shines steadily as an unquenchable flame: it is self-existent and altogether independent of the vicissitudes of time and space and situations and circumstances. This faith cannot be acquired by personal effort and hard labour. It is a precious gift of Grace granted by the Divine himself to any sincere and self-surrendered sadhaka whose love for the Divine is constant and unvarying and entirely motiveless.

Let us close this section with an admonition from Sri Aurobindo addressed to the sadhakas who would like to grow in true faith:

“Let your faith be pure, candid and perfect. An egoistic faith in the mental and vital being tainted by ambition, pride, vanity, mental arrogance, vital self-will, personal demand, desire for the petty satisfactions of the lower nature is a low and smoke-obscured flame that cannot burn upwards to heaven.” (SABCL, Vol. 25, The Mother, p. 9)

A question may at times puzzle the heart and mind of the sadhakas; it is as regards the exact

implication of the statement that the compassionate Divine can do anything and everything for a sadhaka who has totally surrendered himself to Him alone. Does it mean that never, not even once, will any difficulty or misfortune visit a self-surrendered sadhaka? Will his path of progress be always and throughout bedecked with soft and soothing petals of rose? Will he not meet with any thorns or sharp-edged stones ever in his life in his journey towards the Goal?

No, belying all our vain expectations the truth is otherwise. There is a great mystery facing us here. The divine Providence is as deep as the sea. Let us try to elucidate the point.

At a moment of great distress and psychological crisis Dilip Kumar Roy wrote a long letter to Sri Aurobindo which inter alia raised the very question we are now concerned with. In an equally long reply the Master explained to the disciple the exact position in a most lucid and soul-consoling way. We are basing our elucidation on his luminous observations.

All of us, embodied human beings, have come down upon earth and been active there in the terrestrial field. But in the actual state of affairs of the world and life, most of our existence is under the siege of Inconscience and Ignorance. Our journey is no doubt towards the Light but the path passes through the tunnel of Darkness. As a result the world presents to us a double aspect. And for a long stretch of it man's life is criss-crossed with a series of ups and downs and is visited by alternations of happiness and sorrow, good fortune and ill fortune, illness and good health. Now in Sri Aurobindo's own words:

“The meaning of this world must evidently lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance. Whatever guidance there is must be given under these conditions of opposition and struggle... It is leading the individual, certainly,... towards the higher state, but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms, still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune.”
(Letters on Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 1627)

So it cannot be that a sadhaka who has surrendered himself to the Divine and to His guidance will be entirely exempt from all visitations of the darker aspects of present human existence; he too has to meet some crisis-hours off and on.

Is there then no difference between the nature of life lived by an ordinary mortal and that of the life led by someone who has taken to the sadhana of *śaranāgati* or self-surrender? Surely that cannot be. There is a heaven and hell difference between these two types of lives so far as the inner psychological frames are concerned. There may be times when there will be no 'happiness' in the life of a surrendered sadhaka but he will never lack the myrrh of 'blessedness'. As a Western mystic has so beautifully put it: “The music is not in conditions, not in the things, not in externals but the music of life is in the soul of the aspirant.”

So we should carefully note the following points as applicable to the case of any sadhaka who has sincerely and unreservedly surrendered himself to the Divine and loved Him as his sole Refuge always and in every situation.

(1) An effective surrender does not necessarily insure the sadhaka against all future storms and

stresses; what it assures is the absolute security of the sadhaka's spiritual health even in the midst of these storms and stresses.

(2) The Divine does not offer any promise that he will make the path always sun-lit and paved with rose-petals; what he firmly promises is that he would surely lead the sadhaka to his cherished spiritual goal through every possible misfortune of life.

(3) The surrendered sadhaka believes with all his heart that no suffering or misfortune ever visiting his life is altogether vain and otiose; he knows that every one of them comes with the all-wise and all-loving sanction of the Divine for fulfilling a necessary spiritual purpose whose significance will be revealed in time.

(4) A surrendered sadhaka, even when he finds completely shrouded the necessity of his present trouble, knows and feels all the same that the Divine is not absent and far away from him but is sitting in the heart of his acutest difficulty and guiding from there the course of circumstances to lead the sadhaka ultimately and inevitably to the door of union with the Divine.

(5) The sadhaka knows that every difficulty crossing his life, if faced with courage, patience and right attitude and in a spirit of self-resignation and loving surrender, cannot but bring in its train great spiritual benefit.

(6) A sadhaka resigned to the Will of the Divine not only believes that behind everything that happens in his life there is invariably the sanction of the Divine, he is convinced at the same time that this sanction is not the arbitrary fiat of a superhuman super-potent despot but the loving dispensation of Someone who wants to bring about a supreme good in his life and that the particular events are the necessary links in the unfoldment of a divine purpose. What does it matter then even if the nature of this purpose or the secret significance of the event is not immediately revealed to his ego-obscured ignorant consciousness? To know that there is an underlying purpose leading to some future spiritual good is sufficient for the self-resigned sadhaka. He will calmly accept all possible motions of divine Providence with this sole mantra sustaining him: "Let Thy Will be done always and everywhere."

So far so good. But if the sadhaka would like to know more fully the nature of the divine guidance working in his life, even at the very moment when an adverse circumstance is actually confronting him with its veil of impenetrability unlifted, he must adopt a further attitude which can be summed up as "Be still and know." After all, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out,

"The guidance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge... comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes."
(Letters on Yoga, pp. 1626-27)

So the surrendered sadhaka should try to quieten his mind and heart as much as possible and purify them of all egoistic preferences and antipathies, drive away all worries and apprehensions, and then adopt an inner attitude of "trustful and expectant stillness". The indication will then surely come, sooner or later, depending on the state of perfection of the sadhaka's attitude, and he will receive intimations of the precise nature of the divine Will operative in his life at that very moment. We are tempted to cite in this connection a very valuable passage from the writing of a well-known Western mystic:

“When we are in doubt and difficulty, when many voices urge this course or the other, when prudence utters one advice and faith another, then let us be still, hushing each intruder, calming ourselves in the sacred hush of the Divine’s Presence; in an attitude of devout attention, let us be eager only to know what God shall determine. If we will only get alone, where the lights and shadows of earth cannot interfere and if we can dare to wait there silent and expectant, ere long a very distinct impression will be made and the Will of the Divine made clear.” (Quoted in C. E. Cowman’s *Streams in the Desert*)

We should not forget to mention here one other very important point. Any sadhaka who has resolved to surrender himself totally to the Divine and take refuge in his all-wise loving dispensation, should banish from his heart by every means all moods of worries, anxieties and trepidations as regards the possible course of his life’s future. For the slightest uneasiness of this sort will at once prove that his faith in the Divine in at least one of the five areas which we have mentioned before is not yet made firm and true and hence his so-claimed surrender also is not an authentic surrender at all. For a genuine surrender to the Divine and continued anxiety vis-à-vis the future are two things as incompatible and absurd as a circular square or a gold vessel made of stone.

So the slightest appearance of fear or worry or anxiety should make the sadhaka alert and he should immediately set himself to the task of rectifying the flaws in his attitude, renew his resolution to make his surrender sound and perfect, and establish in his consciousness a state of tranquil trust in the Divine.

One last point and we have come to the end of our essay on surrender. It is as regards the place and role of prayer in the life of a sadhaka who has resigned himself to the Divine’s care.

We should not forget that there is a long period of time separating the first imperfect initiation of the *śaranāgati-sādhanā* and its all-round perfect accomplishment. Hence it is quite expected that being troubled by many difficulties in life the sadhaka would not be able to maintain an attitude of silent passivity but rather feel like turning to the Divine for the Supreme’s necessary aid and intervention. There is no harm in that. Only he should be careful that his prayers do not degenerate into the impure and importunate stuff that is what the prayers of ordinary worldly people are who are interested only in the fulfilment of their egoistic desires and not in the development of their spiritual life. In which way then are the prayers of a *śaranāgati sādhanā* distinguished from the normal prayers of men? The following points will offer the answer.

1. Whenever any problem or difficulty will confront a sadhaka, the very first thing he should do is to turn to the Divine and place before Him the entire situation in all its details and seek for the Divine’s intervention. It is not that he will first seek the solution elsewhere through some human agencies and then only turn to the Divine as an alternative last resort.
2. The sadhaka will not seek to dictate to the Divine what the solution should be or how soon the solution should come. He will confidently leave everything to the discretion of the divine Wisdom.
3. He will not cease from praying even if it takes a long time for the solution to come. He will wait in calm patience and continue praying till a clear indication comes from the Divine that his prayer is misplaced and the thing he is asking for is not in conformity with the divine Will but is arising only out of his egoistic ignorance.

4. The sadhaka is not debarred from taking some ancillary outward aid but his first and foremost reliance, and a confident reliance at that, will always be on the divine Grace.

5. Even if the divine answer does not come according to the sadhaka's expectations, or even if his prayers get completely thwarted, he will not lose a whit his love for the Divine or his trust in the divine omnipotence but merely resign himself gladly to the divine Providence, accepting in full faith that such is what it should be at that moment for his veritable spiritual growth.

6. At times the Divine may not unfold His plan in full before the sadhaka's vision; He may indicate only one step at a time, the step that is immediately called for. The surrendered sadhaka should not hesitate to take that step even if the rest of the future course of action remains shrouded in deep darkness. If he confidently follows the step-by-step guidance of the Divine, he will be amazed to discover in no time how the supremely wise divine Diplomat has led him to his spiritual destination through all the mazes of 'drift and bale'.

7. One last point: the sadhaka has to see at all times that his prayers tendered to the Divine do not get marred by any lack of faith or by the rising of complaints and misgivings of any sort. He should not nurture in his mind and heart any cynical or feeble-willed doubts like: "Who knows whether the Divine has indeed heard my appeal; or, given the complex situation, he may not perhaps be able to deliver me from my difficulty; or who knows whether the Divine exists at all." Even the slightest intrusion of doubts like this or any egoistic complaints addressed to the ever-loving Divine will throw a spanner in the effective action of the divine Grace.

Let us close our essay on *śaranāgati-sādhanā* with a final mantra meant for the sadhakas: "Watch for God in the events of your life. See only the hand of God in it all."

VIII.

How to Call and Pray

A complete purification, a total liberation and a perfect perfection constitute the triple objective of the Integral Yoga, and this implies an integral transformation of the whole being and nature.

To all appearances this goal may seem to be exceedingly difficult, almost impossible to attain, for the ascents of consciousness needed are too steep, the descents from above too precarious, and the path of the Integral Yoga too hard to tread. Indeed, left to one's own unaided Tapasya of will and aspiration, no human being however strong in spirit can ever expect to transform himself.

The sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should not therefore forget even for a moment that the Divine Mother's Shakti can always do more than one's personal effort; so the only thing for him to do is to get a settled quiet in his *ādhāra* and call the Shakti down or out to the front — for it is always there behind and above him whether he knows it or not. His only effort should be to keep himself open to the Mother's Force and to keep the whole being always on its side in its dealings with the forces of the lower nature.

The present essay deals with the preliminary stage of sadhana and with the problems of a sadhaka who has taken the central resolution to be the Divine Mother's child in the completest sense of the term, but who has not yet been able to establish in himself a conscious and direct contact with the Mother nor has he succeeded in effecting a conversion of all the elements of his being. And as a result at every step of his inner journey on the road of spiritual ascension he is bound to encounter in his consciousness and in the actions of his instrumental nature a host of pulls and orientations that are contrary to his cherished goal. And since in this preliminary stage of self-preparation he cannot too hastily claim to leave everything overtly and exclusively to the charge of the Divine Shakti, there must perforce be a stress on personal effort.

Now the personal effort demanded of the sadhaka has three limbs: an ever-mounting flame of aspiration, a ceaseless process of rejection of all that is inimical to sadhana, and of course an increasingly growing reality of surrender to the Mother-Power. If these three are forthcoming, the rest is bound to come by the Grace of the Mother and the working of her Force in the sadhaka.

Thus throughout this preliminary period of self-preparation, the sadhaka has to keep himself ever-awake and make at every step an uncompromising choice between the higher and the lower, between all that impels him to his goal and all that detracts him from his path or in the least impedes his forward journey. But the sadhaka should remember that there are always two ways of doing sadhana — *“one to overcome the difficulty in its own field, the other to develop the inner realisation until it grows so strong that the roots... have no longer any soil to hold by and come out easily by a spontaneous psychic change.”* (Sri Aurobindo: On Yoga II, Tome Two, p. 755)

In our sadhana, aspiration should come before rejection: the sadhaka should have his look turned forward to the future, to the coming light and not to any immediate darkness.

But in spite of the main stress being laid on the positive side of the sadhana, the sadhaka cannot

from the very outset altogether eliminate the necessity of dealing with the wrong turns and obscurities of his nature. For so long as the consciousness does not get integrally turned to the Divine Truth and the Divine Mother, so long as the nature remains divided, in however small a measure, between two opposing loyalties, the sadhaka cannot possibly expect that he would remain constantly in a state of ardent aspiration, perfect faith and love, and full and constant openness to the Divine Force.

It is thus clear that so long as the sadhaka does not get integrally consecrated to the Divine Mother, he has to meet and contend with the resistance in his mental being with its principal forms of doubt and denial, in his vital nature with its turmoils of desires and attachments, also in his physical consciousness with its characteristic stamp of fundamental inertia and obscurity.

If that is so, whenever difficulties and impediments to sadhana present themselves to the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga, what ideal attitude should he adopt? As we have already pointed out, he should not seek to master them relying on his own unaided effort alone.

Rather, he should trust in the Divine Mother's Force and Light, call in her aid, open himself to her working and let her Shakti act on his nature. The one thing that really counts is at every step to establish a contact with the Mother and offer one's being and nature to her divine working. And, at least in the preliminary stages of sadhana, a simple and sincere prayer addressed in the right spirit to the Divine Mother is indeed one of the principal means of establishing this needed contact. In spiritual matters and in the seeking of spiritual gains, this conscious relation is a very great power; it is a far greater power than our own entirely self-reliant struggle and effort: it brings a fuller spiritual growth and experience.

But the whole question is the sincerity of this prayer and of the right spirit behind it. For prayers may be crude and childish, unholy and egoistic, addressed to a supposedly superior Power in the vain and perverse expectation of placating and propitiating the higher Will, with the hope of tilting the balance of divine Dispensation in one's favour. Such prayers are of no avail in the building up of a truly spiritual life. The Mother has assured us that "*all sincere calls surely reach and receive an answer.*" Let us then make it clear to our consciousness what is meant by a truly sincere call.

A little introspection will make us realise that any sincere prayer addressed to the Divine Mother from the depths of our being is moulded as it were of seven elements: the Goal, the Insight, the Adhesion, the Presence, Faith, Supplication, and Resignation. Let us consider in their proper order how these elements or 'limbs' individually and collectively contribute to the essential sincerity of a call.

The First Limb: The Goal — The very first element, almost the foundation element, of a sincere prayer in sadhana is, on the part of the sadhaka, a never-failing awareness of his spiritual goal. Once he has entered the path of Yoga, there is only one thing for him to do: to grow progressively towards a state of total consecration and to fix himself in the resolution to go to the end whatever happens, whatever difficulties cross his path. *Ekanisthā* should be his one watchword and he should know that the word *nisthā* means "*one-pointed, fixed and steady concentration, devotion and faith in the single aim — the Divine and the Divine Realisation*". (Sri Aurobindo) Indeed, once on the path all the prayers of the sadhaka should well up as it were from this single source: 'the Goal of an integral dedication and openness to the Divine Mother'. The sadhaka should seek to keep alive at all moments in the background of his consciousness a

profound conviction and a sure and unwavering feeling that except for the Divine, the Divine Truth and the Divine Life, there is nothing whatsoever in the world that is really worth cherishing or striving after. He should seek to remain firm in his awareness that the only object set before him is the complete abolition, although progressive, of all ego-sense, a relentless discouragement of all promptings from his as yet unregenerate lower nature, and a radical scorching out of every single root of all his desires and attachments. He must clairvoyantly see to it that his calls and prayers at all times cooperate with the aspiring and enlightened part of his being against all the gravitational pull of the downward turns of his nature.

A constant awareness of one's single goal: the Divine and the divine Realisation, and a consequent purity of the motive behind one's call, constitutes the first essential element of a sincere prayer.

The Second Limb: The Insight — Whenever crossed by any psychological difficulty or by any obstacle to the free flow of his sadhana, whatever may be its intensity or to whatever domain it may belong, the sadhaka should immediately try to clear the ground of his consciousness of all preferential leaning towards this particular weakness. *Nirmohatā*, absence of all fascination, is the watchword here, and the sadhaka must take his firm station on this ground of no illusion, and deliberately and consciously seek to see and feel that the impediment that has presently appeared is by no means conducive to the realisation of his Goal, nor is it really beneficial in his sadhana life in however minimal a way. He must seek to gather sufficient moral courage to look straight into the face of the difficulty, see it in its true complexion, and unreservedly comprehend with his mind's clear vision that this should and must definitely leave him for good.

On no account should he try to cherish or justify his difficulty or weakness even if he feels himself to be in his vital nature too weak to reject it, even if he finds the particular impediment having driven its roots deep down into his instrumental consciousness, so much so that in spite of his will to the contrary he cannot but succumb to its grip on his nature. He must sincerely try to withdraw his mind's assent to this difficulty and know it for what it is in its naked form, instead of seeking excuses and extenuating circumstances for its continued existence, or trying to give it a respectable look under the cover of gilded masks — thus creating resistance in the path of the Divine Shakti's working. The sadhaka must always live in the awakened part of his being and hold on firmly to the clear perception of the impediment's essential wrongness and of the absolute necessity for its radical elimination.

To see a difficulty or a weakness in its true colour, in its unvarnished reality, not to justify or rationalise it in however small a measure, to keep alive the resolution of getting free from it: this is what constitutes the second element of an effective prayer.

The Third Limb: The Adhesion — Next comes the third element, the fundamental element; for herein lies the true measure of the sincerity of a prayer. Indeed, the introduction of this single element makes all the difference between a sadhana based on self-reliant tapasya and one that is grounded in *śaranāgati* (taking refuge in the Divine).

The central adhesion of the working will and the joyous consent of the vital for its change is what makes up this third element. For it is not sufficient for the sadhaka to know with his mind that something is wrong with his nature; he must at the same time want with all his heart that he should be freed from it. Just a bit of self-searching will very soon convince any sadhaka that we

are for the most part full of vital insincerities, praying and pretending on the surface that something positive should really happen through the Mother's grace but sheltering all the while just below the threshold of our superficial consciousness a lurking desire that this should not actually happen so soon. In fact if it ever happens to come to be realised, our vital may get a severe jolt and demur or even revolt at its fruition.

It is for this that the Mother's very first injunction to anyone seeking to get rid of a wrong movement is really to want it: "*Tout d'abord, il faut le vouloir*"; for otherwise the whole thing gets vitiated even at its very start.

The Fourth Limb: The Presence — Once the sadhaka has grown aware of any wrong turn in his nature and has sincerely decided to get rid of it, he has but to invoke the divine aid of the Mahashakti and quietly open himself to the working of her Force and Light.

But while calling for this aid it is necessary for him not to regard the Divine Mother as someone too far and too remote from him, reigning on some unattainable summit of consciousness.

No doubt in her transcendent aspect the Mother is the Supreme Chitshakti, Consciousness and Power, even beyond the reach of the highest Gods. But that does not debar her from being nearer than the nearest, closer than the closest even to the insignificant part of her creation. For the efficacy of his prayer the sadhaka should be careful not to perplex himself with the questioning voices of his physical or philosophical mind; he should rather take his stand on the unassailable rock of faith and make his heart the altar of his supplication. He must seek to consciously grow in the living Presence of the Mother and feel it at all times to be concretely close and intimate to his consciousness.

Even if he is not directly aware of the Presence, the sadhaka must know it for certain that the Mother Mahashakti is always with him, around him and inside him, enveloping him with her boundless Grace and holding him in her embrace in weal and woe, in life and death, on all occasions and at all times. In the face of every bit of supposedly decisive evidence to the contrary, he must try to feel with a child's candour and straightforward trust that he is living before the very eyes of the Divine Mother who is looking down at him in her infinite love and boundless compassion, ever ready to bring to his soul the needed succour and healing touch whenever a sincere call rises from the depths of his heart.

This unshakable faith in the Presence and nearness of the Mother, even when the sadhaka is not actively aware of it, is the fourth essential element of an efficacious call.

The Fifth Limb: Faith in the Potency of Mahashakti — The faith in the Presence and the nearness of the Divine Mother must now be coupled with an equally unflinching faith in the supreme effectivity of her Force. For the sadhaka should not forget that she is not only Love and Grace, she is at the same time the Mahashakti of the Divine.

But it happens very often that whenever a sadhaka is beset with some difficulty or crossed on his path by some obstruction, he invariably sees the negative side of the picture, magnifies his difficulty out of all proportion and imagines in all seriousness that this time at least it is really insuperable. Thus his whole consciousness gets clouded and he loses faith in the working of the Mother. Although he may still continue to have faith in her Presence and solicitude, he may come to entertain serious doubts that after all the Mother has to work through certain conditions,

and such being the case, since he has fallen into an irretrievable situation, since he is in his *ādharā* so full of twists and imperfections, and since he finds himself so much deficient in his opening to the Mother, how can he possibly expect that the Mahashakti may hear his call and, hearing, save him from his impossible impasse?

This sort of self-depreciation and inner trepidation, such a sense of doubt and uncertainty in the possible working power of the Mother's Shakti is indeed a dangerously black mood for the sadhaka and he must make all effort to throw it out at any cost and as soon as possible. If he ever calls the Mother and lifts up his prayer to her, he must arm himself with a total faith in the One Mahashakti who is infinitely greater than all his supposed imperfections, infinitely more powerful than all his imagined incapacities, and who can change his destiny and perfect his self and nature provided he prays in a way so that his prayers may be heard.

Therefore, whenever the sadhaka's consciousness tends to get clouded, whenever the black mood of doubt and depression threatens to overwhelm him, he should at once recall to his trepidant consciousness the following words of the Mother:

“One must aspire, it is indispensable; but there are people who aspire yet with so much conflict within them, between faith and want of faith, trust and distrust, between optimism that is sure of victory and pessimism that is just waiting for the catastrophe to come, etc., etc. If such is the state of your being, you may aspire but nothing will come out of it. You say, ‘I aspire but I get nothing’. That is because you are demolishing your aspiration all the while by your want of trust. But if truly you have the trust, things would be different... When you aspire for the Force, or ask for the Divine's help, if you do it with an unshakable certitude that the thing will come, in that case, it is impossible for it not to come. In fact, as I say, such a conviction is in itself an inner opening... He who has a happy confidence in him, does not question, does not ask if he will have the thing or not, whether the Divine will answer or not. For to him that is not the question at all; it is well understood and taken for granted: ‘The thing I need I shall be given,’ he says, ‘If I pray my prayer will surely be granted. If I am in difficulty and ask for help, the help will come, it will not only come but settle everything’ — I say, the person who has such a spontaneous, candid, unquestioning reliance gets the best conditions under which an effective descent of Grace can occur; its action then is marvellous.” (Nolini Kanta Gupta: *The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo*, Part 8, pp. 104-05)

A firm faith in the efficacy of the Mother's working behind all appearances, leading to sure victory and to what is spiritually good for the sadhaka, is what constitutes the fifth element of a sincere call.

The Sixth Limb: The Supplication Proper — A sincere attendance to the first five limbs finally brings the sadhaka to the sixth element, the supplication proper. The function of the aforesaid elements is to prepare the sadhaka's consciousness and mould it in the most propitious manner so that his supplication may not be halting, superficial or weak in its core.

Now in this sixth limb, the sadhaka should inwardly place himself in the Presence of the Mother and open himself and his weakness unreservedly before her eyes. With a child's candour and the soul's sincerity he must lift up his heart to the Mother, put everything at her feet, call forth her aid and humbly pray that, if such be the Mother's Will, the difficulty may leave him for good and the roots of his weakness may be eliminated from his nature.

Here at this point let us recall the words of Sri Aurobindo as regards the necessity of call and supplication on the sadhaka's part in the building up of his sadhana life:

"If you cannot call the Mother in what you think the right way, call her in any way — if you can't call her, think of her with the will to be rid of these things. Don't worry yourself with the idea whether you have true aspiration or not — the psychic being wants and that is sufficient. The rest is for the Divine Grace on which one must steadfastly rely — one's own merit, virtue or capacity is not the thing that brings the realisation." (Sri Aurobindo on Himself and on the Mother, p. 742)

We consider now the seventh and last limb that deals with the spirit in which a prayer has to be tendered.

The Seventh Limb: The Resignation — Sri Aurobindo has warned the sadhakas that there is a great difference between 'calling' and 'pulling' — one can and must always call for the Mother's help and the answer will be proportionate to the sadhaka's capacity of reception and assimilation. But pulling is a selfish movement that may bring clown forces quite disproportionate to one's capacities and therefore harmful.

Thus the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should be ever on guard against all egoistic ardour of his heart and the violence of his will; for the human vital is, by nature, impatient and over-eager; it always hungers for a quick-yielding fruit of its labour, and if the fruit appears to be denied or long delayed, it gets fatigued and depressed, and loses its faith in the Guidance.

The sadhaka should guard himself against all such deplorable lapses and for that he should take care that his prayers may not get tainted by self-love and egoistic vehemence. He must acquire an unshakable patience and a single-minded perseverance; and happen what may, he must remain ever steadfast and joyful in humble submission to the Divine Mother's Will, and even if she delays to hear or seemingly rejects his prayer, he must go on calling still, and still hold fast to a faith in the Mother's aid, and this faith should remain firm through all difficulties, delays or even apparent failures.

For the sadhaka should not look upon his prayer as a mere slot-machine device nor should he pollute the purity of his call with the baneful spirit of commercial give-and-take. He must know at all times that even the spiritual progress that he seeks is not for his own sake but for the sake of the Divine; and when he prays, this should be his sole intention: 'To will always what the Mother wills', while in asking or in receiving. For a sincere sadhaka should never forget that the only motive behind all his prayers should be to unite his personal will to the Will of the Divine and not to pull His Will to be in alignment with his.

A total and joyous resignation to whatever the Divine Mother wills is what constitutes the seventh limb of a sincere call.

A sadhaka who relies at every step on the Divine Mother's working in his *ādhāra* and perfects his prayer and call in all its seven limbs is sure to make a quiet and steady progress and not a painful and tormented movement. For him the Way becomes smooth and open, a progressive development and not a struggle; and the sadhana goes on 'as an unfolding, a natural falling away of defects and difficulties, and a coming of greater and greater light and power and transformation.'

IX.

How to Invoke the Divine's Grace

“The grace and the help are always there for all who aspire for them and their power is limitless when received with faith and confidence.” (Words of the Mother, Cent. Vol. 14, p. 91)

Man's life upon earth is full of uncertainties. Accidents and illnesses, frustrations and difficulties, and finally an untimely death are always stalking his way and may at any time turn from a mere possibility into an ominous reality stamping out the happiness of his existence. And yet, being painfully aware of his limited potency and resources, he knows perfectly well that it is altogether impossible for him to prevent these untoward misfortunes from occurring in his life. The result is that he suffers from the sense of a besieged being placed in the hostile ambience of an enemy land; and a constant tension of worries and anxieties and a mood of utter helplessness undermines the ease and peace of his consciousness.

At times, especially if he is of a religious bent of mind, he tries to console himself with a vague idea that there is Someone possessing an infinite power who may perhaps intervene on his behalf and save the situation, if only rightly appealed to. But this assuring idea receives repeated jolts and finally vanishes at the hour of need if and when the doubting rational mind with all its misgivings and reservations rises up and asserts itself, creating total confusion in the individual's heart. The disturbing thoughts that race through his mind at such hours of perplexity are somewhat as follows:

“Is there any such thing called a divine Grace? Is this not after all an illusory thing like the imaginary egg of a mare? For, if it is true, as our scientist-friends affirm, that the world and its events are governed by an inexorable chain of mechanical determinism devoid of any conscious purpose in it, how can there be left in this ceaseless unrolling of events any possible chink or gap through which the so-called divine Grace can possibly enter and try to alter the course of happenings. Surely this is an absurd expectation as futile as the hope of a drowning man trying to save himself by catching at a straw!”

But let it be unequivocally stated at the very outset that this sort of misgiving is not based on actual facts of the world; it arises out of a fallacious reasoning which draws its substance from ungrounded premises and false pre-suppositions. But even before we come to the pointing out of these wrongly assumed premises and pre-suppositions, we feel like advising a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga, who wants to build up his spiritual life, that against all negative whisperings of the adversary forces and the doubting Thomases, he should believe with all his heart and mind that there is indeed such a thing called divine Grace and that he must learn at every step to invoke this Grace and depend on its unfailing assistance.

Here are two passages from Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings which make clear to us the reality and the role of the divine Grace and the nature of its way of working.

“The Supreme has sent his Grace into the world to save it.” (MCW.Vol. 14, p. 86)

“The Divine Grace is there ready to act at every moment, but it manifests as one grows out of the Law of Ignorance into the Law of Light, and it is meant, not as an arbitrary caprice, however miraculous often its intervention, but as a help in that growth and a Light that leads

and eventually delivers... This Divine may lead us often through darkness, because the darkness is there in us and around us, but it is to the Light he is leading and not to anything else.” (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, p. 174)

The most wonderful thing about this divine Grace is that it does not appear for a moment and then vanish in the manner of the flash of a lightning. No, its action is constant and ceaseless and operative everywhere and in everyone’s life irrespective of any limiting or disabling conditions. What is more, it has been acting much before the advent of man upon earth, indeed since the beginning of this world manifestation. The greatness of this action of the Supreme’s Grace is too deep and sublime to be expressed in any human speech or even to be conceived by human thought.

But here a possible confusion or wrong notion has to be fully cleared. When we talk of the Supreme’s or the Divine’s Grace what do we mean by this Divine? Sri Aurobindo has warned the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga that they should not think of the Divine as a very powerful extra-cosmic Person who has ‘created’ outside of Him this world and its creatures and has since then been governing them and determining their moment-to-moment fate by arbitrary, albeit divine, whims and fiats.

No, the world is not the ‘creation’ of an extra-cosmic Deity; it is the self-manifestation of Sachchidananda, of the supreme and absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, and this Sachchidananda or the Divine is making His Will operative and effective in the bosom of this self-manifestation whose other name is world-existence, ceaselessly from moment to moment, with a great divine purpose behind.

Talking in a limited way we may state that here in particular upon this field of earthly manifestation the same divine Will has come down into the life of man and is guiding him from behind towards his divine destiny by applying a constant pressure on his present Ignorance-dominated consciousness and nature so that they can march with assured steps towards the attainment of divine light, peace, love, delight, liberty and harmony. The only aim of this constantly operative divine Will is to effectuate the best possible good at every moment in everyone’s life; best, of course, that will be compatible with and permitted by the present state of the individual that is entirely governed by the equally ceaseless action of cosmic Ignorance whose very badge in man is the separative consciousness whose other name is ‘ego’. And who can defy the universally valid proposition, ‘Where Ignorance is, there suffering too must come’? Of course, the ultimate victory will be the divine Will’s, and in spite of all the vicissitudes of his existence man will surely be privileged to have a divine life here in the earthly field in a physical embodiment.

But that is a far way off at the end of a long arduous journey covering many lives. And these lives, including the present one that we have been actually living, cannot but be occasionally visited by many types of misfortunes some of which may apparently be quite disastrous. At these moments of trials and stresses the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga is apt to get disconcerted and ask with a sense of great consternation: “If the divine Grace is in fact always operative, how is it that it could not prevent this mishap from happening in my life?”

The sadhaka has to banish from his heart this sort of doubting and distressing thought and believe with all the conviction of his inner consciousness that whatever may be the appearance, the divine Grace is indeed always acting, even in the midst of utter sorrows and failures, and

turning them into occasions of spiritual fulfilment whose real beneficial nature will be revealed in time. That the sadhaka is not being able to comprehend the inner significance of his apparent misfortune is due only to the vain and erroneous expectations of his ignorant ego-consciousness which obscure his inner vision thus preventing him from seeing the truth.

These are times of tests for the sadhaka and he must try with all his strength not to listen to the misleading voices of the Adversary but, instead, keep his faith firm that however dark is the present night, however grievous his present trouble, the divine Grace is there in action and is surely leading him to light and deliverance through all the unexpected twists and turns of his life. The sadhaka of the Integral Yoga, whenever he is confronted with a puzzling situation like what is depicted above, should immediately recall the two following passages from the Mother's writings and meditate on their deep import:

"...no matter how great your faith and trust in the divine Grace, no matter how great your capacity to see it at work in all circumstances, at every moment, at every point in life, you will never succeed in understanding the marvellous immensity of Its Action, and the precision, the exactitude with which this Action is accomplished; you will never be able to grasp to what extent the Grace does everything, is behind everything, organises everything, conducts everything, so that the march forward to the divine realisation may be as swift, as complete, as total and harmonious as possible, considering the circumstances of the world." (Questions and Answers 1956, Cent. Ed., p. 251)

"...if you can keep within yourself a confidence, a candid trust which does not argue, and the sense of... yes, it is truly a kind of trust that what is done for you, in spite of all appearances, is always the best thing to lead you in the quickest way possible out of all your difficulties and towards the goal... if you can keep that strong in you, well, your path will become tremendously easier." (Questions and Answers 1954, Cent. Ed., p. 445)

We recall in this connection the luminous words the Mother once addressed to the students of the Ashram School in course of one of her evening class talks of 1954. The gist of what she said is as follows:

If you can enter into the depths of things, eliminate all your ego-sense, and surrender yourself to the care of the divine Grace, unreservedly, without any doubts and misgivings pulling you backwards, you will come to understand the inner meaning of all that the divine Providence does for you in the course of your life's journey. You will find that all the apparent misfortunes befalling you are not just a cruel jest played at your cost. You will then clearly see that everything, even the darkest event, has an auspicious divine intent behind it. You will no more feel any sorrow on account of all the struggles you may have had to wage in the past or for the acute pangs of pain you may have had to bear in your life. An ardent fire of enthusiasm will then be lit in your consciousness which will impel you towards the attainment of union with the Divine and under its indomitable urge you will not hesitate to plunge yourself into even the most arduous Tapasya needed for the achievement of the Goal. You will always be animated with this certitude in your heart that the ultimate victory is sure to come at the end of all the struggles of the Path. (Based on the Mother's Talk)

Here a disturbing question may arise and unsettle the mind and heart of some calculating sadhakas. The nature of the question is like this: "If the Grace of the Divine is indeed so powerful, capable of achieving anything and everything, and if it is operative, as it is claimed,

always and everywhere and under all situations, how is it that we do not find the overt manifestation of this Grace in the same measure in everyone's life? We meet with some people around us whose life is a wonderful tale of uninterrupted action of the helping and protecting Grace of the Divine. But there are others whose lives seem to be almost constantly buffeted by all sorts of dangers and difficulties as if in their case such a thing as Grace is well-nigh non-existent. What is the reason behind this obvious inequality of treatment? Can we dare say that the Divine suffers from some fault of partiality? But the Divine being divine, how can that be?"

The question thus put seems to be quite baffling as if defying any solution. But the fact is otherwise. There is a great mystery of world-existence involved here. Let us try to see wherein lies the harmonising solution to this disconcerting riddle.

What we have to understand at the very outset is the fact that there are three different cosmic Forces simultaneously operative in the world and in the life of man. These may be conveniently termed 'Law', 'Compassion' and 'Grace'.

The first one is what people, depending on their psychological bent and angle of vision, designate as the 'Law of Karma' or the 'inexorable causal determinism' or the 'inscrutable indeterministic Providence' or simply 'Fate', 'Niyati' or 'Kismet'. The common underlying idea behind all these concepts is the conviction that whatever happens in a man's life happens because it had to happen, and no remedial measures can be contemplated which can possibly alter the course of events.

Let us devote here a little more attention to the concept of the Law of Karma. The basic tenet of this theory is that every man has to inevitably suffer the consequences of all that he has done before. A mistake committed, even in ignorance, an error indulged in, even if inadvertently, is bound to confront the man, today or tomorrow, in this life or in a life hereafter, with its corresponding result of sorrow and suffering: he is caught in a rat-trap from which there is no escape.

This is the first cosmic Force operative in man's life. But if this would have been the one and only Force in action, man and his world would have been destroyed long ago; for, so many mistakes are being committed daily and if everybody had to pay the price for his misdeeds in mathematical equipollence, man's life would be a long tale of unmitigated series of sorrows and sufferings and disasters. But in reality it is not so. The question is why.

Here comes the second cosmic Force operative in man's life. This may be called 'Divine Compassion'. It is an impersonal divine Force of love and goodwill which is acting always in every man's life and in the world at large, irrespective of any variation of conditions and circumstances. Its sole purpose is to mitigate the effect of Karma as far as possible, acting in the field of Karma itself, without annulling it altogether. It is because of the beneficial and moderating action of this Compassion that most of us are most of the time allowed to escape the full rigour of the 'punishments' that are due to us because of our constant defaulting. We may recall in this connection two statements of the Mother concerning the protective contribution of this second Force of statically operative divine Compassion:

"Who can stand before Thee, Lord, and say in all sincerity 'I have never made a mistake'? How many times in a day we commit faults against Thy work, and always Thy Grace comes to efface

them!"(MCW, Vol. 14, p. 87)

"Without the intervention of Thy Grace, who would not often times have come under the merciless blade of the Law of Universal Justice?" (Ibid., p.87)

Such is then the universal action of Divine Compassion which is all the time trying to lessen the impact of the universal laws of Justice and Karma. And this is operative everywhere in every man's life irrespective of the quality or the state of consciousness of individual men or their subjective attitude and preparation.

But this is not all. There is a third cosmic Force operative in the world. It is the person ward-oriented mobile divine Grace and this is the most wonderful Force of all which can really work miracles at any time overriding altogether the laws of universal Karma and rigorous Justice.

But what is this third Force? Well, it is divine Compassion but in another form and in another mode of action. In a simplistic language of imagery we may say that divine Compassion is like a frozen sheet of shining whiteness covering the whole field of world manifestation but almost in a static way by its very omnipresence, always seeking to diminish the painful negative effects of cosmic Justice and Karma but without getting specially concerned with any particular individual: its action is impersonal and general.

But for whatever reason, mostly because of a sincere and ardent call from an individual for divine help and intervention, this frozen sheet of Compassion gets melted so to say, acquires mobility, and starts moving towards the appealing individual to act directly and potently in his life in the prevailing circumstances, and alters altogether the adverse course of happenings. We give the name of Grace to this specialised action of divine Compassion.

And this acts in many different ways depending on the nature of the difficulty troubling the individual sadhaka. For dangers and difficulties threaten the happiness of man not in only one way but in diverse manners. Thus, depending on the particular situation, the divine Grace may assume at least six different forms; they may be designated as (1) 'Helping Grace'; (2) 'Protective and Saving Grace'; (3) 'Curative Grace'; (4) 'Dispensing Grace'; (5) 'Warning and Guiding Grace'; and finally (6) 'Liberating and Transforming Grace'. The epithets themselves are self-explanatory and do not call for detailed elucidation. So we shall content ourselves in each case with a few introductory sentences followed by some apt quotations from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother.

While walking through life's uncertain Path, whenever a sadhaka feels himself threatened by any difficulty of any sort, great or small, both inner and outer, he should not waste any time but turn immediately to the help of the Divine with as much ardour and sincerity as he can command. If his faith is strong and genuine, he will surely receive the help of the Grace to extricate him from the threatening trouble. Here is what the Mother says:

"Why, when you get into trouble, do you no longer ask for the help of the Divine Grace? Yet you know from experience that the result is unfailing and marvellous!" (Words of the Mother, MCW, Vol. 16, pp. 27-28)

Man's life is, at times quite unexpectedly, confronted with many types of risks and dangers. In

this case also the sadhaka should turn to the Divine without any undue delay, pray for His protective and saving Grace with the candour and faith of an innocent child, and continue praying persistently without allowing any diminution in his faith and ardour till the requisite intervention comes. Here are some words of Sri Aurobindo:

“To walk through life armoured against all fear, peril and disaster, only two things are needed, two that always go together — the Grace of the Divine Mother and on your side an inner state made up of faith, sincerity and surrender.” (The Mother, SABCL, Vol. 25, p. 9)

Occasional illnesses or even serious diseases are almost a universal besetting feature in the life of men. When thus confronted we turn here, there, everywhere except towards the Divine and take to this remedy or that remedy leaving out the only sure panacea, ‘action of the divine Grace’. But this is what the Mother would like us to do:

“Have faith. There is no disease which cannot be cured by the Divine Grace.” (Words of the Mother, MCW, Vol. 15, p. 164)

Now comes the question of the ‘Dispensing Grace’. In the course of our long life’s journey, we feel the need of so many things, for the successful conduct of the life and, especially, for the building up of our spiritual life. But we don’t know where to find these necessary things or how to procure them even when we know the way to do so. In this case too the sadhaka’s main reliance should be on the dispensing Grace of the Divine. Here are some assuring words of the Mother:

“And if you add to this the ardour of a faith and trust in the Divine Grace and that kind of self-giving to the Grace which makes you expect everything from It, then it can become tremendous; you can see things being realised more and more, and the most surprising ones can be realised one after another... at each step one comes to see that things are exactly what they had to be and the best that could be.” (Questions and Answers 1955, p. 243)

Now about the ‘Warning and Guiding Grace’. While walking through life it may often happen that, faced with a particular situation, the sadhaka is not being able to know what to do or what to avoid, or it may also sometimes come to pass that the sadhaka, out of sheer ignorance or due to a momentary lapse of vigilance, is going to adopt a course of action which is sure to prove deleterious to the good health of his sadhana or land him into some pit of disaster. What is one to do then? Who will guide and warn him at that critical juncture? Who else except the warning and guiding Grace of the Divine? Here are some assuring words of the Mother:

“My experience is like this: whenever you sincerely want to know the truth, you do know it. There is always something to point out the error to you, to make you recognise the truth. And if you observe yourself attentively you find out that it is because you prefer error that you do not find the truth.”

“Even in small details, the very smallest — not to speak of the big things of life, the big decisions that one has to take — even in the smallest things, whenever the aspiration for the truth and the will to be true are wholly sincere, the indication always comes...”

“Whenever there is sincerity, you find that the help, the guidance, the grace are always there to give you the answer and you are not mistaken for long.” (Questions and Answers, MCW, Vol.

3, p. 192)

Finally comes what we have termed as the ‘Liberating and Transforming Grace’ of the Divine. We all know by our experience that the life of a sadhaka is not by any means, at least in most cases, a way always sunlit and made soft with flower-petals. How many defects are there hidden in the recesses of the consciousness of a sadhaka! How many hundreds of weaknesses have struck their poisonous roots in nooks and comers of his functioning nature! It is an almost impossible task for any sadhaka to eradicate all his defects and uproot all his vicious weaknesses from his nature and consciousness, solely by the application of his own unaided paltry effort. It is only the Shakti or Power of the Divine Mother which can release us from their iron grips. And surely she will do so if only we can take refuge at her feet and surrender ourselves completely to her action with the utter simplicity and the trustful abandon of an innocent child . In that case we shall discover at every moment with a sense of happy surprise how and with what dexterity the divine Grace is at work to free the sadhaka’s nature and consciousness from the manifold bondage of his weaknesses and ignorance, whose inevitable happy culmination will be the spiritual transformation of the entire instrumental being of the sadhaka, consisting of his mind and heart and body in all their parts and functionings. It will be a constantly repeated delightful experience for the sadhaka to discover with surprise that it is the Divine Mother herself and not he himself, who, dwelling within him as a constantly active Presence has been doing all the sadhana in his *ādhāra*: he, on his side, is nothing more than an interested witness who is all the time watching with joyous wonder this amazing Lila of the Divine Mother whose sole aim in all her guidance is to lead the sadhaka to a state of total transformation. Here is a very succinct but profoundly significant message of the Mother:

“Have faith in the Divine Grace and the hour of liberation and transformation will be hastened.”

If such is the sixfold wondrous action and effectivity of the divine Grace, every sadhaka would surely want to know the process of sadhana he should adopt which would make the Grace of the Divine intervene in his behalf and help him in every possible way in the perilous journey of his life. But a doubting question may be raised at this point: Is there indeed or can there at all be any sadhana-procedure which will guarantee this intervention of the Grace? For we are often told that the Grace is *ahetukī*, unconditional and causeless, and ‘the Spirit bloweth where it listeth.’ Did not the Rishi of the Katha Upanishad too declare that ‘Only he whom the Being chooses can win Him’, ‘*yamevaisa vrnute tena labhyah*’?

If such be the case, how can a sadhaka expect with a sense of surety that in case of his need he would receive the help of the divine Grace? Surely he has no role to play in the matter of the intervention of the Grace!

No, the situation is not so hopeless for the sadhaka as it apparently seems. For the Grace is both conditional and unconditional at the same time. It is unconditional in Idle sense that its action does not depend on any outer Merit or fitness on the part of the sadhaka. Did not the same Rishi of the Katha Upanishad specify that “the Self is not to be won by eloquent teaching, nor by brain power, nor by much learning”? (Katha Upanishad, 1.2.23) .

And fitness? — Which sadhaka can claim with presumption that he has made himself so fit that the divine Grace is bound to act in his case whenever he summons it? Did not Sri Aurobindo throw cold water on such a claim by writing to a presumptuous disciple:

“Who ever was fit, for that matter — fitness and unfitness are only a way of speaking: man is unfit and misfit (so far as things Spiritual are concerned) — in his outward nature.” (Nirodbaran’s Correspondence with Sri Aurobindo, Complete Set, p. 461)

But does it then mean that the action of the divine Grace is altogether unconditional and the particular sadhaka has no say in this matter? This too does not represent the actual situation. For Sri Aurobindo has reminded us:

“...it [Grace] is not indiscriminate — only it has a discrimination of its own which sees things and persons and the right times and seasons with another vision than that of the Mind or any other normal Power.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 609)

Here is an admonition of Sri Aurobindo meant to disabuse the mind of the sadhakas concerning the mode of action of divine Grace:

“...you seem to think it [the Divine Grace] should be something like a Divine Reason acting upon lines not very different from those of human intelligence. But it is not that.” (ibid., p. 609)

Another important point to note. Even when the Grace intervenes in a case and starts acting in the life of a sadhaka, its mode of action may assume altogether different forms. Here is what Sri Aurobindo has to say on this particular point:

“It is not indispensable that the Grace should work in a way that the human mind can understand, it generally doesn’t. It works in its own ‘mysterious’ way. At first it usually works behind the veil, preparing things, not manifesting. Afterwards it may manifest, but the sadhaka does not understand very well what is happening; finally, when he is capable of it, he both feels and understands or at least begins to do so. Same feel and understand from the first or very early; but that is not the ordinary case.” (Letters on Yoga, pp.610-11)

Be that as it may, we are now interested in knowing what as sadhakas we should do in a critical situation of our life so that the third cosmic Force that we have called the ‘divine Grace’ may successfully intervene and save the situation for us. But before that let us brush up our memory about the essential points concerning the three cosmic Forces simultaneously acting in the world and also in every man’s life. The two following extracts from Sri Aurobindo’s letters will give us the essence of the matter:

“There are these three powers: (1) The Cosmic Law of Karma or what else; (2) the Divine Compassion acting on as many as it can reach through the nets of the Law and giving them their chance; (3) the Divine Grace which acts more incalculably but also more irresistibly than the others.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 609)

“It [the Divine Grace] is a power that is superior to any rule, even to the Cosmic Law — for all spiritual seers have distinguished between the Law and Grace.” (Ibid., p. 609)

Now, as we have pointed out before, this third incalculable Force, whose other name is divine Grace, is absolutely unconditional so far as the outer defects and qualifications of the sadhaka are concerned. But it is at the same time conditional in another way. For the all-seeing Divine looks into the heart of the sadhaka and examines his state of inner preparedness and the flaming intensity of his inner aspiration. As Sri Aurobindo has said: *“A state of Grace is prepared in the*

individual often behind thick veils by means not calculable by the mind and when the state of Grace comes, then the Grace itself acts.” (Ibid., p. 609)

But this inner preparedness will not come by itself. The sadhaka should not lapse into a mood of inert indolence and idly bide his time hoping that, since he has come to the spiritual path, the divine Grace is bound to act in his case today or tomorrow but surely act it will. This is a vain expectation. The sadhaka has to do his part well and with full sincerity. In the Mother’s words: *“One must know how to pay this supreme Grace the price it deserves.”* (Some Answers from the Mother, MCW, Vol. 16, p. 172) Sri Aurobindo too has warned us in a somewhat different way against any *laissez-faire* attitude of tamasic complacency. Let us listen carefully to what he says:

“It [Yoga] is not a fantasia devoid of all reason and coherence or a mere miracle. It has its laws and conditions and I do not see how you can demand of the Divine to do everything by a violent miracle.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 612)

So the essential point we have always to keep in mind is that the divine Grace will surely do everything necessary for us and do it with perfect effectivity if only from our side we adopt the right attitude and allow the Grace to act in an unimpeded way. In that case it is absolutely certain that no other strength or tapasya is needed for the successful building up and consummation of our spiritual life. Has not Sri Aurobindo assured us? —

“Strength has a value for spiritual realisation, but to say that it can be done by strength only and by no other means is a violent exaggeration. Grace is not an invention, it is a fact of spiritual experience... Strength, if it is spiritual, is a power for spiritual realisation; a greater power is sincerity; the greatest power of all is Grace.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 611)

We have at last arrived at the main theme of the present essay. That is: What type of sadhana should the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga precisely follow in order that the divine Grace in its most potent form can always and in every way intervene in his life and help him in every situation to lead him finally to his goal of spiritual fulfilment?

The first thing we have to know is that in this particular sadhana, principally based on the action of Grace, the sadhaka need not take recourse to any outer austerities or any violent effort of his personal will. What he has to do is to build up a ‘state of Grace’ in his consciousness and maintain it in an uninterrupted way. If he can do so he will find that the divine Grace has automatically started acting in his life and developing all that is necessary for his real growth both in his inner as well as in his outer existence.

But one thing the sadhaka should assiduously guard against. He should in no way oppose or impede the action of the divine Grace. He has to offer it his full collaboration and an unreserved and entire assent to its working. This is absolutely essential on his part. For as Sri Aurobindo has warned us:

“The Divine Grace and Power can do everything, but with the full assent of the sadhak. To learn to give that full assent is the whole meaning of the sadhana.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 583)

We may even venture to say that this offering of the full assent and collaboration and the building up of the state of Grace are not two different things; they represent the same sadhana-phenomenon viewed from two different angles. Now, the important question is: How

to develop this state of Grace? how to offer an unstinted co-operation to the working of this Grace in the sadhaka's life and being? Well, it is all a question of developing the right attitude in sadhana and moulding the consciousness into a state of unfailing opening and receptivity. For that the sadhaka has to pay constant attention to the observance of the following points:

(1) The very first thing one has to attend to is to consider the Divine as one's dearest one far above and completely transcending all other claims emanating from different persons and objects. At the same time the sadhaka has to feel with all his heart and mind that a genuine spiritual fulfilment is the only central object of his life dominating all other pulls and urges.

(2) Next comes a constant remembrance of the Divine in the sadhaka's consciousness throughout the entire period of his waking existence: this will lead to the establishment of an uninterrupted conscious communion with the divine Reality.

(3) The third essential element of this sadhana is to develop an active faith in oneself that the Divine is acting everywhere and at all times, in every object and in every person, and His action in each case is always for the good whatever may be the appearance.

(4) Now comes the sadhana of self-consecration in works. One must learn to do all one's actions, big or small, important or apparently trivial, not for the sake of the ego and its desires but as a loving and dedicated service to the Divine Mother. The sadhaka's constant mantra should be: '*Yat karomi jaganmātas tadeva tava pūjanam*' — 'Whatever I do, Mother, is done in the spirit of Thy worship.'

(5) Next comes the sadhana of the domination of the desire-being. One must try to eliminate from one's active consciousness the thousands of diverse desires that assail oneself; instead, one should develop in oneself the one and unique 'desire' of progressively establishing in oneself the all-engrossing love and devotion for the Divine.

(6) After this comes the sadhana of *śaranāgati* which has been the principal theme of our preceding essay in this book. One must consider the Divine as the sole refuge of one's life under all varying situations, and keep the eye of one's background consciousness always turned to the Divine with a calm, silent and patient expectation that one would be able to recognise the Divine's action at every moment and joyously assent to it.

(7) Along with this sadhana of *śaranāgati*, the sadhaka has to develop in his consciousness a dual attitude of (i) the sense of utter impotence so far as his personal egoistic capabilities are concerned but at the same time (ii) the sense of complete conviction of the omnipotence of the Divine Shakti. The sadhaka should have abiding faith in this double formulation: "O Divine, without you I am nothing, I know nothing, and I can do nothing; but with you I can be everything, I can do everything, and I can know everything." This concurrently functioning twofold faith is very much helpful in the building up of the state of Grace.

(8) Now comes a very important element of sadhana: it concerns the establishment of a spirit of sincere and constant gratitude to the Divine for all that He has done so far for him and for all that He has been doing for him even at this very moment, irrespective of whether the sadhaka is aware of it or not. The Mother has characterised this great virtue of gratitude as:

"A loving recognition of the Grace received from the Divine. A humble recognition of all that

the Divine has done and is doing for you. The spontaneous feeling of obligation to the Divine, which makes you do your best to become less unworthy of what the Divine is doing for you.”

This sense of gratitude coupled with a sense of perfect spiritual humility in the sadhaka’s heart are very conducive to the activation of divine Grace in his life.

(9) After gratitude we have to mention the indispensable virtues of faith and trust in the Divine. The sadhaka has to maintain at all costs an attitude of absolute faith and total trust in the active Presence of the Divine Mother and her constant loving Action in his life through all the thick and thin of its vicissitudes. The sadhaka should never forget that much of the effective potency of the Grace depends upon this faith and confidence. Here are a few messages of the Mother concerning the interdependence of faith and Grace:

“At every moment all the unforeseen, the unexpected, the unknown is before us — and what happens to us depends mostly on the intensity and purity of our faith.”

“...faith in the Grace always brings about its intervention.”

“For the Grace to have a perfect and total result of its action, the faith must be total and perfect.”

“Have faith and unshaken confidence. The Divine Grace will do the rest.”

(10) Now comes another essential aspect of sadhana to which the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to pay constant attention. It is the necessity of sincere rejection on the sadhaka’s part of all that contradicts his upward aspiration. For mere aspiration will not do unless the sadhaka remains perfectly vigilant and rejects in an uncompromising way all the negative traits and tendencies of his character which seek in a persistent manner to thwart his advance on the path of spiritual fulfilment. This effort of rejection has to be sincere and cover all the fields of his existence inner as well as outer. Much of the effectivity of the action of the Grace will depend on the sincerity of this rejection. Here are some admonitory words of the Mother:

“The Grace is equally for all. But each one receives it according to his sincerity.”

“Wherever there is sincerity and goodwill, the Divine’s help also is there.”

“Everyone is given his chance and the help is there for all — but for each the benefit is proportionate to his sincerity.”

(11) Finally comes the most essential virtue of all, the capacity on the sadhaka’s part of making a total and unreserved surrender to the Divine. If, as Sri Aurobindo has reminded us, this surrender is truly effected, no other strength and tapasya are then needed but this alone. The sadhaka has to take this attitude at all times:

“So far as my life is concerned, there is no such thing as ‘I’ and ‘mine’ to interest me. I belong entirely to the Divine. I will not allow any of my personal desires to come in the way of the fulfilment of the Divine’s Will. Always and in all situations I shall gladly submit myself to the Divine’s action and dispensation, and that I shall do, not with the effort of my will, but in a most spontaneous and joyous way.”

If the sadhaka can grow into and maintain this attitude at all times, all his problems will be over. For once the surrender is made true and complete, all else is done for him by the Divine.

The eleven points we have mentioned above constitute the sadhana for the building up of a state of Grace in the consciousness of the sadhaka; and once the sadhaka has fulfilled these conditions, he need not worry any more; for in his case the divine Compassion will turn itself into divine Grace and be operative in his life in a continuous way.

Let us close this essay with the following words of the Mother:

“We must learn to rely only on the Divine Grace and to call for its help in all circumstances; then it will work out constant miracles.”

X.

Personal Effort and the Divine Grace

While walking on the thorny path of spiritual Sadhana the sadhaka should never forget even for a moment that he is not alone in his arduous journey. But if not alone, who gives him companionship on the Path? Is it any human comrade who is referred to here? No, certainly not. From that point of view the sadhaka has to mercilessly dispense with all his inner dependence upon other human beings and be austere alone in his 'Pilgrim's Progress' to the divine Goal. Is it not asserted by the mystics of all ages that it has to be sternly "a flight of the alone to the Alone"? Did not the dying Buddha admonish his beloved disciple Ananda who was complaining of his future helplessness in the impending physical absence of his Master: "*Ānanda, ātmadīpo bhava*" – "Be a light unto thyself, Ananda" ?

But this is only one side of the coin. The other side is that we are really never alone on the Path. And this is the deeper side of the spiritual truth. For the Divine's Eye is always fixed upon the sadhaka; the Mother Consciousness is always accompanying him at every step of his advancement. Not only that; in reality the Divine Mother is everything. She is, of course, the Goal but she is also the Way; and she is again the Mahasadhika, carrying on that Sadhana herself. So how can the sadhaka say that he is alone on the upward march of his spiritual itinerary?

But the fact is that this deeper truth is not revealed to the sadhaka's consciousness in the early part of his sadhana. And in spiritual matters it is not the mental speculative knowledge which can be of much help. What is essential is to have the direct subjective experience of the Truth. Otherwise, without having this intimate experience to support him, if a sadhaka tries to shape his daily conduct in his dealings with life and its various possible situations, solely on the basis of intellectual suppositions, he is liable to commit many serious follies and land himself into great troubles.

It is almost a truism that till a sadhaka reaches the concrete realisation that there is none else in the universe than the Divine, and so long as he labours in his active consciousness under the delusion of separativity, he has to necessarily start in his sadhana and continue for a long time with the clear idea of three distinctive elements:

Firstly, the Goal: What is the destination of my sadhana? Who is the object of all my spiritual effort? And with whom am I seeking union? The obvious answer is: The Divine.

Secondly, the Agent: Who is doing the sadhana? Who is seeking the divine union? The answer is, of course, myself, the sadhaka.

Thirdly, the World or the Nature: that is to say, all the rest, whatever I, in my ignorance, have been feeling as different and distinct from my personal self, all that can be labelled as "not-I" to toy ignorant perception.

God, the individual sadhaka, and the Nature are thus the three diverging streams issuing forth from a unique source of confluence, the Supreme. Of course, such is the case in the experience of the novice sadhaka. Later on, when the sadhana will become mature and the sadhaka's mental ideas give place to direct spiritual realisation, he will come to feel concretely that there is indeed

one unique Reality functioning in the world, and that the three separate elements are not different and separate at all: they represent the Three- in-One and the One-in-Three. The Mother's Mantric words are worth recalling in this connection: "*Then you feel – everywhere, everywhere, everywhere: inside, outside, everywhere, everywhere – Him, nothing but Him – Him, His vibration.*" (On Thoughts and Aphorisms, MCW, Vol. 10, p. 156)

And this is what Sri Aurobindo explains in the second chapter of his seminal work, *The Mother*. "*In all that is done in the universe, the Divine through his Shakti is behind all action... In Yoga also it is the Divine who is the Sadhaka and the Sadhana; it is his Shakti with her light, power, knowledge, consciousness, Ananda, acting upon the Adhara... that makes the Sadhana possible.*" (Cent. Ed., p.6)

But this truth is at present veiled from the ego-consciousness of the sadhaka, and his lower nature is quite active with the sense of a separately functioning personal will. And so long as this state of affairs continues, the sadhaka cannot shirk his responsibility and pretend to leave everything, including his sadhana, to the care of the Divine Shakti; for, he should not fallaciously argue, "is not this Shakti the sole Agent in the world?"

No, this will not do. For this will be the case of a serious *dharmā-sankarātā*, a tragic confusion of standards. For, let us affirm once again with insistence that the law of functioning of the *siddha-cetanā*, the consciousness of the realised Yogi, is quite different from the law of conduct of the ego-bound consciousness of an ordinary ignorant individual. And we should not forget that it is the quality and the level of consciousness of the sadhaka which alone matters in the spiritual field.

Hence the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should always keep in mind that he has to conduct his life and mould the ways of his action in accordance with the actual stage of his consciousness: he should not seek to copy the mode of action of a *siddha-yogī*, a realised soul. In practical terms this means that he should not mistakenly abdicate his personal effort too soon but rather put it consistently at the service of the Divine. And as his consciousness grows and develops in spiritual awareness, his way of action also will correspondingly change and this change will be effected quite naturally and with a smooth transition. Such is the established rule of the game in the world of spirituality.

One has to traverse all the steps of the ascent and cannot allow oneself the risky luxury of a triple or a quadruple leap. "*On ne peut pas brûler tes étapes*" — "*One cannot skip the steps*", says the Mother. Sri Aurobindo's words also are in the same vein:

"...all evolution must move by stages; even the greatest rapidity and concentration of the movement cannot swallow up all the stages or reverse natural process and bring the end near to the beginning. A hasty and ignorant mind, a too eager force easily forget this necessity... This is not only an absurd expectation but full of danger." (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 268)

By applying this universal truth of progressive change to the case of whether personal effort is necessary in the life of a sadhaka it may be bluntly stated that so long as the sense of a separative ego with a separate will of its own is present in the sadhaka, he has to apply his personal effort quite seriously and not leave everything to the action of the divine Shakti. Hence is the admonition of Sri Aurobindo:

“Reject the false notion that the divine Power will do and is bound to do everything for you at your demand and even though you do not satisfy the conditions laid down by the Supreme. Make your surrender true and complete, then only will all else be done for you.

“Reject too the false and indolent expectation that the divine Power will do even the surrender for you. The Supreme demands your surrender to her, but does not impose it... Your surrender must be self-made and free; it must be the surrender of a living being, not of an inert automaton or mechanical tool.” (The Mother, Cent. Ed., p. 4)

The sadhaka’s personal effort should be engaged in making this surrender to the Divine genuine and thorough. And in the measure he is capable of doing so, he will find to his happy surprise that the Divine Mother has started acting quite overtly in his life and no longer secretly as before. And this with the purpose of building up his spiritual life and bringing him to the fruition of his divine goal.

Thus is solved the puzzling riddle of personal effort in sadhana vis-à-vis the action of the Divine Shakti, through a harmonious reconciliation of the two factors in the light of the Mother’s dictum: *“Everything has its own place and everything should be at its place”* — *“Chaque chose a une place et chaque chose doit être à sa place.”*

Let us close our discussion with an excerpt from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Synthesis of Yoga* which brings into focus the essential points of the problem and its solution:

“...there are two movements with a transitional stage between them, two periods of this Yoga... In the first the individual prepares himself for the reception of the Divine into his members. For all this first period he has to work by means of the instruments of the lower Nature, but aided more and more from above. But in the later transitional stage of this movement our personal and necessarily ignorant effort more and more dwindles and a higher Nature acts... In the second period the greater movement wholly replaces the lesser formerly indispensable first action... But the entire substitution of the divine for the human personal action is not at once entirely possible... A continual and always repeated refusal of the impulsions and falsehoods of the lower nature is asked from us... In the last period there is no effort at all, no set method, no fixed Sadhana; the place of endeavour and Tapasya will be taken by a natural, simple, powerful and happy disclosing of the flower of the Divine... These are the natural successions of the action of the Yoga.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent. Ed., pp. 79-81)

XI.

Sadhana through Work

Karma-sādhanā is a very essential part of the Integral Yoga. Our ultimate goal being the establishment of divine life upon earth and our intermediate goal being the achievement of victory of the Divine in the totality of our embodied human existence, a consecration of the thinking mind and its knowledge alone or the consecration of the heart and its emotions will not serve our purpose. The entire consecration of the pragmatic will in works is absolutely necessary. Otherwise, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, although one may find God in otherwise, one will not be able to fulfil the Divine in life. As a result the true victory that shall be the key to the riddle of our unhappy and transient and ignorant terrestrial existence will ever evade us.

The Mother also on her part has alluded to the essentiality of Karma-yoga for the fulfilment of the Integral Yoga and that at many places in her writings. Here is for example the substance of what she spoke in her conversation of 28 April 1929:

“In the integral Yoga, the integral life down even to the smallest detail has to be transformed, to be divinised. Otherwise one will always remain divided. For although certain experiences and realisations may come to the aspirant in meditation or in his inner consciousness, his outer life will remain unchanged. An ideal of this mutilated kind may be good for those who want it, but it is not our Yoga. For we want the divine conquest of this world, the conquest of all its movements and the realisation of the Divine here. It will not do to think that anything is unimportant or that the external life and its activities are no part of the Divine Life. If we do, we shall remain where we have always been and there will be no conquest of the external world; nothing abiding there will have been done.”

Now the central question is: How to do Karma-sadhana in the Integral Yoga? How to turn the execution of any action, karma, into Karma-yoga, yoga of action? For is it not an obvious fact than everybody without exception has been doing actions all the time? After all, what is the definition of an action? Surely it is not merely the overt activity done with the exercise of the external organs of action. Any energising of will is an action. Thus all our thoughts, feelings, willings, and imaginations, and what not, are so main actions or karmas done by us.

If such is the comprehensive definition of the term ‘karma’, it follows that everybody is a karma or worker at all times but for that matter is not surely a karmayogi from the spiritual point of view.

For it is not action as action which determines whether someone is doing Karma-sadhana or not: it is the spirit behind the action and the motive behind it which will settle the question. But what is the basic change in spirit and motive which transmutes someone’s ordinary action into an element of Karma-sadhana? The answer can be briefly stated as follows: the elimination of the ego-idea from all the limbs of an action, and the complete and unreserved consecration of this action to the Divine and his service are the twin elements which impart to an ordinary activity the character of Karma-sadhana. Here is a very short extract from Sri Aurobindo’s *The Life Divine* which sums up in a nutshell the whole course of Karma-sadhana:

“This consecration of the will in works proceeds by a gradual elimination of the ego-will and its

motive-power of desire; the ego subjects itself to some higher law and finally effaces itself, seems not to exist or exists only to serve a higher Power or a higher Truth or to offer its will and acts to the Divine Being as an instrument... In the end by this way one arrives at a consciousness in which one feels the Force or Presence acting within and moving or governing all the actions and the personal will is entirely surrendered or identified with that greater Truth-Will, Truth-Power or Truth-Presence.” (The Life Divine, p. 903)

While distinguishing the ordinary activities, both inner and outer, indulged in by a normal worldly man from the actions to be undertaken by an aspirant when he seriously considers taking up a spiritual life, Sri Aurobindo speaks in a very simple but forthright manner:

“Men usually work and carry on their affairs from the ordinary motives of the vital being, need, desire of wealth or success or position or power or fame or the push to activity and the pleasure of manifesting their capacities... When one takes up the yoga and wishes to consecrate one’s life to the Divine, these ordinary motives of the Vital being have no longer their full and free play; they have to be replaced by another, a mainly psychic and spiritual motive, which will enable the sadhak to work with the same force as before, no longer for himself, but for the Divine.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 669)

It is of course well understood that this “no longer for himself, but for the Divine” is easier said than done in practice. It cannot be achieved by any man in a day. A painstaking progressive sadhana is heeded on the part of the sadhaka to eliminate altogether his ego-will and desire from all the five component elements of his actions. And therein lies the process of Karma-yoga. Let us elaborate this point somewhat more fully.

To start with, even if the sadhaka of the Karma-yoga fails to achieve in practice from the very beginning all that is expected of him, he has to adopt from the very outset the appropriate right attitude in his mind and heart and at least intellectually know with clarity the nature of the successive stages of the sadhana he has to pass through, so that he may not be inadvertently sidetracked but rather measure with precision the progress he has been making on his long way to the final attainment, *siddhi*. Sri Aurobindo has delineated in a brief outline the successive stages in the sadhana of the Karma-yoga in the fifth chapter of his book, *The Mother*. Here is a synopsis of what has been written there:

“If you want to be a true doer of divine works, your first aim must be to be totally free from all desire and self-regarding ego.

“All your life must be an offering and a sacrifice to the Supreme. Your only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfil, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in her works. You must grow in the divine consciousness till there is no difference between your will and hers, no motive except her impulsion in you, no action that is not her conscious action in you and through you.

“Until you are capable of this complete dynamic identification, you have to regard yourself as a soul and body created for her service, one who does all for her sake... All stress of egoistic choice, all hankering after personal profit, all stipulation of self-regarding desire must be extirpated from the nature. There must be no demand for fruit and no seeking for reward...

“...keep yourself free from all taint of the perversions of the ego. Let no demand or insistence

creep in to stain the purity of the self-giving and the sacrifice. There must be no attachment to the work or the result, no laying down of conditions, no claim to possess the Power that should possess you, no pride of the instrument, no vanity or arrogance...

“Let your faith, your sincerity, your purity of aspiration be absolute and pervasive of all the planes and layers of the being...”

“The last stage of this perfection will come when you are completely identified with the Divine Mother and feel yourself to be no longer another and separate being, instrument, servant or worker but truly a child and eternal portion of her consciousness and force...”

“You will know and see and feel that you are a person and power formed by her out of herself, put out from her for the play and yet always safe in her, being of her being, consciousness of her consciousness, force of her force, Ananda of her Ananda.

“When this condition is entire... then you will be perfect in divine works...” (The Mother, Cent. Ed., pp. 15-18. Paragraphing ours.)

Such then is the whole programme set before the sadhaka of the Karma-yoga, his course of sadhana, and the nature of the ultimate attainment, *siddhi*. When resolved into their component elements, they amount to:

1. A total elimination of all sorts of desires from the consciousness of the sadhaka, ‘*hrdayāt samparityajya sarvavāsānā-panktayah*’;
2. an abolition of all sense of I-ness and My-ness, ‘*niraham nirmamo bhūtvā*’;
3. to do all actions in one’s daily life as self-consecrated offerings to the Divine, ‘*tadeva tava pūjanam*’;
4. to give up all hankering after the fruits of one’s actions, fruits outer or inner, gross or subtle, ‘*nirāśī bhūtvā*’;
5. to learn to see the Divine in every object and being and behind every event or situation of life and conduct all one’s actions as a service to his manifestation; and
6. to establish absolute equality in one’s heart and mind under all the stresses and strains of life, ‘*samatvatm yoga ucyate*’.

Now we come to the actual elaboration of Karma-sadhana, of the sadhana through works. Let us not forget that the basic goal set before himself by the Karma-sadhaka of the Integral Yoga is to achieve union with the Divine through the proper performance of works. Of course, there is no gainsaying of the obvious fact that all of us have been doing some action or other all the time. The crucial question is: How to turn the normal way of doing works into an effective means of Karma-yoga? But before we can adequately and satisfactorily answer this question, we have first to analyse the process of action itself. ‘

Now, if we clairvoyantly observe the physiognomy of our actions, we shall perceive that every single action big or small, noble or ignoble, high or low, inner or outer, has five distinctly

separate limbs:

1. Who is initiating the action and what is the motive or impulsion behind it?
2. Who is executing the action, the *kartā*?
3. With whose help and instruments the work is being done?
4. For whom and in whose interest is the action being undertaken? And finally
5. who is expecting any fruit out of this particular action and what is the nature of this expectation?

Now a thoroughgoing examination of any action done by a sadhaka in the present state of his impure and unregenerate consciousness will reveal that it is ego-idea and ego-will which are reigning supreme in all the five components of the action.

Thus, it is I who have initiated the action through my own inspiration or impulsion; it is I who am the doer of this action, and this sense of my being the *kartā* is quite strong in me; and, of course, the work is being done through my instrumental capabilities such as my intelligence, my linguistic or artistic capacities, and surely with my organs of action, *karmendriyāni*; and the work is done for me and for those in whom I am interested; and, finally, surely it is I who am seeking some benefit or fruit from the accomplishment of this action. And this is so in everybody's case for every one of his actions.

It is thus found that all our actions in our normal nonspiritual way of living are shot through and through with the dominant sense of ego and propelled by the motion of desire.

Now, the ultimate attainment, *siddhi*, of a sadhaka of the Karma-yoga will come when in all the five areas of every single Action done by him, it is the Divine who will be the governing principle and not in any way his ego and its progeny, desire. But this supreme consummating realisation can come within the reach of the sadhaka only after a very long and arduous sadhana comprising of many stages of successive advancement. Knot after knot has to be loosened; difficulty after difficulty has to be faced and conquered; the Divine Mother's help has to be invoked at every stage of the ascension. One cannot hope to bypass any stages or get a double or a triple promotion. One must hasten slowly and start from the very first stage of this sadhana of Karma-yoga. The successful completion of any one stage of progress will greatly help the sadhaka to tackle the next stage. Let us begin with the very first step in the sadhana of the Karma-yoga.

1. How to choose and initiate any action?

Since we are sadhakas of the Karma-yoga and not just ordinary men interested in the building up of their worldly careers, the only aim in our works at all moments of our daily life should be to choose that action which is in total conformity with the Will of the Divine. But we are just novices on the Path of sadhana. We are not aware of the Presence of the Divine near us nor do we have even the faintest idea about what the Divine's Will may be at this moment. Yet this is our resolve and aspiration that we must do only that action which is not only sanctioned but entirely governed by the Will of the Divine. Thus we face a dilemma at every moment of our

life. How to get at the solution?

The solution is easy to find. Before initiating any action whatsoever, the sadhaka of the Karma-yoga has to examine his heart and mind and see if he has been able to make them as blank sheets of paper where no personal preferences or antipathies or biases are inscribed. For it is these dispositions and related urges and desires which ordinarily propel someone to action. And the sadhaka has to be strict in his resolution that he will on no account act or react under the drive of any impulsion but do so only after due deliberation in a calm and totally detached way. He should never seek to justify or rationalise any choice of action if it is made under the push of any personal desire. But how should he then act at all?

He will act according to the best light available to him at that moment regarding the crucial question of what he should do then, this *kartavyam karma*. Here he has to be very very sincere and not take to any clever subterfuges to deceive himself and others.

Now this ‘best light’ may not absolutely be the ‘best’ but that does not matter at all. If the sadhaka is sincere, the Divine will surely look after this deficiency and make the light grow more and more in the consciousness of the sadhaka so that his discrimination of his ‘duty’ of the moment will gain in clarity and progressively approach the Will of the Divine.

Before deciding on any action, the sadhaka has to turn to the Divine and address him in this way: “O Lord, I want to do your Will but your Will is not yet revealed to my ignorance. And it is only because of that that I am taking recourse to my honest sense of ‘duty’ as determined by the ‘best light’ available to me. I am going to do my ‘duty’ but psychologically I am keeping myself ever ready to drop this one without any delay or reservation if and as soon as you make me know that this action is not in conformity with your Will. I divest myself of all attachment to this particular action and any and every action is welcome to me if it originates in your Will.”

This freedom from preference for any action whatsoever and keeping the consciousness absolutely ready to obey the Divine’s Will at every moment of one’s life is what constitutes the *siddhi* of the first step in Karma-yoga.

But what is this “best light” we referred to above and which should guide the sadhaka in the choice of his action? Let us listen to Sri Aurobindo:

“The work itself is at first determined by the best light we can command in our ignorance. It is that which we conceive as the thing that should be done. And ...it [may] be shaped by our sense of duty, by our feeling for our fellow-creatures, by our idea of what is for the good of others or the good of the world or by the direction of one whom we accept as a human Master, wiser than ourselves and for us the representative of that Lord of all works in whom we believe but whom we do not yet know...” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 209)

Let us repeat: Whatever be the nature of the “best light,” available to a particular sadhaka and whatever be the action chosen by him, the principle of sadhana at this stage remains the same. It is to be completely free from any attachment to any action and remain ever ready to follow the Divine’s Will whenever and in which ever way it comes.

2. What to do after the action is chosen?

Now the sadhaka has to proceed to the doing of the action: He has to do it as a really consecrated act, solely for the pleasure of the Divine. The ego with its own expectations should not be allowed to peep in there. The sadhaka has to try to feel as concretely as possible that the Divine is standing nearby and watching him acting. Here the principle is: “*Always behave as if the Mother was looking at you; because she is, indeed, always present.*” (Sri Aurobindo) While doing the action the sadhaka has to maintain in an uninterrupted way this sense of awareness of the Divine’s Presence. This will impart sanctity to the action however slight and commonplace the work may be. Also, as the sadhaka is doing the action in the presence of the Divine as a work entirely consecrated to him, he should try to do it as perfectly as possible, with as much attention as he can command. For is he not going to offer the work to the Divine as a beautiful bouquet of flowers? So how can he be slipshod in any of his actions?

3. Renunciation of all desire for fruit

Perfection is not the only thing the sadhaka should aim at in his action. What he has to carefully attend to is that no egoistic desire however slight or elevated it may be should be allowed to intervene and spoil the spirit of the work being done. An absolute renunciation of all desire for the fruit of action should be the principle the sadhaka has to scrupulously follow. For he has “a right to the action and not to the fruit thereof” — “*karmanyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phalesu kadācana*”. (Gita, 11.47.1)

But it is not so easy for the sadhaka to detect if any desire for fruit has sneaked in or not. As a matter of fact, our vital self’s craving or seeking after the fruit can take many forms some of which are so camouflaged in their disguises that it becomes highly difficult to discern them in their true nature. Sri Aurobindo has mentioned a few of these diverse forms in which the craving for the fruit of one’s action may appear. Here is the passage from his writing:

“The fruit we covet may be a reward of internal pleasure; it may be the accomplishment of some preferred idea or some cherished will or the satisfaction of the egoistic emotions, or else the pride of success of our highest hopes and ambitions. Or it may be an external reward, a recompense entirely material, — wealth, position, honour, victory, good fortune or any other fulfilment of vital or physical desire.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 94-95)

But Sri Aurobindo has reminded us that all alike are lures by which egoism holds us prisoners to it. “*Always these satisfactions delude us with the sense of mastery and the idea of freedom, while really we are harnessed and guided or ridden and whipped by some gross or subtle, some noble or ignoble, figure of the blind Desire that drives the world.*” (Ibid., p. 95)

But, in that case, should not the sadhaka ask for anything whatsoever from his actions? How could he then act at all? What should be the driving force behind? Sri Aurobindo has answered these nagging questions in one short sentence:

“...your only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfil, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in her works.” (The Mother, Cent. Ed., p. 15)

But suppose a sadhaka thinks that he has indeed reached this ideal state and doing all his actions following the prescription given by Sri Aurobindo. How should he know whether he is deluding himself or not? Herein the test offered by Sri Aurobindo:

“The test... is an absolute equality of the mind and the heart to all results, to all reactions, to all happenings... The tiniest reaction is a proof that the discipline is imperfect and that some part of us accepts ignorance and bondage as its law and clings still to the old nature.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 95)

Sri Aurobindo has further elucidated the position. Every sincere sadhaka of the Karma-yoga has to ponder over the following words of the Master:

“...so long as we work with attachment to the result, the sacrifice [yajna] is offered not to the Divine, but to our ego. We may think otherwise, but we are deceiving ourselves; we are making our idea of the Divine, our sense of duty, our feeling for our fellow-creatures, our idea of what is good for the world or others, even our obedience to the Master a mask for our egoistic satisfactions and preferences and a specious shield against the demand on us to root all desire out of our nature.” (Ibid., pp. 209-10)

To do every action as a consecrated offering to the Divine without any desire for any conceivable fruit from the action is the *siddhi* of this stage of the Karma-sadhana.

4. Renunciation of all attachment to any specific work

It is often found that although a particular sadhaka, in course of his advancement on the Path, has reached a state where he can do an action without any desire for fruit out of it, yet he still retains some preference for some particular types of work: the execution of these actions give him some special satisfaction. This attachment to work too has to be utterly renounced.

After all, the spiritual benefit of an action does not derive from the nature of the action but from the spirit in which the work is done. As the Mother has pointed out:

“The yogic life does not depend on what one does but on how one does it... it is not so much the action which counts but the attitude, the spirit in which one acts. To know how to give yourself entirely and without egoism while washing dishes or serving a meal brings you much nearer the Divine than doing what men call ‘great things’ in a spirit of vanity and pride.” (Words of the Mother, Cent. Vol. 16, pp. 181-82)

Thus, to consider all actions equally and renounce all attachment to any specific action but to do every single action of our daily life as a perfectly desireless consecrated offering to the Divine is the *siddhi* of this stage of Karma-yoga.

5. Actions initiated by spiritual inspiration

All our normal actions are vitiated by the presence of some personal desire behind them. In fact it is this desire overtly or covertly lying within us which propels us to any activity. And, that it is really so can be easily tested if we apply the following procedure indicated by the Mother:

“There is a very simple way of knowing. One has only to imagine that the thing one wants to do will not be done, and if this imagination creates the least uneasiness, then one can be sure of the presence of personal desire.” (Some Answers from the Mother, Vol. 16, p. 343)

If any sadhaka ever fails in this test and comes to detect the presence of some egoistic desire

mixing itself up with his sacrifice of action to the Divine, he has to critically re-examine his consciousness and take remedial measures to purify his mind and heart.

Now suppose for a moment that a particular sadhaka has reached a state where he does every single action of his daily life as a consecrated service to the Divine without seeking for any fruit out of it nor being particularly attached to any specific action. If this becomes the habitual poise of his consciousness, the sadhaka will by and by come across a new spiritual phenomenon. He will no longer have to choose an action with the help of his imperfect and fallible “best light” but will rather be guided in his choice directly by the divine inspiration.

Of course, this achievement has got many stages of progress. Thus, at first the personal will of the sadhaka may be occasionally or frequently enlightened or moved by a supreme Will or conscious Force beyond it; then, constantly replaced; and, last, identified and merged in that divine Power-Action. There are two separate passages, one in *The Life Divine* and the other in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, where Sri Aurobindo has described in sufficient detail this complex process of progressive taking over of the initiation of action by the divine Will from the inept hand of the sadhaka’s personal will. Those two passages are worth quoting here:

“This consecration of the will in works proceeds by a gradual elimination of the ego-will and its motive-power of desire... The law of being and action or the light of Truth which then guides the seeker, may be a clarity or power or principle which he perceives on the highest height of which his mind is capable; or it may be a truth of the divine Will which he feels present and working within him or guiding him by a Light or a Voice or a Force or a divine person or Presence.” (The Life Divine, p. 903)

“...something of the supreme Will can manifest in us as an imperative impulsion, a God-driven action; we then act by a spontaneous self-determining Force but a fuller knowledge of meaning and aim arises only afterwards. Or the impulse to action may come as an inspiration or intuition, but rather in the heart and body than in the mind; here an effective sight enters in but the complete and exact knowledge is still deferred and comes, if at all, later. But the divine Will may descend too as a luminous single command or a total perception or a continuous current of perception of what is to be done into the will or into the thought or as a direction from above spontaneously fulfilled by the lower members. When the Yoga is imperfect, only some actions can be done in this way, or else a general action may so proceed but only during periods of exaltation and illumination.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 207)

So the *siddhi* of this stage of Karma-sadhana can be summed up as follows: *“By the force of his devotion and constant self-consecration, the sadhaka’s contact with the Divine will become so intimate that at all times he will have only to concentrate and to put everything into his hands to have his present guidance, his direct command or impulse, the sure indication of the thing to be done and the way to do it and the result.”* (Vide The Mother, p. 16.)

6. Annulment of the sense of “I” as the worker

So long the sadhaka was under the strong impression that although he was receiving the inspiration for his actions from the supernal sources above and within, it was he himself after all who was in charge of executing the actions. Now even this sense of “I am the worker” will be abrogated from his consciousness. *“He will concretely feel that it is the divine Shakti herself who is carrying out all his works; all his movements are originated by her; all his Powers are*

hers, and his mind and life and body are only conscious and joyful instruments of her action, means for her play, moulds for her manifestation in the physical universe.” (Vide p. 16 of Sri Aurobindo’s *The Mother*.) In *The Life Divine* Sri Aurobindo describes the experience as follows:

“In the end by this way one arrives at a consciousness in which one feels the Force or Presence acting within and moving or governing all the actions and the personal will is entirely surrendered or identified with that greater Truth-Will, Truth-Power or Truth- Presence.” (p. 903)

Thus, the Divine being the actor of all one’s actions and oneself being the joyously interested witness of this divine play, is the nature of the *siddhi* of this stage of Yoga.

7. Experience of identity with the Divine

After the annulment of the sense of ‘I’ being the actor, after the abrogation of even the sense of oneself being an instrument of divine action, the sadhaka will arrive at the last stage of Karmayoga in which he will feel himself completely identified with the divine consciousness. Sri Aurobindo has described this summit realisation in this way:

“[In] the last stage of this perfection... you... feel yourself to be no longer another and separate being, instrument, servant or worker but truly a child and eternal portion of her [the Divine Mother’s] consciousness and force. Always she will be in you and you in her; it will be your constant, simple and natural experience that all your thought and seeing and action, your very breathing or moving come from her and are hers... When this condition is entire and her supramental energies can freely move you, then you will be perfect in divine works; knowledge, will, action will become sure, simple, luminous, spontaneous, flawless, an outflow from the Supreme, a divine movement of the Eternal.” (*The Mother*, : pp. 17-18)

Here lies the consummating realisation of Karma-sadhana in the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

XII.

The Problem of Right Action: How to Recognise the Divine Will

The Yoga of Sri Aurobindo aims at the perfect manifestation of the Divine in the field of earthly existence. A sadhaka of this path cannot therefore consider his sadhana fulfilled, simply when he has achieved union with the Divine in the profundities of his inner consciousness or on the heights of his being, leaving his outer nature imperfect and untransformed. An integrated and well-harmonised simultaneous realisation of divine Being and divine Becoming: such is the goal set before himself by the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga. It follows, therefore, that a perfect, integral and divine transformation of his whole nature including all the instruments of functioning forms an indispensable part of the sadhaka's programme. As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out:

“Life, not a remote silent or high-uplifted ecstatic Beyond — Life alone, is the field of our Yoga. The transformation of our superficial, narrow and fragmentary human way of thinking, seeing, feeling and being into a deep and wide spiritual consciousness and an integrated inner and outer existence and of our ordinary human living into the divine way of life must be its central purpose.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent Ed., p. 82)

Now, Nature in her dynamic movement is nothing but action. By action, of course, should not be meant only the outwardly manifested activity conducted with the help of the organs of action. The word ‘action’ has a much wider connotation in yogic parlance. Any energising of consciousness is called an ‘action’. Thus, every act of thinking, feeling, sensing and willing falls into the category of ‘action’. And if we seek to transform our nature, we have to carefully attend to the half-fixed, half-fluid mass of our thoughts, perceptions, sensations, emotions, desires, enjoyments, and half-blind activities which are in the most part habitual, customary and self-repeating, and then convert the spirit and body of all our works, without exception, to the spiritual way of living. And here arises for the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga the difficult problem of action. For doing any action in any way dictated by the whims of the sadhaka will not do for him in his lift of sadhana. The Mother's words addressed to the sadhakas of the Path are categorical on this point. Here is what she has said again and again: *“Pray to the Divine Grace to make you do always the right thing in the right way.”* (Words of the Mother, MCW Vol. 15, p. 243)

We find here two significant requirements: the right action and the right way of doing it. But the question is: How to judge the rightness of an action and what is, after all, the right way of doing it?

The difficulty becomes compounded when we come across the following affirmation of the Mother: *“There is only one way of being right, but there are many ways of being wrong.”* (Ibid., p. 242) The problem before the sadhaka is how to discover this unique way of doing the right thing. Should he follow the four rules (the aluminium rule, the silver rule, the golden rule and the platinum rule) to shape his actions in the right way while dealing with others in the course of his daily life? Let us recall the formulations of these four rules of conduct as given by Prof. Arohie J. Bahm (Philosophy, p. 323):

1. The Aluminium Rule: “Don't let others do to you what you wouldn't do to them.”

2. The Silver Rule: “Don’t do unto others what you would not have them do unto you.”

3. The Golden Rule: “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.”

4. The Platinum Rule: “Do unto others as others would have us do unto them.”

It is true that these four rules, distilled from the ethical experience of many cultures at different stages of development, work well in most situations confronting an ordinary citizen. But a sadhaka’s life, especially that of one who wants to put into practice the principles of the Yoga of Transformation as propounded by Sri Aurobindo, cannot be regulated by the mechanical application of copy-book rules however convenient these may prove to be for the guidance of normal men their conduct of ordinary affairs of the world. The sadhaka has to find out some inner law of conduct which will further his spiritual advancement. What that inner law is is what we shall presently discuss in the later part of our essay.

Another ticklish question that perplexes the sadhaka is as regards the comparative importance of the three different factors involved in any action whatsoever. These three factors are: (i) the intention, (ii) the means, and (iii) the consequence. Now, what constitutes the tightness of a specific action? Is it the tightness of the intention? or that of the means employed to execute the act? or, perhaps, none of these two terms but rather the goodness of the consequences that ensue from the action?

But is it possible to put forward the view that any means good or bad may be used with impunity if it can be shown that the end is good and beneficial? Or is it asserted that it is absolutely essential for an act to be judged at all right, that it should proceed from a good motive and pass through the use of right means to consequences which are themselves good? But what about that case, then, where the intention of the agent is good and the means adopted are also right but, somehow, the results achieved are not as good as they should have been? We have to discuss these questions also and arrive at the right answers.

Indeed, the sadhaka of the Integral Path finds to his utter consternation that the ‘Science of Right Action and Wrong Action’ is very recondite and its subtlety is such that it is not easy to unravel it. And what is most disconcerting is that in this field of supreme practical importance, while proffering their dogmatic advices no two sages are found who do not differ among themselves (*nāsau munir yasya ma tarn na bhinnam*).

Thus the situation becomes curiouser and curiouser as we proceed with the task of tackling the problem of action. And the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga may be wondering if it is at all possible to carry out in practice the categorically stated instruction of the Mother that “*one should always do the right thing in the right way and at the right moment.*”

Nevertheless there must be a solution to this labyrinthine puzzle and we must now venture to set ourselves to the task of finding it out. But before that let us be clear in our mind about what a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga seeks to accomplish in his sadhana. For Sri Aurobindo has so forcefully reminded us:

“A Yoga of works, a union with the Divine in our will and acts — and not only in knowledge and feeling — is... an indispensable, an inexpressibly important element of an integral Yoga. The conversion of our thought and feeling without a corresponding conversion of the spirit and

body of our works would be a maimed achievement.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent. Ed., pp. 84-85)

Now this total ‘conversion of the spirit and body of our works’ can be successfully brought about only by the integral enthronement of the Divine in place of the ego in all the constituent limbs of our acts. But what are these limbs?

Well, any meaningful voluntary action possesses the seven following elements inherent in it:

(i) Who is initiating the action? (ii) What is the impulsion behind? (iii) For what purpose is it being done? (iv) Who is executing the action? (v) With whose instrumentality is it being executed? (vi) How, in which spirit and manner, is it being done? and, finally, (vii) For whom, for whose benefit, is it being undertaken?

A moment’s reflection and introspection will reveal to us the surprising fact that, in the normal unregenerate consciousness of man, almost all acts, big or small, trivial or momentous, have the ‘ego’ of the worker installed as the sole governing factor dominating all the seven limbs referred to above. “I” and “mine” are the only possible answers to the seven questions that can be formulated in the case of any action. Of course, depending on the situation, this ego may be a gross or a subtle one, and have a compass large or small, but it is ego all the same.

Now, the task before the sadhaka is to banish altogether this ubiquitous ego and its protean progeny, desire. Instead, the Divine should be the consciously felt reality permeating all the seven limbs of every single act of the sadhaka. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“But a time will come when you will... realise that the divine Shakti not only inspires and guides, but initiates and carries out your works; all your movements are originated by her, all your powers are hers, mind, life and body are conscious and joyful instruments of her action, means for her play, moulds for her manifestation in the physical universe..

“The last stage of this perfection will come when you are completely identified with the Divine Mother and feel yourself to be no longer another and separate being, instrument, servant or worker but truly a child and eternal portion of her consciousness and force.” (The Mother, Cent. Ed., pp. 16, 17)

But this can only be the ultimate *siddhi*; and the sadhaka has to traverse a long, long way before he can hope to approach this Goal. Sri Aurobindo has delineated the whole Path and all the successive steps of the Journey in Part One (“The Yoga of Divine Works”) of his masterpiece, *The Synthesis of Yoga*. To attempt a summary of this way, even in the barest possible outline, is not possible here. Our present essay has a limited purpose. It deals with the state of a sadhaka who has no doubt resolved to realise in his life the whole goal of the Yoga but is otherwise a novice on the Path. He is sincere in his profession and seeks to do at every moment of his life the right action in the right way. And this too he knows that for a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga, at whatever stage of his progressive journey, the only action that can be considered to be genuinely right is that which is in accord with the Divine’s Will at that moment: no other criterion can be applicable here.

But merely knowing this yardstick does not solve our problem. For the Divine’s Will cannot be known for the mere asking. For that the sadhaka has to undergo some necessary psychological

preparation and adequately fulfil certain preconditions. Now what this preparation and what are these conditions? It goes without saying that all that we have to say in answer is meant solely for those who sincerely want to lead a spiritual life; our words and recommendations have no validity nor any relevance in the case of others.

Conditions for recognising the Divine's Will

First condition — The Divine and the spiritual life should occupy the place of prime importance in the sadhaka's life. Everything else, however valued by other people, should be allotted a secondary and minor place and not possess any intrinsic importance. Everything in a sadhaka's life should derive its value only in relation to its relevance to the pursuit of spiritual progress.

Second condition — The sadhaka should expect no egoistic return from his practice of Yoga or from his ardent seeking after the Divine. 'The Divine for the Divine's sake' should be the constant motto of his life. The vital self's craving for some desired fruit of his actions should be entirely renounced by the sadhaka of the Path. Wealth, position, honour, victory, good fortune or any other fulfilment of desire, the accomplishment of some preferred idea or cherished will, or the satisfaction of some egoistic emotion, or even the so-claimed 'legitimate' expectation of peace and joy — none of these or similar things should be allowed to intrude as motives behind any of the sadhaka's actions. The "*only object in action shall be to serve, to receive, to fulfil, to become a manifesting instrument of the Divine Shakti in her works.*" (Ibid., p. 15)

Third condition — All has to be done for the Divine, either directly if the sadhaka has reached that advanced stage of consciousness or, at least, indirectly through others. In the words of Sri Aurobindo, in any enterprise "*whether undertaken for ourselves, for others or for the race, it will no longer be possible to stop short at the idea of the race, of ourselves or of others. The thing we are doing must be consciously offered as a sacrifice of works, not to these, but either through them or directly to the One Godhead...*" (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 103)

Fourth condition — "*Remember and offer*" is the Mantra the Mother has given to every sadhaka of the Integral Path. The sadhaka has to form the firm resolution of offering all his movements, outer and inner, to the Divine. But what exactly is meant by this 'offering'? It means that all that the sadhaka does in course of his daily life should be done not with any egoistic or personal aim in view but solely "*as a service and an offering, in order to become more conscious of the Divine Will and to give oneself more entirely to it, until one has made enough progress to know and feel that it is the Divine who acts in you, His force that animates you, and His will that supports you — not only a mental knowledge, but the sincerity of a state of consciousness and the power of a living experience. For that to be possible, all egoistic motives and all egoistic reactions must disappear.*" (MCW, Vol. 12, p. 391)

Fifth condition — The sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should not forget that in our sadhana the entire life of the individual even to its minutest details has to be spiritually transformed. So it will not do for the sadhaka to split his daily life into two distinctly different parts, one part devoted to sadhana while the other is divorced from the spirit of sadhana, nor should the sadhaka make any essential distinction between work and work so far as the necessity of their being offered to the Divine is concerned.

For one who wants to grow in spiritual perfection, there are no great actions and small actions, none that are spiritually unimportant.

Sixth condition — A sadhaka following the Path of the Yoga of Transformation should know that, much more than offering his actions, he should try to offer his state of consciousness to the Divine so that the Divine Shakti could mould it in her own way. Offering for transformation what one is is infinitely more important than offering what one does. In the words of the Mother, *“if you truly want to receive the divine Light and transform yourself, it is your whole way of being you must offer...”* (MCW, Vol. 4, p. 373)

Seventh condition — This is one of the most important conditions to fulfil: it is to change the whole basic attitude activating all the efforts of sadhana of the sadhaka. A sadhaka of the integral Path should do everything, including his sadhana and his seeking after divine union or divine manifestation, only because he feels that such is the Will of the Divine in him and not because of any other consideration high or low. The Mother was once asked by a disciple: *“But why do we do this divine Work? It is surely to make ourselves...”* The Mother abruptly stopped the questioner from proceeding further and retorted:

“No, not at all. It is because that’s the divine Will. It is not at all for a personal reason, it must not be that. It is because it’s the divine Will and it’s the divine Work. So long as a personal aspiration or desire, a selfish will, get mingled in it, it always creates a mixture and is not exactly an expression of the divine Will. The only thing which must count is the Divine, His Will, His manifestation, His expression. One is here for that, one is that, and nothing else.” (MCW, Vol. 7, p. 191)

Eighth condition — To be aware of the Divine’s Will, the sadhaka should resolve to act always under one sole motive, that of the impulsion coming from the divine Shakti. No other motive such as desire, self-interest, fear, fellow-feeling, emotional adhesion, preferential ideas, etc., should be allowed to set him into activity.

It is quite possible that in his early imperfect state of sadhana the sadhaka may not always be actually capable of carrying out this resolve in practice but that should at least be his constant and sincere aspiration. *“O Divine, indicate to me your Will and I shall promptly and unreservedly follow it without any further calculation”*: such should be his constant prayer. Here is what the Mother prescribes in this connection:

“When one is perplexed, when one has to make a choice, when one doesn’t know what the right thing to do is — you see, one has to choose among two or three or four possible decisions and doesn’t know which is the right one, then one must put himself as far as possible in contact with his psychic being and the divine Presence in him, present the problem to this psychic consciousness and ask for the true light, the true decision, the one most in accordance with the divine Will, and try to listen and receive the inspiration.” (MCW, Vol. 6, pp. 340-41)

When the sadhaka has tried to fulfil the eight above-mentioned conditions, he has created in him the requisite state of psychological receptivity and can then reasonably expect to receive an intimation of the divine Will that is operative in him at that moment.

But in the beginning he can receive just a vague intimation only and not the direct and full awareness of it; for, he has not yet reached the advanced state of a concrete spiritual experience of the Presence of either the Divine or the psychic being. That experience will surely come with the further advancement of his sadhana. But at this early stage of his spiritual life, the sadhaka can at best expect to receive just a sign of the divine Will and that too expressed through the

medium of one of the conventional standards of conduct and principles of right action.

These principles and standards, vehicles of right action, may be for example, (i) the sadhaka's sense of duty, (ii) his feeling for his fellow-creatures, (iii) his idea of what is for the good of others or the good of the world, (iv) the direction of one whom he has accepted as a human Master, (v) his sense of ideal ethic, etc. But it is clear that none of these standards or principles can satisfy the requirement of a spiritually advancing sadhaka. All these are, no doubt, good in their own places and should govern the different stages in the progressive growth of the individual. But they are after all relative in nature and cannot be binding on all men for all men irrespective of their evolutionary needs.

Thus, it cannot but be that a particular norm of conduct which is good at one time for a particular stage of development will prove to be bad in other circumstances of growth. After all, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, "*good is all that helps the individual and the world towards their divine fullness, and evil is all that retards or breaks up that increasing perfection.*" But since this perfection is progressive and evolutive in time, good and evil change their meanings and values with the passage of time. Hence is the warning of Sri Aurobindo:

"To form higher and higher temporary standards as long as they are needed is to serve the Divine in his world march; to erect rigidly an absolute standard is to attempt the erection of a barrier against the eternal waters in their outflow." (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 180)

It follows, then, that a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to leave behind him all the makeshifts whose other name is 'temporary standards of conduct'. He will follow at all times one sole law, one sole principle: it is to accept all that comes from the Divine and only from the Divine, all that is sanctioned by the Divine's Will and only by that. As the Mother has reminded us, anyone aspiring to turn to the Divine must abandon all mental conceptions; the only true attitude for him will be to be plastic and ready to obey the Divine Command whatever it may be. (MCW, Vol. 3, p. 54)

But this is not an easy task. The forward movement of the sadhaka is of the nature of an adventure into the unknown or the partly known regions of the Spirit. In his attempt at deciding on a right action to be done in the right way, the sadhaka has to forgo the safe and sure clues of conventional standards of conduct; instead, he has to be utterly sincere and arm himself with certain spiritual qualities. Otherwise he will fumble and stumble at even second step. Every sadhaka of our Path should recall with profit the following words of Sri Aurobindo:

"It is not possible to enter utterly into the spiritual truth of the Eternal and Infinite if we have not the faith and courage to trail ourselves into the hands of the Lord of all things and the friend of all creatures and leave utterly behind us our mental limits and measures. At one moment we must plunge without hesitation, reserve or fear or scruple into the ocean of the free, the infinite, the Absolute." (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 197)

If any sadhaka can carry out in practice what Sri Aurobindo advises us to do in the above passage, he will not fail to discover a divine standard of action which will be at the same time the supreme spiritual law of his own true inner nature, *svabhāva* and *svadharma*, for the godhead in him is moving towards its own concealed perfection. This standard, free and flexible, as distinguished from all other man-made standards which, when turned into action, either waver on a flux of compromises or err by the partiality and the unelasticity of their

structures, will be based only on the spontaneous freedom of the all-wise Will of the Divine. When the sadhaka reaches this state, — and such is the goal of the Integral Yoga, — the way he will choose his actions and the way he will do them will assume an altogether different character. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

“The individual has nothing further to gain, no desire to fulfil; he has become a portion of the impersonality or the universal personality of the Eternal. No other object than the manifestation and play of the Divine Spirit in life and the maintenance and conduct of the world in its march towards the divine goal can move him to action. Mental ideas, opinions, constructions are his no more; for his mind has fallen into silence, it is only a channel for the Light and Truth of the divine knowledge. Ideals are too narrow for the vastness of his spirit; it is the ocean of the Infinite that flows through him and moves him forever.” (Ibid., p. 198)

The discussion so far must have made it clear that the goal of our sadhana in the conduct of our actions is to arrive at a standardless state solely governed at every step by the omniscient spontaneity of the divine Will but for most of us — sadhakas taking the first tentative steps on the spiritual Path — this goal is still very, very far away. Yet it cannot be denied that the task even for the novice sadhaka is to do all acts in conformity with the Will of the Divine. What do we do then? How to come out of the impasse?

The Mother and Sri Aurobindo have both assured us that even in the state of ignorance, even when the sadhaka is not aware of the presence of his psychic being nor, for that matter, of the Will of the Divine, he can surely put himself in the hands of the Divine in such a way, in such a spirit of sincere self-giving and a total trust in the divine guidance, that the Divine will intervene his life and guide him at every step along the right lines, albeit from behind the veil of outer ignorance of the sadhaka. After the passage of some months and years, when the sadhaka will cast a clairvoyant look at his past, he will discover to his happy surprise how he has been all the time infallibly led on his Path by an inscrutable supreme Wisdom. But for this to happen the sadhaka has to fulfil a number of essential preconditions and follow a certain procedure which is as follows:

- (i) Before initiating any action the sadhaka has to be vigilant and carefully discourage all ego-promptings and desire-impulsions pushing him to some specific activity.
- (ii) He has to invoke the Presence of the Divine Shakti, place himself in that ambience, and sincerely pray to the Mother Divine that he be rightly guided at this moment in the matter of the choice of the action.
- (iii) He must seek to eliminate all preferences and antipathies as regards the possible indication of the anticipated course of action.
- (iv) The sadhaka should try to silence all agitation in his mind and heart: all emotional effervescence as well as ideational excitement should be abated and calmed.
- (v) The sadhaka should be fully attentive, and patiently wait for the first sign of the inspiration coming from the higher or the inner source.
- (vi) If the sadhaka is really sincere in his asking for the divine directive and that too solely with the intent of carrying it out in practice without any reserve or hesitation, then he can reasonably

expect to receive the divine guidance in the propitious milieu of the mental and vital silence already created.

(vii) The indication from above or within may come in either of three different ways. (a) It may possibly come in the quiet mind as a sure knowledge as regards the course of action the sadhaka should follow at that moment, (b) or, it may come in the emotional heart in the form of a sure feeling, and indicate to the sadhaka which course of action will make him ultimately happy from the spiritual point of view, (c) or, the guidance may come in the dynamic vital in the form of a clearly defined intense will pointing to the right action among all possible alternatives. It should be carefully noted that this urge of will will be felt by the sadhaka as something intense but altogether limpid, free from all turbidity and excitement. The slightest appearance of excitement or confusion should make the inspiration suspect in the sadhaka's eyes.

(viii) After receiving the indication the sadhaka should proceed to choose the action which should be in accordance with the best light available to him at that moment. And while being engaged in the execution of the act he should keep his personal will always offered to the Divine so that the supreme Consciousness can rectify its orientation as and when it deviates from the right path.

(ix) Now about the attitude that has to be maintained. The sadhaka should do all that he has to do only for the joy of doing the right thing as an offering to the Divine. No other motive should be allowed to intrude there. As the Mother advises: *"You must not be anxious about the results; simply do a thing because you have seen that it is that which must be done; tell yourself, 'I am doing this because this is the thing to be done, and whatever may happen afterwards is not my concern.'"* (MCW, Vol. 4, pp. 12-13)

(x) The sadhaka should remain always vigilant to receive and recognise even the slightest indication coming from the higher or the inner source, hinting that he should change his act or the way he has been doing it. This indication may come in the form of a quiet but very distinct sense of uneasiness which the sadhaka will feel in the depth of his heart. When it comes, the sadhaka has to immediately stop and ponder, and pray to the Divine Shakti for the necessary guidance.

(xi) The sadhaka should never forget that it is not so much the outer form of action that matters but the spirit behind it. The Mother has often insisted upon this point. Here is a typical citation: *"From the point of view of a spiritual life, it is not what you do that matters most, but the way in which it is done and the consciousness you put into it."* (MCW, Vol. 14, p. 36) And about this right spirit and attitude Sri Aurobindo has this to say:

"The essential of the sacrifice of works must be there and the essential is the surrender of all desire for the fruit of our works, the renunciation of all attachment to the result for which yet we labour. For so long as we work with attachment to the result, the sacrifice is offered not to the Divine, but to our ego. We may think otherwise, but we are deceiving ourselves..." (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent. Ed., pp. 209-10)

(xii) A last point: The sadhaka should not forget that if one is sincere in his sadhana, for him everything in life can be utilised for the sake of progress, everything can be useful if one knows how to use it. *"The important thing is never to lose sight of the ideal you want to realise and to make use of every circumstance for this purpose."* (MCW, Vol. 12, p. 323)

A sadhaka of the Path of the Integral Yoga of self-transformation should keep the above twelve-point programme before his eyes and seek, in all earnestness, to carry it out in practice for every single activity of his life. This will help him to advance step by step, through various stages of his progression, to the ultimate goal of divine self-fulfilment. What these stages are and how to solve the problem of action in each of these stages, has been succinctly and very beautifully described by Sri Aurobindo in a passage of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. This passage interrelates all the varying standards of conduct in a synthetic sweep of vision and places all the attempts of man to regulate his life and action in the right perspective.

“In the ordinary life a personal, social or traditional constructed rule, standard or ideal is the guide; once the spiritual journey has begun, this must be replaced by an inner and outer rule or way of living necessary for our self-discipline, liberation and perfection, a way of living proper to the path we follow or enjoined by the spiritual guide and master, the Guru, or else dictated by a Guide within us. But in the last state of the soul’s infinity and freedom all outward standards are replaced or laid aside and there is left only a spontaneous and integral obedience to the Divine with whom we are in union and an action spontaneously fulfilling the integral spiritual truth of our being and nature.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 261)

Herein lies the ultimate solution to the nagging problem of right action and the methodology of recognising the Divine’s Will at every moment of the sadhaka’s life.

XIII.

Sadhana through Love and Devotion

(Prema-yoga)

Most of us who claim to be sadhakas are under the impression that it is almost an obvious fact that we love the Divine. But the fact is otherwise. Our so-called love for the Divine is not love at all in the spiritual sense of the term: it is only a simulacrum of love and devotion. But why do we venture to say so?

Well, there are some characteristic signs by which a true lover of the Divine can be recognised. Wherever these signs are missing or are feeble in nature it is presumptuous to assert or believe that one really loves the Divine. It is good to know these distinctive characters. For we may then cast a searching look at our own consciousness and judge for ourselves whether we have grown in true love for the Divine and, if yes, how far. For if true love develops in us, these signs of genuine love for the Divine are bound to appear in us. If any of these traits are found to be deficient on examination, that will attest to the fact that there is still some serious lacuna affecting our love. This checking up on our love and devotion in the light of the characteristic sure signs will make us aware of how far we have still to travel in order to attain to the goal of *Prema-yoga* or the Yoga of Love. There should be no scope for self-deception in this matter. Of course the Divine knows how much or how truly we love him, for he is *bhāvagrāhī*, that is to say, our heart is an open book before him; but what is more relevant is that we as sadhakas can become cognisant of the actual state of our consciousness. Let us then start mentioning one by one the principal specific characteristics of a genuine God-lover.

First Characteristic: The first sign by which a genuine God-lover can be known is that his thoughts and feelings always turn towards the Divine almost as a constant preoccupation. Not a single moment passes for such a sadhaka when he does not remember the Divine. The *Bhāgavata* speaks to us about the following prayer of Kunti addressed to the Divine: “O Lord, just as the river Ganga flows always towards the ocean carrying all its waters to pour into it, let all the movements of my heart and mind be directed to you in a ceaseless stream.”—“*Tvayi me ananyavisayā matir madhupate asakrt / ratim udvahatād addhā gangevaugham udanvati.*” (1.8.42)

Did not Sri Ramakrishna give the analogy of a man suffering from an acute toothache? He may engage himself in all sorts of activities during his daily round but yet at every moment he has the background awareness of the aching at the root of his tooth.

For a God-lover even meditation acquires another signification. It is not so much closing one’s eyes and concentrating within as the constant communion with the Supreme through one’s senses and mind and heart: “*Aikyam yad buddhimanasor indriyānān ca\ sarvadā/viśveśvare parādeve dhyānam etat prakirtitam.*” (Garuda-purana, Purva, 243.10) Here is what Sri Aurobindo says about it:

“*Manana and darśana, a constant thinking of him [the Divine] in all things and seeing of him always and everywhere is essential... an unceasing habit of all-embracing love and delight...*” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 575)

We have to obviate here one possible confusion that may trouble some readers. To be all the time turned to the Divine, will it not interfere with our active life? Or is it intended that a true God-lover should curtail his activities as much as practicable and pass most of his time in an indrawn state?

No, surely that cannot be the avowed purpose of the Integral Yoga. One has to live a normal and effective life devoted to the service of the Divine, but being all the time inwardly in touch with him. As Sri Aurobindo has so clearly stated:

“This [constant] communion is not to be confined to an exceptional nearness and adoration when we retire quite into ourselves away from our normal preoccupations, nor is it to be sought by a putting away of our human activities.” [The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 576]

“...the one thing essential is the intense devotion of the thought in the mind to the object of adoration... the comprehensive consecration in which all the thoughts are full of the Divine and even in the occupations of life every thought remembers him.” (Ibid., p. (549)

This may be difficult to achieve in the early part of one’s sadhana-career but this can surely be attained, with sufficient advancement on the Path, and has to be attained if one expects to be gifted with integral love for the Divine.

Second Characteristic: The full flowering of the first characteristic as discussed above helps the sadhaka, naturally and predictably, manifest a second characteristic which is the sign of established God-love. This is to feel the Presence of the Divine always and everywhere, in oneself and in others, in Sri Aurobindo’s words:

“...one comes to see the Divine everywhere and in all and to pour out the realisation of the Divine in all one’s inner activities and outward actions.” (Ibid., p. 549)

How far our love for the Divine has become true and sincere can thus be tested on the touch-stone of the following formula given by Sri Aurobindo: *“A growing sense of the Divine in all things.”*

Third Characteristic: This can be epitomised by the pregnant Sanskrit expression, *‘tadekasaranata’* — ‘taking refuge in the Divine alone.’ When one starts loving the Divine in the really right and true way, it is found that the Divine becomes for the sadhaka his only and unique *bhartā, suhrd* and *śarana* — friend and support and refuge. The sadhaka then hands over to the Divine the entire charge of his life very willingly and gladly and becomes free from all cares and anxieties; for the responsibility is no longer his but the Divine’s. And the Divine is quite capable of shouldering it if only the sadhaka resolutely surrenders himself to the Divine.

Of course, the sadhaka’s attitude should not be like that of Cromwell who gave this diplomatic advice to his fighting soldiers: “Have faith in God but keep the gun-powder dry.” This is not faith at all. For a genuine God-loving sadhaka the Divine should not be the last resort after he has first exhausted all other sources of support; he spontaneously turns to the Divine as his primary source of help and support. And there is a great joy in this attitude of *tadekaśaranaāa*, in this ‘taking refuge in God in all the vicissitudes of life.’ As the Mother has so beautifully expressed:

“There is a certain state of consciousness... in which joy is unmixed and light shadowless, where all possibility of fear disappears. It is the state in which one does not live for oneself but where whatever one does, whatever one feels, all movements aid an offering made to the Supreme, in an absolute trust, freeing oneself of all responsibility for oneself, handing over to Him all this burden which is no longer a burden.

“It is an inexpressible joy not to have any responsibility for oneself, no longer to think of oneself... when one lives like this, quite open, like a flower blossoming in the sun before the Supreme Consciousness, the Supreme Wisdom, the Supreme Light, the Supreme Love, which knows all, which can do all, which takes charge of you and you have no more worries — that is the ideal condition.” (MCW, Vol. 3, pp. 256-57)

So this is the third characteristic of a sadhaka who truly loves the Divine in a profound way.

Fourth Characteristic: A truly God-loving person cannot indulge even in the slightest degree in any thought or feeling or action which is not in consonance with the Divine’s Will. Any unspiritual movement visiting his mind and heart hurts him in an intense measure. He is always eager to keep the ‘hearth’ clean in every way. Hence the following definition offered by Sri Aurobindo for a sincere devotee of the Divine:

“...an all-embracing devotion to the Divine, becomes the whole and the sole law of the being. All other law of conduct merges into that surrender, sarvadharmān parityajya. The soul then becomes firm in this Bhakti and in the vow of self-consecration of all its being, knowledge, works...” (Essays on the Gita, Cent. Ed., pp. 269-70)

Fifth Characteristic: A sadhaka possessing genuine and entire love for the Divine renounces his self-will in every way. “O Divine, O my supreme Beloved, whatever you will, whatever you will”, this should be his aspiration and yearning of every moment. “Not my personal will but your divine Will”, should be the actuating motive behind all his actions. A great God-lover of the past rightly remarked:

“Whatever else we may give to God, should we refuse him our will, we give him nothing... Whoever retains his separate will does not love God perfectly.” (Bellecius, Solid Virtue)

Sixth Characteristic: Whatever may befall the sadhaka in his life, whatever dangers or misfortunes may overwhelm him with their black wings of despair, nothing can, if he truly loves the Divine, create even the smallest chink in the impenetrable armour of his love and faith in the Divine. Did not St. Paul throw the confident challenge “What shall separate me from the love of God?” And can we forget the unshakable resolve of Job in the midst of the greatest calamities of his life: “Though He [the Divine] slay me, yet will I trust in Him.” (Job, XIII.5)

“Even if He slay me”: Yes, a sincere love for the Divine keeps the sadhaka prepared for all eventualities, bene praeparatum pectus. And that not in a mood of grudging consent or even of devoted resignation but in full joy and eager acceptance. For in his case “adversity becomes the oil and wood which only inflame and preserve in him the fire of love.” “Radha’s Prayer” as formulated by the Mother embodies the attitude of a genuine God-lover:

“O Thou whom at first sight I knew for the Lord of my being and my God, receive my offering... What Thou wilt of me, that I shall be. Whether Thou chooseth for me life or death, happiness or

sorrow, pleasure or suffering, all that comes to me from Thee will be welcome. Each one of Thy gifts will be always for me a gift divine bringing with it the supreme Felicity.” (Words of the Mother, MCW, Vol. 15, p. 224)

Seventh Characteristic: This trait manifests at a much more advanced level of spiritual development. When a sadhaka reaches this stage, he cannot only keep firm his loving faith in the Divine even under the harrowing blows of life, but can actually see the auspicious hand of the Divine Mother behind all the misfortunes that may visit him. He will realise not in mere intellectual belief but in concrete experience that in God’s Providence there is no real evil; there is only good or preparation for good.

Thus, in life’s weal or woe, in sunshine or in cloudy darkness, to be able to see the loving Grace of the Divine is the seventh characteristic of a genuine God-lover. The following verses from Sri Aurobindo’s “Meditations of Mandavya” portray this trait in delectable poetry:

*“O joy of gaining all the soul’s desire!
O stranger joy of the defeat and loss!
... I will love thee, O Love,
Naked or veiled or dreadfully disguised;
Not only when thou flatterest my heart
But when thou tearst it!
...Easy is the love that lasts
Only with favours in the shopman heart!
Who, tortured, takes and gives the kiss, he loves.”*
(Collected Poems, Cent. Ed., p. 86)

Eighth Characteristic: The true lover of the Divine continues to rejoice in the Divine when he has absolutely nothing else to delight in. For he does not seek anything whatsoever from the Divine except his love overtly expressed or covertly disguised. In Sri Aurobindo’s depiction:

“...[the] imperative... delight in the Divine for his own sake and for nothing else, for no cause or gain whatever beyond itself. It does not seek God for anything that he can give us or for any particular quality in him, but simply and purely because he is our self and our whole being and our all.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 564)

We have indicated above eight different specific traits which characterise the state of consciousness of a sadhaka who has arrived at a true and sincere and one-pointed love for the Divine. This sort of all-forgetting love and devotion is for the sadhaka his greatest treasure, his best means for attaining to his goal and is also at the same time his supreme attainment, *siddhi*. Let us recapitulate in a somewhat different manner the essential nature of this crowning love for the Divine.

Well in that consummate state everything in the sadhaka, everything done by the sadhaka, is for the sake of the Divine and never for a moment for the sake of the ego. One completely forgets one’s lower self in one’s total preoccupation with the Divine. The Mother has described this state of perfect love in these words:

“...all the elements of the being, all the movements (whether outer or inner), all the parts of the being, all of them, have one single will to belong to the Divine, to live only for the Divine, to

will only what the Divine wills, to express only the divine Will, to have no other source of energy than that of the Divine.” (Questions and Answers 1953, Cent. Ed., p. 5)

Now, to arrive at this state of perfect love the Mother has prescribed for the sadhaka a certain programme of action which is as follows:

“Think only of the Divine. Live only for the Divine. Aspire only to the Divine. Work only for the Divine. Serve only the Divine. Be attached only to the Divine. Want only the Divine. Seek only the Divine. Only adore the Divine.” (White Roses: Letters to Huta)

By somewhat adapting the words of a great mystic of old we may state that a sadhaka of the *Prema-yoga* or the Yoga of Love should remember at all times that he must love the Divine with a sincere, singular and superlative love. He that is his all must have, his all, and none but He. The sadhaka must love God above all things or persons whatever or whoever, and must not be attached to anything or anyone besides Him; he should treasure only what he loves for Him and in complete subordination to His Will. Also, the sadhaka must love the Divine not with a divided heart but with an entire love uniting his mind and heart and will.

Also, as we have pointed out before, the sadhaka must love the Divine for the sake of the Divine himself and not for anything or whatsoever He can possibly grant him in return. Even the slightest intrusion of the attitude of give-and-take will make his love lose its purity and wholeness, and turn him into a ‘shopman lover’.

Of course it is an indubitable spiritual fact that such an entire motiveless love for the Divine on the sadhaka’s part will not go unrecognised by the Divine. As Sri Aurobindo has assured us:

“In return the Divine Mother also gives herself, but freely – and this represents itself in an inner giving – her presence in your mind, your vital, your physical consciousness, her power re-creating you in the divine nature, taking up all the movements of your being and directing them towards perfection and fulfilment, her love enveloping you and carrying you in its arms Godwards.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 757)

A true and integral love is indeed the greatest transforming power. The sadhaka’s perfect love for the Divine brings down in response the Divine’s unbounded love for the sadhaka and this love starts working in the sadhaka’s *adhara* to give him all possible spiritual fulfilment in Yoga. There is no other way except this unreserved loving self-giving to the Divine which can bring about such a miracle. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

“...to the soul that wholly gives itself to him, God also gives himself altogether. Only the one who offers his whole nature, finds the Self. Only the one who can give everything, enjoys the Divine All everywhere. Only a supreme self-abandonment attains to the Supreme.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 102)

Such is the state of all-consuming and all-transforming perfect love for the Divine into which the sadhaka has to grow if he would like to attain to the *siddhi* of *Prema-yoga*, the Yoga of Love and Devotion. But surely this cannot be realised in a short span of time. All his present unregenerate nature will vehemently oppose any such radical new birth on the sadhaka’s part. So we have to start in our sadhana from what we actually are in our present state with all its impurities and imperfections and move step by step along the steep ladder of our ascent to the

ideal love.

First, let us learn to run to the Divine for all our requirements even if they may be of a purely mundane nature. At the next step we will learn to shun the petty and impermanent things of this world and ask from the Divine only those gifts which are conducive to our spiritual growth. Next, we will learn not even to ask for these apparently noble and permanent possessions: our sole object of seeking will be the Divine and the Divine alone. This is how Sri Aurobindo has described the ascent of love and the progressive transformation of its motives:

“By seeking this good from the Divine, he [the sadhaka] shall come in the end to seek in the Divine all his good... By knowing the Divine in his forms and qualities, he shall come to know him as the All and the Transcendent who is the source of all things.” (Essays on the Gita, Cent. Ed., pp. 273-74)

The “seeking in the Divine all one’s good” and the “fixing in the Divine all one’s joy” is indeed the ultimate goal of our sadhana. But when we look at ourselves with an observant eye we very well realise that this ‘highest and intensest motiveless love’ for the Divine, this *parāprema*, is far far beyond the reach of our meager spiritual capacity. It is true that we as sadhakas fervently feel the need of such a love but this is equally true that the love for the Divine we actually possess suffers from a thousand and one limitations, and falls far short of our heartfelt expectation. What to do in this situation? How to grow in true and all-absorbing love for the divine Beloved? There are a number of ways to that attainment which may be briefly delineated as follows:

(1) A supreme love for the Divine Reality, a perfect adoration of the All-Beautiful, All-Blissful, All-Good, the True is the very nature of our soul or psychic being. That our external consciousness is not being able to share in this love and adoration is only because of many extraneous coverings shutting that love out from the superficial being. Love has not to be strenuously sought out from somewhere, it has only to be uncovered. And for that a conscious contact with the psychic is the best way possible.

If a sadhaka, because of his sufficient spiritual development in his previous lives, is born this time with a developed psychic being, he is apt to grow into true love for the Divine much more easily and spontaneously than others. But in any case there is a sadhana for the awakening of one’s psychic being and of bringing it to the front. Anyone aspiring to be privileged with genuine love for the Divine can very well follow that Sadhana and come to his fulfilment. (See Chapter XX of this book.)

(2) Our preoccupation with the vanities of ordinary worldly life and our self-absorption in the fugitive pleasures and satisfactions that our brief existence upon earth can offer us, prevent us from feeling their utter relativity and transitoriness and in the same measure pull us back from the Divine who is All-Love, All-Light, All-Joy and All-Mastery. The more we loosen our love and attachment for the things of the ordinary world, the more will the true love which is in the depths of our being shine forth and flood even our outer being.

(3) Being caught by the overpowering tyranny of the present and being dazzled by the glittering shows of the moment we mostly act as mesmerised creatures and remain quite oblivious of our actual situation in life. We feel a sense of false security even in the midst of the constantly altering vicissitudes of existence. So we do not feel any need for turning to the Divine. The

more we can feel our complete helplessness in life and at the same time the omnipotence and all-love of the Divine, our urge to turn to him in order to take refuge in his strong loving arms will automatically grow and along with it a spontaneously grateful love for him who alone stands by our side and sustains and protects us through all the ups and downs of life.

(4) In one of our preceding chapters we have already spoken about the sadhana of *Karma-yoga* or the Yoga of Works. Now to do all the actions of our daily life in a spirit of consecration to the Divine and not to give any quarter to our ego and desires is one of the most potent means of growing in divine love. Here is what Sri Aurobindo tells us in this connection:

“This... is the demand made on us, that we should turn our whole life into a conscious sacrifice. Every moment and every movement of our being is to be resolved into a continuous and a devoted self-giving to the Eternal. All our actions... must be performed as consecrated acts... It is evident... that, even if such a discipline is begun without devotion, it leads straight and inevitably towards the highest devotion possible; for it must deepen naturally into the completest adoration imaginable, the most profound God-love.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent. Ed., pp. 102-04)

One more point and we have come to the end of our chapter on *Prema-yoga*. One of the most remarkable traits of true love for the Divine in its purest form is that it is both all-exclusive and all-inclusive at the same time: exclusive because no other love, whether for a person or an object or a situation, can be allowed to be a rival to one's exclusive love for the Divine; and inclusive because one's love will be so universal in its scope that the sadhaka will be able to love all without exception with an equal love with no difference or variation. But the question is: How to reach this supremely desirable spiritual love characteristic of a most advanced soul? Well, the sadhana-procedure for this *siddhi* or attainment has six distinct steps or stages in it.

First Stage: This is the lowest stage, a stage in which most men live. In this stage the Divine is almost a nonentity in one's life. At the most one remembers him only in Sunday church service or in one's visit to the temple and on other such occasions. At this stage there is no real love felt for the Divine: the feeling one has is just formal and ritualistic.

Second Stage: At this stage one starts loving the Divine but this love is still only one love amongst thousands of other loves the person feels for various objects and persons. In the priority list the Divine occupies the lowest rung. In other words, if ever it is found that one's love for the Divine is standing in the way of one's love for say, A or B or C, etc., one will rather give up the Divine without much sorrow than the other objects of love.

Third Stage: Here the sadhaka's love for the Divine has been made sovereign: it dominates all other loves. The Divine has come to occupy the first rung in the priority list. In other words, the sadhaka is now prepared to give up any other love found incompatible with his love for the Divine. But with a significant reservation. That is to say, the sadhaka would very much like to retain both the loves as long as possible but if at all he has to leave A, for example, for the sake of the Divine, he will surely do so, but with a lingering ache in his heart .

Fourth Stage: In this stage the pain attendant on the rejection of a lesser love will be completely abrogated. The sadhaka will gladly and promptly part with any other incompatible love and faithfully stick to his love for the Divine under all circumstances.

Fifth Stage: In the preceding stage the sadhaka had no objection to the co-existence of many independent loves till anyone is actually found to be incompatible with one's love for the Divine.

But in this fifth stage all other loves except the love for the Divine are voluntarily given up. There reigns only one love in the sadhaka's heart, that for the Divine Beloved. This love is thus made all-exclusive admitting of no sharing, for "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." In the words of the Mother:

"To love truly the Divine we must rise above all attachments. To become conscious of the Divine Love, all other love must be abandoned."

But why is such a strict condition imposed? There are two reasons for this injunction. The first one is that *"there is a thirst for Love which no human relation can quench. It is only the Divine's love that can satisfy that thirst."* (MCW Vol. 14, p. 127)

The second reason is much more profound and is of capital importance in one's sadhana. It is hard for us to believe but yet it is true that any human love however noble and beautiful it may appear to be, if it involves some attachment on the part of the lover, cannot but act as a "short-circuiting" and prevent the passage of true divine love. Hence the Mother's warning:

"...whatever the sincerity, simplicity and purity of the relation between two human beings, it shuts them off more or less from the direct divine force and help..." (Ibid., p. 126)

The Mother has elaborated this point in her *Four Austerities and Four Liberations* in this way:

"These rare souls must reject all forms of love between human beings, for however beautiful and pure they may be, they cause a kind of short-circuit and cut off the direct connection with the Divine... Moreover, it is a well-known fact that one grows into the likeness of what one loves. Therefore if you want to be like the Divine, love Him alone." (MCW Vol. 12, pp. 68-69)

Sixth Stage: The stern and uncompromising words of the Mother as quoted above may sadden many human hearts. Is love then a taboo for the sadhakas?

There is a confusion of understanding here. No, the cancellation of all other loves does not mean that our life will become dry and dessicated and we will take delight in nothing in the world. For the cancellation intended is only of attachment to the objects of love and not of love itself. Sri Aurobindo has explained this subtle point in a passage of his book *The Synthesis of Yoga*. The passage is rather long but it is worth quoting here in extenso:

"Therefore attachment and desire must be utterly cast out; there is nothing in the world to which we must be attached... this does not mean that there is nothing at all that we shall love, nothing in which we shall take delight; for attachment is egoism in love and not love itself, desire is limitation and insecurity in a hunger for pleasure and satisfaction and not the seeking after the divine delight in things. A universal love we must have, calm and yet eternally intense beyond the brief vehemence of the most violent passion; a delight in things rooted in a delight in God that does not adhere to their forms but to that which they conceal in themselves and that embraces the universe without being caught in its meshes." (pp. 314-15)

Thus in the sixth stage our love becomes all-inclusive although essentially remaining exclusive to the Divine. For at this stage of development, to the sadhaka's intimate experience the Divine is in all and all are in the Divine and the Divine is all. Thus in this last stage the sadhaka can love anything and everything, anyone and everyone, but only for the Divine and through the Divine, without any separate attachment.

Here ends our long essay on the sadhana of *Prema-yoga*, of the Yoga of Love and Devotion.

XIV.

The Conquest of Self-love

A total and unreserved self-giving to the Divine on the part of a sadhaka is the key secret of living a truly spiritual life. And Sri Aurobindo has reminded us that, in practice, this “*self-giving... means a change from ego-centricity to God-centricity*”. (Letters on Yoga, p. 1374) But this ‘God-centricity’ is not so easy to obtain: it can come only if we truly and integrally love the Divine.

Now the question arises whether, as sadhakas of the spiritual Path, we fulfil the above condition. Of course, if someone asks us point-blank: “Do you love the Divine?”, our prompt answer will be: “Surely we do.” If now a second question is addressed to us seeking some clarification: “How do you know that you really love the Divine?”, our reply will perhaps be: “Well, we intensely like any discussion about the Divine and spiritual life; we sit in meditation at regular intervals; praying to the Divine is a normal feature of our life; we do not forget to offer flowers before the Images; and, of course, an attentive reading of books on spirituality forms a significant part of our daily life; etc.”

But these are not sure signs of one’s loving the Divine. Most often these apparently sacred operations hide behind themselves a pronounced form of self-love. This statement may seem to be rather startling and unbelievable but yet it is true. A sincere and clairvoyant search will reveal to us that this pernicious enemy of self-love can assume a legion of deceptive camouflages and openly parade before the eyes of the self-oblivious sadhaka.

In fact, most of us most of the time have turned ourselves into bond-slaves of “I” and “Mine” and the major portion of our activities during our daily life is devoted to the satisfying of the voracious hunger of this twin demon “I” and “Mine”. But this sort of self-love is totally incompatible with true love for the Divine. This acts as a stumbling-block to our effort at offering ourselves to the Divine. As a result our life of sadhana cannot develop up to our expectation and the progress made by us remains stunted.

And why should it not be so? If one cuts the roots of a tree and then pours water on the top of its branches with a hope to nourish it, will the tree grow in its stature or even survive? To allow self-love to sneak in is tantamount to the cutting of the roots of our spiritual life. Sri Aurobindo pin-points the real malady afflicting many sadhakas when he writes:

“Even in their sadhana the I is always there, — my sadhana, my progress, my everything... it is always one’s own sadhana, one’s own endeavour, one’s own development, perfection, siddhi.”
(Letters on Yoga, p. 1372)

So long as this unholy “I” occupies the central position in the field of our spiritual effort, it will be difficult for us to receive the bounty of divine Grace in a free and uninterrupted flow nor can we in that case expect to grow in genuine love for the Divine. A Christian mystic of Europe of the Middle Ages has succinctly stated the same truth: “As soon as one begins to seek oneself in one’s spiritual life, he ceases to love the Divine at that very moment.”

Indeed the co-existence of self-love and love for the Divine is an impossible proposition. The growth of one of these two loves leads to the diminution of the other. Thus, in the measure in

which a pure, unadulterated love for the Divine occupies the sadhaka's heart, his penchant for feeding his self-love is bound to diminish and disappear. Equally, any form or measure of self-pampering, whether knowingly or unknowingly done, cannot but proportionately dislodge from his heart the already existent love for the Divine. It is because of this fundamental truth of spiritual life that Sri Aurobindo has warned us in his book *The Mother*:

“Do not imagine that truth and falsehood, light and darkness, surrender and selfishness can be allowed to dwell together in the house consecrated to the Divine. The transformation must be integral, and integral therefore the rejection of all that withstands it.”(pp. 3-4)

Sri Aurobindo further says: *“If behind your devotion and surrender you make a cover for your desires, egoistic demands and vital insistences, if you put these things in place of the true aspiration or mix them with it and try to impose them on the Divine Shakti, then it is idle to invoke the divine Grace to transform you.”* (Ibid., pp.2-3)

We recall here the words uttered by Bellecius in his *Solid Virtue*: “Self-love is the rival, adversary and sworn enemy of the love of the Divine. Divine love cannot enter our heart unless self-love is banished thence.”

But the question of questions is: “How to do it”. Here is Sri Aurobindo's prescription:

“The remedy is to think constantly of the Divine, not of oneself, to work, to act, do sadhana for the Divine; not to consider how this or that affects me personally, not to claim anything, but to refer all to the Divine.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 1372)

We as sadhakas should never forget that the main purpose of our human existence upon earth in a physical body is to give ourselves totally to the Divine and be the perfect instruments of his manifestation. If we can successfully do this and completely forget ourselves we will be granted an ineffable Ananda beyond all human imagination.

While referring to this state of self-forgetting God-centric consciousness acquired by a sadhaka the Mother speaks:

“In the mere fact of not thinking of oneself, not existing for oneself, referring nothing to oneself, thinking only of what is supremely beautiful, luminous, delightful, powerful, compassionate and infinite, there is such a profound delight that nothing can be compared to it.

“This is the only thing that deserves... that is worthy of being attempted. All the rest is only marking time.” (Questions and Answers, MCW, Vol. 3, p. 269)

Alas, this ‘marking time on the same spot’ many of us have been doing most of the time. We pretend to do the necessary sadhana by displaying the inessential trappings of a spiritual life but the flaw remains at the very base: we do not pay sufficient attention to the eradication of our ego-centricity and its attendant evil, self-love. This self-love prospers in the sadhaka's consciousness in many different ways unimaginable to the unwary sadhaka. In a significant passage of his treatise on the acquisition of what he calls ‘Solid Virtue’, Bellecius writes:

“Self-love is a crafty, skilful, obstinate enemy. There is no prevarication of which it is not the principle. It frequently assumes the mask of virtue to conceal its deformity. Self-love possesses

an inconceivable dexterity in seeking itself in all things — even thingy divine, and in constituting itself the last end of all its actions. It has but itself in view, seeks only its own glory and advantage everywhere. It has a thousand ways of justifying itself, a thousand intensities through which to insinuate itself. Its deceits are extremely concealed as they are continual. It has defensive weapons as well as offensive ones. Very often it even causes us to abandon one passion only in order to satisfy another. Everything, even nothingness itself, serves it as a nutrient. If it is vanquished and we flatter ourselves upon it, then, lo, self-love survives its ruin!... Self-love deceives all our actions with the twin motivations of hope and/or fear.”

The passage from Bellecius is long but it was worth quoting here. For it leaves us really speechless when we discover in how many different ways we indulge in our self-love in our daily life of sadhana and how subtle and deep-rooted is our self-deception in this regard. And it is not that this sort of self-deception is a rarity in the sadhaka’s life: it is often a habitual feature of his daily life. Did not the Mother say in surprise —

“It is amazing, amazing — this power of self-deception, the mind’s skill in finding an admirable justification for any ignorance, any stupidity whatsoever. This is not an experience that comes only now and then. It is something which you can observe from minute to minute.” (On Thoughts and Aphorisms, MCW, Vol. 10, p. 82)

This fourteenth chapter of ours is entirely devoted to the elucidation of the necessity of eradication of self-love from the consciousness of the sadhaka, for so long as this bane is allowed to remain, it proves itself highly detrimental to any progress in sadhana. Many, many are the harmful effects produced by this nuisance of self-love. It completely disrupts the right functioning of all the inner faculties of the sadhaka’s consciousness. Thus it invades his mind and heart and will and corrupts them. Self-love enthrones itself in the sadhaka’s heart, knows how to confuse his mind by its illusions, and to deceive his will by its threatenings or flatteries as the case may be. For it has the capacity of derailing all our actions from the straight path through the twin motivations of hope and/or fear as we indicated above.

Because of the intrusion of self-will our faculty of understanding gets confused and obscured, and we fail to see a thing as it really is but always in a distorted way; and we think ourselves to be what we are not. Self-love constantly creates in the sadhaka a sense of illusion and delusion and he is led to commit many a mistake and take many false steps on the path of sadhana.

Our emotional nature too falls often under the corrupting influence of self-will and self-love. A black veil is then interposed before the eyes of our perception and judgment and we become prone to commit any evil act however dangerous or heinous it may be in its nature.

After deluding our mind and heart, self-love moves to attack our faculty of will which then loses sight of the right goal before us and rushes impetuously towards a dark pit of perdition sidetracking the path of light.

At a further stage of downfall the sadhaka’s personal will goes at every moment counter to the will of the Divine but he cannot realise his folly because of the blindness brought about by self-love.

Another deleterious effect produced by inordinate self-love is to create a false scare in the mind and heart of the sadhaka in order to dissuade him from following the path of spirituality. It goes

on suggesting to the credulous sadhaka many sorts of imaginary fears such as:

“Beware, danger is looming large before you. Never forget that too much effort at sadhana may make you lose the sanity of your mind. Rather slow down your progress; otherwise, who knows, you may stumble on the path and break your limbs. In the name of the Divine do not give up everything else. For the result may be that you will lose both the ends; a spiritual realisation worth the name will elude you while you will completely lose your life in the world. After all, you should know that to fulfil all the hard conditions of an Integral Yoga may perhaps be possible only for some great and gifted souls but surely not for ordinary mortals like yourself. Any rash attempt at trying to copy their examples can only lead to some serious disaster. So the sane advice that should guide you in your sadhana-life is that you should follow the path of the Divine in a rather moderate way with permissible compromises to soften the impact. Otherwise, an undue suppression may undermine all your future. Etc., etc.”

Readers should not think that the imaginary fears we have detailed above are mere creations of our poetic fancy. They are not. The failures of many sadhakas to advance on the path of self-consecration and self-surrender have behind them such and allied misgivings whispered into their consciousness by their inordinate self-love.

In her commentary on *The Dhammapada* the Mother has alluded to this noxious whispering of self-love in another context. The purpose of this whispering is of course to dissuade the sadhaka from following the path of the Spirit in preference to the worldly material life of the senses. Here is what she says:

“...this horrible notion that only material realities are real... the whole of modern civilisation is based on this conception: ‘Ah, what you can touch, you are sure that is true; what you can see, you are sure that is true; what you have eaten, you are sure of having eaten; but all the rest — pooh! We are not sure whether they are not vain dreams and whether we are not giving up the real for the unreal, the substance for the shadow. After all, what are you going to gain? A few dreams! But when you have some coins in your pocket, you are sure that they are there!’

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“And that is everywhere, underneath everything. Scratch the appearances just a little, it is there, within your consciousness; and from time to time you hear this thing whispering within you, ‘Take care, don’t be taken in.’ Indeed, it is lamentable...”

“Now, in those beautiful cities that are so comfortable, when one wants to condemn anything, what does one say? — ‘It’s a dream, it is imagination.’” (Questions and Answers, MCW, Vol. 3, p. 204)

Now, both these whisperings referred to above which militate so much against the sadhaka’s spiritual zeal come from the same source, the source of self-love, one from the love of one’s assumed security and the other from the love of one’s comfortable worldly existence.

And as long as this self-love is not hunted out, the imaginary shadow-demons of fear and shrinking will always act as scarecrows and prevent the forward movement of the aspirant, pulling him always backwards.

We have already indicated in one of our preceding chapters that fearlessness and an entire and uncalculating faith and confidence in the Divine's working are the very sine qua non of a genuine spiritual consciousness. But these virtues cannot be acquired if self-love is not banished from the sadhaka's heart. On the other hand, when one achieves a total conquest over this disabling element of self-love, the sadhaka's psychology undergoes a radical transformation and he spontaneously grows into the right attitude befitting a sincere sadhaka of the Path.

Now this right attitude is principally characterised by fearlessness under all circumstances and an unwavering faith in the wisdom of divine Providence. The Mother has graphically described this ideal attitude through the words she has put in the mouth of two aspirants in her playlet, *The Ascent to the Truth*. This is how these aspirants express their feelings and resolve when confronted with an apparently impossible situation on a mountaintop:

“Everything else has disappeared. The steps by which we so laboriously climbed to the summit have vanished... Emptiness behind, in front, everywhere; there is only room for our feet, nothing more ... Where do we go now? What shall we do? ... The Truth is here, Truth alone, all around, everywhere... And yet to realise it we must go further. And for that another secret must be found... Obviously, all possibility of personal effort ends here. Another power must intervene... Grace, Grace alone can act. Grace alone can open the way for us, Grace alone can perform the miracle... Yes, we must have faith, an absolute trust in the Grace, a total surrender to the Divine... Yes, an absolute self-giving to the Divine Will. And since all visible paths have disappeared, we must leap forward without fear or hesitation, in complete trust... And we shall be carried to the place where we must go... (They leap forward) ... Here we are, borne upon invisible wings, by a miraculous power!” (On Education, MCW, Vol. 12, pp. 516, 517 and 518)

Such is the attitude we have to grow into and that not merely on one or two occasions but always, in every situation of our life, if we would like to complete our journey on the arduous Path of the Integral Yoga.

But this is not possible if the sadhaka has not the faith and courage to trust himself into the hands of the Lord of all things and the Friend of all creatures and plunge into the ocean of divine Providence without hesitation, reserve, fear or scruple.

Yes, ‘without hesitation, reserve, fear or scruple’; but it is impossible to fulfil this condition if the sadhaka allows even the slightest remnant of his self-love to linger in his heart and mind. He must empty himself totally of all self-seeking and unite himself in everything with the Will of the Divine. He must not vacillate in this task even for a moment — whatever may be the vicissitudes of life. He must deny his lower self absolutely, nor seek to gratify his self-love in any way and in any circumstance.

The following message of Sri Aurobindo should be the central Mantra of a sadhaka's life:

“The sadhaka must be free from ego; he should do nothing with reference to himself or for his own sake but only for the Divine; all his thoughts and feelings will be for the Divine. Not any ego-centricity but God-centricity should govern all his life.” (Adapted from pages 1369-71 of Letters on Yoga)

Here ends our chapter on the conquest of self-love.

XV.

On Human Relationships in Sadhana

In all spirituality with an ascetic orientation it is asserted that a sadhaka's love for the Divine should be exclusive; that is to say, it should admit of no sharing with others. Do we not read in the Bible? - "The Lord thy God am a jealous God." The Mother also has said: "*To love truly the Divine we must rise above all attachments. To become conscious of the Divine Love, all other love must be abandoned.*"

But, we wonder, why is this harsh injunction imposed? Two different reasons are advanced in its support. The first one is: "*There is a thirst for Love which no human relation can quench. It is only the Divine's Love that can satisfy that thirst.*" (The Mother, MCW, Vol. 14, p. 127)

The second reason is intimately connected with the first one, because it seeks to answer the very natural question: "How to acquire this Divine's Love so necessary for the soul's satisfaction? The first hint of the answer comes from the Mother's words: "*...whatever the sincerity, simplicity and purity of the relation between two human beings, it shuts them off more or less from the direct divine force and help...*" (Ibid., p. 126)

The Mother becomes more explicit when she explains: "*These rare souls must reject all forms of love between human beings, for however beautiful and pure they may be, they cause a kind of short-circuit and cut off the direct connection with the Divine... Moreover, it is a well-known fact that one grows into the likeness of what one loves. Therefore if you want to be like the Divine, love Him alone.*" (MCW, Vol. 12, pp. 68-69)

"Love Him alone?" — What a disconcerting demand is this? How disturbing for the ego-bound attached heart of man! The sadhaka may at this point raise some questions of perplexity as regards the real nature and goal of the Integral Yoga. He may ask:

"Have I to renounce all other loves, all without exception, for the sake of the love for the Divine? How can I stay then in the world? Is it really suggested that in order to receive the love of the Divine, one has perforce to give up all forms of human love such as love between brothers and sisters, parents' love for their children and vice versa, love between the lover and the beloved, and the helpful love between faithful friends? Will not our heart completely dry up in that case? On what foundation should we then build up our relationship with other human beings? Is it mooted that a stern indifference is the only right attitude for a sincere sadhaka?"

To answer these uneasy questions satisfactorily we have first to ply our boat of inquiry somewhat upstream and mount to the source of love itself. We have to understand the deeper mystery behind love as an emotion and its veritable nature. We have to know why love arises in somebody's heart and is directed to some particular objects and persons and not to others, and that too at some specific point of time. Is there any inevitability in this appearance of human love? And any psychological-metaphysical necessity behind its genesis? Finally, we have to comprehend the real implication of the Mother's statement: "*...human love is not a need of the soul, but rather a concession it makes for a time to the ego.*" (MCW, Vol. 14, p. 126)

We have always to bear in mind one fundamental truth concerning what is called love. This truth is that whoever be the lover and whoever or whatever may be the object of one's love, the

fascination and the attraction involved is always coming from one common source, the soul, the Spirit, the Divine who is there in everyone and everything, *sarvabhūtāntarātmā*. Viewed from the deepest point of view, this attraction is the attraction of the soul directed to itself in others. Let us explain.

World-manifestation is in its essence the One becoming many but not for that matter separating itself from the many. “I shall be Many”, “*aham bahu syām*”: that was the first Will of the Divine, the One without a second, *ekam evādvitīyam*. But because of the intervention of Cosmic Ignorance this ‘many’ thought itself to be different from the One, but the One continues to view the many as the One-in-many. As a result this One, the fundamental Reality is always seeking to annul the veil of Ignorance and bring the many back to the consciousness of One-in-many. This divine seeking is expressed in the world as the attraction of the One exercised on the One-in-many. And as a consequence the ‘many’, which ignorantly experiences itself to be different and cut off from the One, is unknowingly but constantly feeling a reflex urge, albeit obscure and distorted, to move towards the One. But as the essential truth is hidden from the ‘many’ which is shrouded in ignorance and dominated by the sense of a separative egoism, this ineluctable urge towards the unique Source cannot retain its pure form but becomes caricatured and perverted in the egoistic human heart. There, love’s apparent arousal and continuation becomes entirely based on a sense of need and deficiency felt by the ego. The satisfaction of this need is then sought through a peculiar human sentiment otherwise called ‘love’. Thus love loses its absolute character and becomes something altogether relative and conditional.

Also, depending on the particular part of the being in which this need is acutely felt, this ‘love’ takes different forms such as a physical lust, a vital desire, a mental fascination, etc. But, in reality, it is always the same pure love of the One for the One. Hence are the words of the Mother:

“There is only one Love – the Divine’s Love; and without that Love there would be no creation. All exists because of that Love, and it is when we try to find our own love which does not exist that we do not feel the Love, the only Love, the Divine’s Love which permeate s all existence.”
(MCW, Vol. 14, p. 130)

The same truth, the truth of all love in its multifarious manifestation being in essence love directed to the Divine alone, has been beautifully brought out in Rishi Yajnavalkya’s famous dialogue with his aspirant wife Maitreyi as recounted in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*. There, the Rishi explains to his wife that “not for the sake of the husband is the husband dear to the wife but for the sake of the Self that is in the husband” — “*Na vā are patyu kāmāya patih priyah bhavati ātmanastu kāmāya patili priyali bhavati*”. And the same principle holds good in the case of all other objects of love whether they be wealth or fame, parents or children, brothers or sisters, friends or lovers, etc. In every case it is *ātmanastu kāmāya*, for the sake of the Self or the Divine present in the object of love.

Such is the fundamental truth but this is not the way the ordinary ignorant consciousness of man interprets it. Man interprets it in a way that pampers to the interests of the separative ego. And this confusion becomes possible because of the double meaning of the term “atman” as used in Yajnavalkya’s expression “*ātmanastu kāmāya*” — “for the sake of the Self.”

The first meaning of ‘Atman’ is, of course, the Self, the Divine and that is the higher sense. But the same term means also the ego, the lower self. And man in his ignorance takes this lower

sense to be the purport of Rishi Yajnavalkya's teaching and claims on its basis that all objects of human love should be just the means for satisfying the obscure hungers and appetites of the ego-self, "*ātmanastu kāmāya*", "for the sake of the self.

It is because of this false interpretation that all human love, in spite of its "coloured and passionate professions" of self-giving is at its basis nothing more than a sheer self-centredness which grabs and pulls its object of love only to satisfy its ravenous hunger operative on different levels of consciousness. Here are some pertinent verses from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*:

*"This angel in thy body thou callst love,
Who shapes his wings from thy emotion's hues,
In a ferment of thy body has been born
And with the body that housed it it must die.
It is a passion of thy yearning cells,
It is flesh that calls to flesh to serve its lust;
It is thy mind that seeks an answering mind
And dreams awhile that it has found its mate;
It is thy life that asks a human prop
To uphold its weakness lonely in the world
Or feeds its hunger on another's life."
(Book X Canto 2, p. 608)*

Yet, the fact remains that, whatever may be its present deformation or even perversion, the basic truth is that "*all the forms that love has taken in the human consciousness on earth are but awkward attempts, deformed and incomplete, to find once again true Love.*" (The Mother, MCW, Vol. 14, p. 129)

Such is the mystery behind the phenomenon of human love; and, if this is the truth, how can a sadhaka remain forever satisfied with the giving and receiving of this frail and obscure human love? Sooner or later his heart must cry out and thirst for the real Love and seek union with the Divine, the Atman, who is always the real Lover behind the grotesque masks of various names and forms. As Sri Aurobindo reminds us:

"...our aim is to go beyond emotion to the height and depth and intensity of the Divine Love and there feel through the inner psychic heart an inexhaustible oneness with the Divine which the spasmodic leapings of the vital emotions cannot reach or experience." (Letters on Yoga, p. 754)

After all, why should a genuine sadhaka feel any pain or any sense of deprivation if he is asked to renounce the lures of ordinary human love for the sake of the love for the Divine? Is human love so precious and so noble a thing? A close observation will reveal the sombre fact that

*"The snake is there and the worm in the heart of the rose.
A word, a moment's act can slay the god [love];
Precarious is his immortality,
He has a thousand ways to suffer and die...
Trivial or sombre, disillusion comes..."
(Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, p. 611)*

No reflecting sadhaka, desirous of discovering the truth behind the glittering guises of the

appearances, can deny the veracity of what Sri Aurobindo once wrote to his beloved disciple Dilip Kumar Roy as regards the real nature of all human love. This is what he wrote:

“...the human feeling is always either based on or strongly mixed with ego... There is usually a hope of return, of benefit or advantage of some kind, or of certain pleasures and gratifications, mental, vital or physical that the person loved can give. Remove these things and the love very soon sinks, diminishes or disappears or turns into anger, reproach, indifference or even hatred.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 759)

Therefore, all profession of ordinary human love and its inevitable attendant, attachment, are absolute taboos to the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga. Indeed, any attachment whatsoever to anyone or anything in the world acts as a stumbling block to the building up of a veritable spiritual consciousness. And when we say “any attachment” this ‘any’ is very much rigorous in its comprehensiveness. There is no scope for any self-deception in this regard. For there is no such thing as a permissible attachment. All attachments have to be burnt up in the brazier of the sadhaka’s utter self-consecration to the Divine. Sri Aurobindo has made this point absolutely unambiguous in a magnificent passage of his *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

“...attachment... must be utterly cast out; there is nothing in the world to which we must be attached, not wealth nor poverty, nor joy nor suffering, nor life nor death, nor greatness nor littleness, nor vice nor virtue, nor friend, nor wife, nor children, nor country, nor our work and mission, nor heaven nor earth, nor all that is within them or beyond them.” (p. 314)

But does it mean that the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should be “heartless” and not love anything or anyone at all? Not so surely; for, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, *“attachment is egoism in love and not love itself.”* And when this egoism is renounced, attachment will surely fall off like a dead leaf from the tree but true love will shine forth in its utter purity and unimaginable splendour and delight.

Not only so; love will escape at the same time the artificial confines arbitrarily imposed upon it by the petty and short-sighted egoism of the individual. Being freed from all limitations, love becomes universal in its scope: the sadhaka will come to love everyone and everything, for his only object of love will then be the Divine and what is there in the world which does not have this Divine as its essential Reality? To quote the Mother’s luminous words:

“Then you feel — everywhere, everywhere, everywhere: inside, outside, everywhere, everywhere — Him, nothing but Him — Him, His vibration.” (On Thoughts and Aphorisms, MOW, Vol. 10, p. 156)

Let us close this chapter with some practical guidelines from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother which will help the Sadhaka of the Integral Yoga to steer clear of all dangers and pitfalls on the Way and build up his human relationships upon a right foundation in the early transitional period of sadhana when he has not yet attained to the union with the Divine:

- (i) A Sadhaka should have universal goodwill for all irrespective of sex.
- (ii) The love of the Sadhaka should be for the Divine. It is only when he has that fully, that he can love others in the right way.

(iii) A Sadhaka should not establish personal relationship with any other person in the sense of what Sri Aurobindo calls “*exclusive mutual looking to each other.*”

(iv) There should be no relationship based on sex differentiation: no friendship with someone simply because that someone happens to be a man or a woman.

(v) Relationship between a man and a woman should be as between two human beings and not as between a man and a woman.

(vi) One should not seek to establish relationships in order to satisfy the sentimental, sensational and physical wants of the lower vital nature.

(vii) A relationship should not be formed with a craving for the gratification of unchastened emotional desires or physical passions.

(viii) “*For one who has known love for the Divine, all other forms of love are obscure and too mixed with pettiness and egoism and darkness; they are like a perpetual haggling or a struggle for supremacy and domination, and even among the best they are full of misunderstanding and irritability, of friction and incomprehension.*” (MCW, Vol. 12, p. 69)

(ix) “*A human vital interchange cannot be a true support for the sadhana and is, on the contrary, sure to impair and distort it, leading to self-deception in the consciousness and a wrong turn of the emotional being and vital nature.*” (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, pp. 811-12)

(x) “*Since we have decided to reserve love in all its splendour for our personal relationship with the Divine, we shall replace it in our relations with others by a total, unvarying, constant and egoless kindness and goodwill that will not expect any reward or gratitude or even any recognition. However others may treat you, you will never allow yourself to be carried away by any resentment; and in your unmixed love for the Divine, you will leave him sole judge as to how he is to protect you and defend you against the misunderstanding and bad will of others.*” (MCW, Vol. 12, p. 70)

At last will dawn a day when the ascent of love will be completed on the world stage and the cosmic manifestation will be fulfilled in its true purpose. Then

“*...is our being rescued from separateness; All is itself, all is new-felt in God: a Lover leaning from his cloister’s door gathers the whole world into his single breast.*” (Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, Book X Canto 3, pp. 632-33)

And so far as individual human love is concerned, this too will undergo a divine apotheosis. For

“*All our earth starts from mud and ends in sky,
And Love that was once an animal’s desire,
Then a sweet madness in the rapturous heart,
An ardent comradeship in the happy mind,
Becomes a wide spiritual yearning’s space.*”

XVI.

Sadhana through Meditation

(Dhyāna-yoga)

“Concentration is very helpful and necessary — the more one concentrates... the more the force of the yoga grows.” (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, p. 729)

All of us are more or less familiar with the terms ‘concentration’ and ‘meditation’. Every sadhaka, we presume, is expected to sit in meditation as a regular feature of his sadhana-life. But what is after all meditation? What state of the sadhaka’s consciousness should deserve the appellation of a ‘state of meditation’?

We as sadhakas habitually meditate some time or other in course of the day. But the pertinent question is: What do we do individually when we sit in meditation? And what gain do we derive when we come out of our meditation into the active waking state? Do we add anything on the credit page of our spiritual progress after each seance of meditation? Or is it just a routine exercise expected of an aspirant, which perhaps gives some pleasant soporific touch to our drab mundane life?

A few other relevant questions crop up in our mind in this connection: Is meditation tantamount to one’s sitting still with both eyes closed? Or perhaps offering one’s prayers to the Divine with closed eyes? Or, who knows, meditation is perhaps the inner effort one puts in to bring to a standstill the ceaseless comings and goings of the wandering thoughts in our mind? Or, does it signify the steady visualisation of the inner image of one’s preferred deity or spiritual Master? Or, to take the worst case, does meditation boil down to passing some time in a half-awake and half-asleep state of peaceful torpor?

It goes without saying that none of the above descriptions can respond to a real meditation. It is well to remember that the capacity of sitting still in the same position for a very long time is no necessary sign of spiritual advancement. Even otherwise, when we concentrate, during our meditation, on the chosen object of our contemplation, what generally happens, is that most often our consciousness fails to go inward to the depths of our being; it remains functioning on the surface only and our mind and heart and inner senses continue ranging amidst the objects of the outside world subjectively imagined. The Mother’s ironic remarks about this type of meditation are worth recalling in this connection so that our mind may be disabused of wrong notion about meditation:

“...they think that their state is delightful and remarkable. They have a very high opinion of themselves... But usually it is a kind of kaleidoscope that is going on in their head, they do not even notice it. Still, those who can remain for a moment without moving, without speaking and thinking, have certainly a very high opinion of themselves. Only... if they are pulled out of it, if someone comes and knocks at the door... they immediately get furious and say: ‘There, my meditation is spoilt! Completely spoilt.’... Naturally this is not a sign of great spiritual progress.” (Questions and Answers 1953, MCW, Vol. 5, p. 42)

Well, all these are counterfeit ‘meditations’. But it cannot be gainsaid that there are genuine meditations of great spiritual value and among people who meditate there are some who know

how to meditate. But even in their case the question may be pertinently asked: A traditionally conceived meditation, even if rightly done, how much does it help a sadhaka in achieving the goals of the Integral Yoga? For whenever we utter the word “*Dhyānī*” or a “Yogi in meditation”, immediately in our mind there flashes forth the image of Lord Shiva or of Buddha or of Vivekananda, with eyes closed, a serene face and consciousness appearing to be completely indrawn, cut off from all contact and concern with the outer world.

But we must remember that this is only one specialised form of a successful meditation. As we are sadhakas of the Integral Yoga and seek the establishment of spiritual consciousness even in the waking state, and since we aim at the divine transformation even of our external nature, the connotations of the terms ‘meditation’, ‘contemplation’ and ‘*Samadhi*’ or trance should be much more wide and comprehensive in our case. Sri Aurobindo has warned us: “*A purely sedentary subjective realisation is only a half realisation.*” (Letters on Yoga, p. 540)

But why half? The answer is that in the traditional meditation, when effectively practised, the consciousness of the sadhaka splits into two distinctly different disjoint parts: one the inner one and the other the outer one. The inner consciousness of the sadhaka gets flooded with the downpour of supernal Light and Love and Peace and Delight, abiding and self-existent, while the outer untransformed life is left outside to fend for itself with the past momentum of the Nature.

For the goal set before traditional sadhana is the cessation of the wheel of rebirth in this unstable and unhappy world and the securing of one’s spiritual habitation in the blissful supraphysical heavens or even in the supracosmic timeless and spaceless Transcendence. And this goal can surely be achieved solely through the inner liberation somehow or other acquired.

But the Integral Yoga does not favour this kind of escapist spirituality. It demands that the Truth, the Light, the Power, the Bliss realised in the inner consciousness should enter into the outer waking consciousness also and become entirely effective there. Hence for the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga each act of meditation has to be outwardly dynamic and not confine itself to being merely subjective. The Mother has called this new type of meditation ‘*méditation transformatrice*’, the ‘*transforming meditation*’. We shall discuss hereafter how an ordinary meditation can be turned into a transforming meditation. For the moment it will be enough if we remember that even if we do not sit in traditional meditation it may be possible for us to make progress in the Integral Yoga.

And this is because for us meditation does not mean necessarily the withdrawal from all outer activities and self-absorption in the inner depths; for us ‘to meditate’ means to keep one’s whole consciousness turned and open to the Divine and the Divine Shakti, be it subjectively or objectively, always and everywhere and under all circumstances of life.

It is because of this basic truth that when someone asked the Mother whether it is absolutely essential that one should sit in meditation for some time every day almost as a discipline, she answered:

“But a discipline in itself is not what we are seeking. What we are seeking is to be concentrated on the Divine in all that we do, at all times, in all our acts and in every movement... The final aim is to be in constant union with the Divine, not only in meditation but in all circumstances and in all the active life.” (MCW, Vol. 3, p. 20)

Does it then mean that the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga need not sit in meditation at all nor practise developing their power of concentration? Not so surely; for that will be another sort of exclusive extremism.

We the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga will surely sit in meditation but with a different attitude and a different purpose. We shall surely develop the power of our concentration but not for any limited specific goal but for orienting the whole of our consciousness in all its parts Godward. It is good to indicate here, although necessarily in brief, the nature, necessity and utility of meditation and concentration in the Integral Yoga.

In the fulfilment of our sadhana we aspire to lead a divine life here upon earth itself in an embodied physical existence. But is it possible to lead a divine life without first achieving the divine consciousness? For, it is consciousness that determines the nature and quality of the life lived. Therefore, our first task must be to acquire a truly advanced spiritual consciousness. Then and then only can we hope to translate that consciousness into the activities of the obiter life. Otherwise, it will be like putting the cart before the horse, which will be not only absurd but wholly bereft of any fruitful result.

It is because of this obvious folly shown by many sadhakas in pretending to lead a spiritual life backed only by a non-spiritual consciousness that the Mother once scolded the inmates of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in these words:

“Many people who are here forget one thing. They want to begin by the end. They think that they are ready to express in their life what they call the supramental Force or Consciousness, and they want to infuse this in their actions, their movements, their daily life. But the trouble is that they don’t at all know what the supramental Force or Consciousness is and that first of all it is necessary to take the reverse path, the way of interiorisation and of withdrawal from life, in order to find within oneself this Truth which has to be expressed.” (Questions and Answers 1955, MCW, Vol. 7, p. 355)

The Mother further added: *“That is, the first movement is a withdrawal of the consciousness from... [the] total identification with outward and apparent things, and a kind of inward concentration on what one wants to discover, the Truth one wants to discover. This is the first movement.”* (Ibid., pp. 354-55)

Long long ago, in the Upanishadic age of ancient India, the Rishis pointed out the same situation prevailing with most men, when they declared: ‘The self-born has set the doors of the body to face outwards, therefore the soul of a man gazes outward and not at the Self within: hardly a wise man here and there, desiring immortality, turns his eyes inward and sees the Self within him.’ (Katha Upanishad, II. 1.1. Sri Aurobindo’s translation.)

Herein lies the absolute necessity, also the proper utility, of withdrawing our sight from the superficialities of life and bringing it inward to the depths of the being. In the last chapter of his magnum opus *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo has elucidated this important point in great detail. We quote here a small portion of what he has said there:

“These things are impossible without an inward living; they cannot be reached by remaining in an external consciousness turned always outwards, active only or mainly on and from the surface. The individual being has to find himself, his true existence; he can only do this by going

inward, by living within and from within... If there is a being of the transcendence in us, it must be there in our secret self... If there is a self in us capable of largeness and universality, able to enter into a cosmic consciousness, that too must be within our inner being... There must be for the divine living a transference of the centre and immediate source of dynamic effectuation of the being from out inward; for there the soul is seated... Thus to look into ourselves and see and enter into ourselves and live within is the first necessity for transformation of nature and for the divine life.” (The Life Divine, Cent. Ed., p. 1027)

So we see that if we would like to lead a truly spiritual-divine life with our nature divinely transformed, what becomes essential for us is not to remain floating on the surface level of our consciousness but rather to enter into the depths of our being, dwell there permanently, and send from there into our habitual waking consciousness all the spiritual glories and treasures.

We should not miss the import of the last part of the above sentence, for therein lies the special character of the Integral Yoga. We do not want to plunge into meditation only to disappear into some superconscious realms of consciousness. We seek instead the integral divine transformation even of our waking life and of our active outer nature. And we resort to meditation only as a necessary preliminary preparation for attaining to this ultimate goal. For it cannot be denied that a rightly conceived and properly practised meditation opens wide all the now-closed doors of our veiled reaches of consciousness. But Sri Aurobindo calls it only “*the first necessity*” and the Mother “*the first movement*”. To quote verses from Savitri

*“To free the self is but one radiant pace;
Here to fulfil himself was God’s desire.”*
Book III, Canto 2, p. 312)

If we keep this final goal always in our view, then only will we be able to give to meditation and concentration their right places in the comprehensive framework of the Integral Yoga. For in that case whatever supernal treasures and realisations we shall garner through meditation, we shall bring them into our outer waking consciousness, and stabilise them there. In this way a bridge will be built between the inner and outer ranges of our being.

Let us recapitulate: If we would like to be spiritual sadhakas worth the name and not be satisfied with being merely religious devotees, we have to develop in ourselves the higher spiritual consciousness as a first necessity. But what is the form and nature of this higher consciousness? Let us listen to Sri Aurobindo:

“The higher consciousness is a concentrated consciousness, concentrated in the Divine Unity and in the working out of the Divine Will, not dispersed and rushing about after this or that mental idea or vital desire or physical need as is the ordinary human consciousness — also not invaded by a hundred haphazard thoughts, feelings and impulses, but master of itself, centred and harmonious.” (Letters on Yoga. Cent. Ed., p. 744)

Yes, “*consciousness concentrated in the Divine, not dispersed and rushing about*”, and “*consciousness not invaded by a hundred haphazard thoughts, feelings and impulses*”, these are the twin goals we have to achieve if we would like to progress in the Integral Yoga. And here comes meditation as a great help to the sadhaka in attaining to these double objectives. But what is after all meditation? How is it distinguished from concentration and contemplation? And how to arrive at a successful meditation?

The answers to these questions cannot be properly understood unless one refers to the actual operations of one's consciousness. A mere intellectual discussion will not bring us any nearer to the right comprehension of these psychological things. Let us therefore start from the very beginning, always keeping our searching eye of observation fixed on the functioning of the various stages of our own consciousness.

Let us begin with the concept 'consciousness'. In the parlance of sadhana we often use expressions like 'development of consciousness', 'concentrating one's consciousness', or 'the widening, the inwardization, the heightening of one's consciousness.' But what is 'consciousness'? Is it the same thing as thinking or feeling or willing or some such thing? The answer is: Not so. Consciousness is something behind and outside all these operations and it can observe them as a completely detached witness.

All our thoughts and feelings and willings and imaginings and all other movements of our subjective being ceaselessly move in a procession before the consciousness as a spectacle, *drśya*, to borrow Patanjali's nomenclature: while the consciousness acts all the time as the seer, the *drastā*, of this variegated spectacle.

Now, if such is what 'consciousness' is, it is obvious that most of us, ordinary sadhakas, do not possess it even for a short while. For, in our normal subjective functioning in the course of our daily life, we remain totally involved in and identified with the uninterrupted stream of our psychological movements — we fail to observe them from outside.

In other words, we happen to "think" but cannot "see" ourselves thinking; we "feel" but cannot "see" ourselves feeling; we "will and desire" but cannot "see" ourselves willings. So long as we are in this state of identification, it will be impossible for us to "meditate" with a concentrated consciousness. We must first learn how to separate our subjective functioning into two distinct parts: one the executive operative part; the other the silent and detached observant part. And with this *sāksī* or "seeing" part we have to 'meditate'.

"But that is not the normal state with most of us who are only novice sadhakas. Ours is a state of quasi-total identification with the streaming flow of subjective movements. For successful meditation we have to develop there a constantly functioning 'witness consciousness', '*sāksī-cetanā*'. But how is one to do it? Is there any sadhana-procedure for that? The answer is: There is; and this sadhana has to pass through a succession of progressively advanced stages. To comprehend well the whole process, let us bring on the stage a fictitious sadhaka in his novice state and 'observe' carefully all that is happening in his subjective field while he is trying to "meditate". Let us start with the most elementary state.

First Stage (of so-called 'meditation'):

An introductory note: Those amongst our readers who are even cursorily familiar with the history of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram (Pondicherry) know that at one time in the past the Mother used to come every morning at 6 a.m. to the northern balcony of the Ashram Building to give 'Darshan' to the disciples and devotees who used to gather on the street below. The Mother would remain standing on the balcony for more than five minutes and then withdraw.

This short introductory piece of information concerning the 'Ashram life' of those days will help the readers to follow well our discussion of the various stages of meditation. Here is the

very first stage:

Let us hypothetically imagine that our novice sadhaka has been standing on the road and waiting for the appearance of the Mother on the balcony overhead. He takes a pious resolution that from the moment the Mother comes out on the balcony till she goes back, he will keep himself concentrated on her and her alone to the exclusion of everything else; outwardly he would keep his eyes steadfastly fixed on the Divine Vision. So far so good.

Ah ! the Mother appears on the balcony and looks down on her children assembled below. Our novice sadhaka joins his palms in a gesture of adoration and looks up at the Mother with a devotional smile. At the same time, he starts “meditating” on the Mother, for such was his resolution.

Time passes in silence; seconds tick away and soon five minutes are over. The Mother withdraws from the balcony and disappears out of sight. The assembled devotees and disciples disperse in silence to proceed to their respective places of work. Our novice sadhaka too terminates his ‘meditation’, brings his joined palms on to his forehead in a gesture of ‘Pranam’ to the Mother and then slowly walks away in a half-indrawn state. He is immensely pleased with himself for having had a successful “concentrated meditation” on the divine Mother for full five minutes. But was it really successful as a meditation? Did he derive much spiritual benefit out of his routine exercise in daily morning meditation?

For right answers to these questions we have to look into the subjective field of the sadhaka and follow the course of the thoughts and images that actually raced through his mind and heart while he was ostensibly “absorbed” in the “concentrated meditation”.

Well, here is one possible stream of thoughts and images that might have passed through his mind. There could be a thousand other alternative pathways. The individual joints and links in these plains of thought, which seem to the untrained eye as apparently quite unconnected and accidental, are really determined by a set of definite psychological laws and shaped by the person’s hopes and fears and impulses and inclinations. Some of these laws governing the succession of thoughts are: (i) Law of Similarity; (ii) Law of Contrast; (iii) Law of Contiguity; (iv) Law of Intensity; (v) Law of Proximity; etc. There is no necessity of elaborating on this point further here.

As we were saying, the shape of one possible stream of successive thoughts and images that raced through the sadhaka’s mind while he was “absorbed” in his meditation on the Mother might be as follows:

1. The Mother. 2. She is dressed in a red robe. 3. The colour of the robe is somewhat like that of a red rose. 4. Rose is not an indigenous flower of India. 5. Rose was introduced into the country by the foreign invaders. 6. Alexander the Great was the first invader of India. 7. Alexander’s Master was Aristotle; Aristotle’s Master was Plato, and Plato learnt at the feet of Socrates. 8. Socrates had to drink hemlock and die. 9. Was Christ too offered hemlock before his crucifixion? 10. Christ is one of the three Avatars mentioned by Sri Aurobindo, the other two being Krishna and Buddha. 11. Strange! Buddha was born in India but Buddhism almost disappeared from India. 12. Buddhism is the first established religion with a founder of its own while Sikhism is the latest; etc.

And five minutes are over. And the Mother retires. The novice sadhaka's 'meditation' too ends in a mood of highly pleased self-complacency. But how can you call it meditation? It is nothing but a kaleidoscopic procession of haphazard thoughts and images. See the fun: the novice sadhaka begins with the Mother and ends with Sikhism! And he is blissfully ignorant of this jumbled procession effervescing beneath his 'meditating' consciousness!

And this is what happens in most people's meditation. Each thought and image quickly leads to another by the law of the association of ideas and the series could have continued indefinitely if the Mother would have stayed on the balcony for a much longer period of time.

Second Stage: This represents a little more advanced stage of 'meditation'. In the preceding stage, the first stage; thoughts in the sadhaka's mind were rushing from 'station' to 'station' almost with a mail-train's speed, just touching the stations but not halting there.

In this second stage of 'meditation', the thoughts stop for some time at individual 'stations', roam about them for a little while, and then proceed to the next station, and the procedure is repeated. Taking the example of the first stage given above, the pathway of this second stage may be hypothetically represented as follows:

1. The Mother. 2. She is dressed in a red robe. 2/a. Robes may be of many different fabrics, 2/b. Nylon robes are quite popular in our time. 2/c. Robes worn by people vary from country to country, also from age to age. 3. The colour of the Mother's robe is somewhat like that of a red rose. 9. Christ was one of the three Avatars mentioned by Sri Aurobindo. 9/a. But what is this concept of Avatarhood? 9/b. Is it the same as that of 'incarnation' prevalent in Christianity? 9/c. Sri Aurobindo has explained the phenomenon of Avatarhood in his Essays on the Gita... Etc.

Please note that in the succession of thoughts here, "The Mother" is still the first centre but "Robes" has become the second centre, "Avatars" the third centre, etc. There is a temporary halting at these sub-centres, also the phenomenon of thought-radiations from these derivative centres. The 'procession' of thoughts is thus no more continuous as in the first stage but rather intermittently interrupted.

Third Stage: This is a still further advanced stage of meditation. In the first two stages one was diverging away from the original centre, "The Mother", leaving her far behind and almost forgotten, in one's rapid centrifugal march outward. But in this third stage one keeps to the first centre, "The Mother", and turns round her in one's thoughts, not of course deliberately, but propelled by the same laws of association of ideas. For example, in this third stage of 'meditation', the chain of thoughts and images passing through the sadhaka's mind may be conceived of as follows:

1. The Mother. 2. She is dressed in a red robe. 3. Last time on Durga Puja Day the Mother was dressed in a different colour. 4. We have a photograph of the Mother dressed in a gown and a fur coat, dating from her Paris days. 5. The Mother used to wear kimonos while she was in Japan. 6. She came back from Japan in 1920. 7. The Mother established the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in 1926. 8. The Mother met Rabindranath Tagore while in Japan. 9. Dalai Lama met the Mother in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in the sixties of the twentieth century. Etc.

It is to be observed that in this case 'The Mother' remains the connecting link amongst all the different thoughts of the series. It is as if the individual thoughts were placing themselves at the

tips of so many different radii emanating from the centre of the circle, which is “The Mother” in the illustration given above.

Fourth Stage: Here too “The Mother”, the originating centre of the series continues to remain the centre and the ‘meditating’ sadhaka’s thoughts continue to turn round her but the circle of divergence has become very much smaller. Thus, in the just preceding third stage our thoughts touched in their wanderings Paris, Japan, Tagore and Dalai Lama, although all connected with the Mother in some way or other, but in this fourth stage all the thoughts remain very close to “The Mother”. For example, the flow of thoughts in the sadhaka’s mind during his ‘meditation’ may take the form of the series below:

1. The Mother. 2. The Mother represents divine Consciousness in a human body. [The thought stops here for quite some time and then proceeds.] 3. The Mother’s Grace is boundless. [Thought hops here too for a good length of time and then moves forward.] 4. Self-surrender to the Mother is the most effective way of one’s spiritual fulfilment. [Thought pauses again and ponders in silence what surrender means; and then gives place to the succeeding thought in this slow-moving series.] Etc.

Readers are invited to observe carefully the notable features here... One thought emerges from the centre, “The Mother”, travels along a particular radial line and remains suspended at its tip for a measurable length of time. The meditating sadhaka’s consciousness then goes back to the centre, “The Mother”, and comes out in the form of a second thought along a different radial line, remains stationary at its tip for a good measure of time. Then, the consciousness goes back to the centre, “The Mother”, and emerges as a third thought pursuing a third radial line, etc., etc.

The continual centrifugal procession of thoughts so characteristic of the three previous stages of meditation has now been reduced to a circular sweeping of the field having for centre the first centre, “The Mother”.

As the meditation advances in its quality, the circle goes on reducing itself more and more and the time-interval between two successive emerging thoughts goes on increasing progressively, till we reach the fifth stage of meditation.

Fifth Stage: The circle has now been reduced to a single point, the central point of meditation, *dhyeya*. Thoughts have lost their penchant for mobility. And the consciousness remains suspended in a “contentless” condition. Yes, “contentless”, but that does not mean that it lapses into a static condition of inertia. Not so at all, rather it gains in acute attentivity and luminosity, and is intensely and one-pointedly concentrated in the then subject or object of meditation.

And this is what is meant when one speaks of ‘Consciousness’ with a C cap. To disengage this Consciousness from the medley of running and whirling and crisscrossing thoughts and feelings and desires which have been always occupying the subjective field of the sadhaka, is one of the principal tasks he has to accomplish in *Dhyāna-Sādhana* or the Sadhana through Meditation. For, a genuine meditation can be conducted only with the help of this contentless but concentrated consciousness.

But in connection with the sadhana for the attainment of this state of contentless concentrated consciousness we have to remember one very important point. We should always keep in mind that our consciousness is not uniplanar; it is multilayered. As in any geological exploration of

the globe starting from its crust and ending in its centre, we are apt to come across many different levels with altogether different contents and constitution, so is the case with the exploration of our consciousness. There are many many levels intervening between the normally functioning surface consciousness and our deepest and truest being, the psychic centre. Now all these levels have different types of subjective movements, increasing in their subtlety and complexity as we move farther and farther inward.

Well, if such is the actual situation, it is obvious that the really 'contentless' consciousness is not so easy to acquire and so soon on the part of the sadhaka, it can come only at the end of a long and arduous sadhana.

For, when we come to believe that we have been able to detach ourselves completely from the subjective movements ranging on a particular level, we should not hasten to presume that we have indeed possessed the 'contentless' consciousness.

For, behind and below this apparent stillness obtained, there are all the time subtler and subtler movements active on the more profound levels. After we have successfully silenced the subtler movements of the second level, we should not terminate our effort and rest on our oars. We have to move from level to deeper level and bring about stillness everywhere. At the end of this long process of self-withdrawal from all the *pratyayas* or subjective movements characteristic of all the different levels of our consciousness, we shall at last reach a state of absolute calmness and stillness whose spiritual value and importance is simply indescribable.

This is what is really and truly the "contentless consciousness" or simply the 'Consciousness' and it is this 'Consciousness' which we have to employ for the acquisition of various treasures of the Spirit in our life of sadhana.

The entire course of this great Sadhana of Silence beginning at the very beginning and ending in the final attainment has been elaborately described by Sri Aurobindo in all its various steps and stages in Book Seven Canto Six of his epic poem, *Savitri*. The interested readers may go through pages 538 to 544 of the Poem to be acquainted with the nature of the whole journey with all its complexities and variegated episodes.

This momentous sadhana of introspection commences in this way:

*"And Savitri ... mused
Plunging her deep regard into herself
In her soul's privacy in the silent Night.
Aloof and standing back detached and calm,
A witness of the drama of herself,
A student of her own interior scene,
She watched the passion and the toil of life
And heard in the crowded thoroughfares of mind
The unceasing tread and passage of her thoughts.
All she allowed to rise that chose to stir;
Calling, compelling nought, forbidding nought,
She left all to the process formed in Time
And the free initiative of Nature's will." (p. 538)*

Passing from stage to stage and through a very complex sequence of thought-adventures the sadhaka at last reaches a state which Sri Aurobindo has described as follows:

*“After a long vacant pause another [thought] appeared
And others one by one suddenly emerged,
Mind’s unexpected visitors from the unseen
Like far-off sails upon a lonely sea.
But soon that commerce failed,
None reached mind’s coast
Then all grew still, nothing moved any more;
Immobile, self-rapt, timeless, solitary
A silent spirit pervaded silent Space.”* (p. 544)

Through a process of assiduous sadhana when the sadhaka has reached a state where he can command at will, whenever he likes, this luminous blank of utter stillness, he can apply this “concentrated contentless consciousness” on various subjects/objects of meditation and achieve any spiritual objective whatsoever. It is worth recalling in this connection what Sri Aurobindo has said about the inestimable contribution of “Yogic concentration”. He writes:

“It is by the thought that we dissipate ourselves in the phenomenal; it is by the gathering back of the thought into itself that we must draw ourselves back into the real. Concentration has three powers by which this aim can be effected. By concentration on anything whatsoever we are able to know that thing, to make it deliver up its concealed secrets... By concentration again the whole will can be gathered up for the acquisition of... any object whatsoever... By concentration of our whole being on one status of itself, we can become whatever we choose...” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 304)

Here is a representative illustration of the power of concentration in spiritual life. Through the persistent application of the “concentrated consciousness” on any object whatsoever, we can come to realise the Presence of the Divine in that object. This is how Sri Aurobindo has described the process:

“...one concentrates on the idea of Brahman omnipresent — one looks at a tree or other surrounding object with the idea that Brahman is there and the tree or object is only a form. After a time if the concentration is of the right kind, one begins to become aware of a presence, an existence, the physical tree form becomes a shell and that presence or existence is felt to be the only reality. The idea then drops, it is a direct vision of the thing that takes its place... one sees with a deeper consciousness, sa paśyati. It should be noted that this concentration on the idea is not mere thinking, mananam — it is an inner dwelling on the essence of the Idea.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 726)

In fact, as we have mentioned above, the sadhaka can apply this “concentrated consciousness” on different *dhyeyas* or subjects, objects of meditation depending upon his need of the moment or the occasion presented, and derive out of it appropriate spiritual benefits. To satisfy the curiosity of the readers we append below a short list of these possible applications:

(i) To establish, and stabilise a new experience in oneself; (ii) to discover the hidden roots of anyone of one’s weaknesses and uproot them; (iii) to call down into oneself the knowledge, the power, the purity and the bliss of the Spirit; (iv) to “see” the Divine everywhere, in all that is

manifested; (v) to realise in concrete experience the essence behind any abstract idea; (vi) to make the “entry into the inner countries” (Sri Aurobindo) and discover one’s psychic being; (vii) to have direct knowledge of the realities of the suprasensuous supraphysical worlds; (viii) to go through forms to the Formless beyond; (ix) to open one’s consciousness to the action of the Divine Shakti; (x) to purify the habitual impure nature; (xi) to learn the secret of how to surrender oneself to the Divine; (xii) to find the solution of any specific problem of one’s life; (xiii) to evoke and receive the Grace and aid of the Divine Mother before undertaking any special work; (xiv) to establish peace and silence in oneself; (xv) even to eradicate the maladies afflicting the physical adhara; etc.

Another possible application of the power of concentrated consciousness is in connection with the opening of the different psychic Centres or Chakras in the subtle body. These Centres or Chakras are generally considered to be six or seven in number and have each one a fixed psychological use and specific function.

Now the sadhaka can meditate with his consciousness concentrated in any of these Chakras with a view to open it and make it active. But the psycho-spiritual results of these openings will vary according to the Chakra selected for meditation. Sri Aurobindo has given us a graphic description of these spiritual consequences of the opening of various Chakras in his epic Savitri. The readers are requested to carefully go through Book Seven Canto Five of the poem (pages 528-30) of the Centenary Edition.

We have not yet touched a very important point. It is true we have described in detail the different progressive stages through which ‘meditation’ advances, starting from the novice sadhaka’s highly dispersed state and arriving at last to the ‘contentless concentrated consciousness’ of the advanced Yogi. But we have not yet indicated the exercises which can help to overcome the dispersion of the normal state and arrive at the final attainment.

This is what we are going to do now, although necessarily in brief, for all these things become comprehensible only when one puts these things into actual practice; no elaborate theoretical discussion can serve the purpose.

Be that as it may, here are the steps and processes through which the habitual dispersion of the thoughts can be progressively controlled and the final state of concentrated contentless consciousness achieved:

(1) “Concentration in self-observation”: While sitting in meditation, the sadhaka should observe with undivided attention all the *pratyayas*, impressions (thoughts, feelings, desires, etc.) that invade his inner field. He wills to discover in a totally detached way the sources from which they are arising. This very knowledge, if not vitiated by any personal egoistic involvement, will progressively discourage the distracting effects of the intruding impressions.

(2) “Concentration in witness-detachment”: this exercise the sadhaka will try to consider the racing thoughts and feelings as not his own at all but rather alien offsprings of universal human nature, passing through his mind’s sky as so many wandering birds of passage. Let them wander at their whim: the sadhaka will refrain from taking any interest in them, either positive or negative.

If the sadhaka can do this in the right and persistent manner, he will arrive at the following

result:

“In this way it usually happens that after a time the mind divides into two, a part which is the mental witness watching and perfectly undisturbed and quiet and a part which is the object of observation, the Prakriti part in which the thoughts cross or wander. Afterwards one can proceed to silence or quiet the Prakriti part also.” (Letters on Yoga by Sri Aurobindo, p. 731)

(3) “*Dhyāna* of liberation”: When the first and the second exercises as described above reach their mature fulfilment, the sadhaka can proceed to establish in his inner field what Sri Aurobindo has termed “a true vigilant blank” totally free from any intruding thought or image or feeling. As a sequel a genuine spiritual knowledge will dawn in the sadhaka’s consciousness in a most vivid and luminous way as if somebody has written something in white chalk on a black board.

(4) “Throwing away the incoming thoughts”: This is a very difficult sadhana, possible only for the rare souls, some Mahayogis. In this sadhana the meditating sadhaka can clearly “see” that all the thoughts and images are coming from outside the brain and trying to get an access there. But before they succeed in this malevolent enterprise, the vigilant sadhaka flings them back with the help of his clairvoyant will-power. Sri Aurobindo has mentioned in his autobiographical notes that he realised the experience of Nirvana in only three days by following this method of “throwing back the thoughts”. This is how he has described his experience:

“There are in fact several ways. My own way was by rejection of thought. ‘Sit down,’ I was told, ‘look and you will see that your thoughts come into you from outside. Before they enter, fling them back.’ I sat down and looked and saw to my astonishment that it was so; I saw and felt concretely the thought approaching as if to enter through or above the head and was able to push it back concretely before it came inside.

“In three days — really in one — my mind became full of an eternal silence — it is still there. But that I don’t know how many people can do.” (On Himself, Cent. Ed., pp. 82-83)

(5) “Constant practice of rejection”: This method is meant for those sadhakas who are still on the lowest rung of the scale of meditation and are just novices on the Path. What else can they do during meditation except to be always on the alert to detect in themselves the appearance of any intruding thought and immediately take their mind away from all its interest in the thought and bring it back to the original subject of meditation. This consciously cultivated inattention to the encroaching thoughts, persistently applied, leads to some sort of quietude. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

“You are probably paying too much attention to them [the thoughts of the mechanical mind]. It is quite possible to concentrate and let the mechanical activity pass unnoticed... What has to be done... is to detach oneself from these movements and concentrate without further attention to them. They are then likely to sink into quietude or fall away.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 734)

One last point and we have come to the end of this long chapter on concentration and meditation in the Integral Yoga.

We must not forget that meditation for the sake of meditation has not much value for us. To have some illuminating experiences while sitting in meditation cannot be the special object of

our seeking. What we seek after is to be united with the Divine always and under all circumstances, whether in silent meditation or in active waking life. As the Mother has reminded us:

“Whether you sit down to meditation or go about and do things and work, what is required of you is consciousness; that is the one need, — to be constantly conscious of the Divine.”
(Questions and answers, MCW, Vol. 3, p. 20)

Such being our real objective, meditation can be for us only a means — a potent means at that — to acquire this state of constant and unfailing concentration on the Divine. In our Integral Yoga the sadhaka has to become concretely aware, at all time and in all situations, of the Presence and Working of the Divine Reality. And this awareness he can gain through a proper course of meditation. Therein lies for us the necessity and utility of concentration and meditation.

XVII.

The Conquest of Self-will and the Enthronement of the Divine Will

One of the principal objectives of the sadhana of the Integral Yoga is the total eradication of self-will from the sadhaka's consciousness and the establishment there of the Divine's supreme Will to shape all his thoughts and feelings and actions. Self-will is one of the three most stubborn causes of bondage, the other two being desire and egoism. But what is actually meant by 'self-will' in the language of sadhana? We must be clear about it before we can possibly embark upon an attempt at its banishment from our mind and action. Sri Aurobindo has explained the matter in great detail two different places of his *Synthesis of Yoga*. The following paragraph is an abridged adaptation of what he has said there. This will make explicit to the sadhaka the nature of the problem and the hard but essential task set before him if he would attain the perfection in yoga.

In all yoga, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, there are three essential objects to be attained by the seeker: (1) union or abiding contact with the Divine; (2) liberation of the soul or the self, the spirit; and (3) a certain change of the consciousness, the spiritual change. It is this change, which is absolutely necessary for reaching the other two objects, but it is not at all easy to accomplish it. One may almost say that this spiritual change which yoga demands from human nature and individual character is the most difficult of all human aspirations and efforts. For our character is largely mechanistic and made up of habits and it clings to them, is disposed to think them the very law of its being, and there is almost invariably a resistance and, more often than not, a strong and stubborn resistance to any change demanded from it. And self-will in the mind is one of the commonest and most prominent causes of this resistance. For self-will is deeply attached to its own pride of ideas, its prejudices, its fixed notions and its ignorant reason. This inveterate clinging to old ideas, to preconceived notions, to mental preferences and partial judgments, to opinions and facile reasoning comes in the way of the higher truth and closes all the avenues to further illumination.

After all, self-will is nothing but an egoism in the mind which makes it prone to be attached, and that in an attractive and self-justifying way, to the sadhaka's personal preferences, opinions, judgments and imaginations, to the current repetitions of his habitual mind, to the insistences of his pragmatic mind, and to the limitations of his intellectual mind.

All these attachments are there within the sadhaka waiting to wall in the spirit with imperfect and transitional forms. An attachment is always an attachment and acts as a great impediment to the progress in sadhana, irrespective of whether it affects the physical or the vital or the mental nature. And mental attachments must go the way of all other attachments and yield to the impartiality of an equal vision.

The ideal attitude to be adopted by a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga vis-à-vis this stubborn enemy that is 'self-will' has been described by Sri Aurobindo in great detail at two different places of his *Synthesis of Yoga*. The following paragraph is an abridged adaptation of what he has said there.

Self-will with its attendant attachment must be entirely excised from the mind. Not only must we give up the ordinary attitude to the world and life to which the unawakened mind clings, but we must not remain bound in any mental construction of our own or in any intellectual

thought-system or arrangement of religious dogmas or logical conclusions. We must flee beyond the snare of the thinker, the snare of the theologian and the church-builder, and the bondage of the idea. We must always go beyond, and renounce the lesser for the greater. We must be prepared to proceed from illumination to illumination, from experience to experience, from soul-state to soul-state so as to reach the utmost transcendence of the Divine and its utmost universality. Nor must we attach ourselves even to the truths we hold most securely, for they are but forms and expressions of the Ineffable who refuses to limit himself to any form or expression. Always we must keep ourselves open to the higher World from above. We must not hold ourselves bound and limited by our present knowledge or forbidden by it to proceed to fresh insights nor lay too fierce a grasp on truths even when we are using them to the full, or tyrannously chain them to their present formulations. (Adapted from *The Synthesis of Yoga*, pp. 315, 679)

We have now a clear idea of what self-will is and of how wide is its influence in corrupting almost every facet of human psychology. For the perfection in Yoga this self-will in all its manifestation has to be dethroned from its present privileged position of being the motivating force behind the sadhaka's thoughts and actions. The command upon the spiritual aspirant at all moments and in all situations can be formulated by a few pithy sentences of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother:

"To will what the Divine wills is the supreme wisdom." (Sri Aurobindo)

"We must see only through the Divine's eyes and act only through the Divine's Will." (The Mother)

"Our will must always be a perfect expression of the Divine's Will." (The Mother)

"Offer your will to the Divine and make it one with his eternal Will." (Sri Aurobindo)

Thus, to eliminate his self-will root and branch and make the Divine's Will the sole governor of his life and the determinant of all his actions is the noble objective every sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to realise.

But what is this Divine's Will, what its nature? Is it the will of a super-despot, albeit divine, who acts according to his arbitrary whims? Is the Divine a super-Person with infinite Power but somehow separate from the creation or manifestation? How is his Will related to a human being's will, if it is at all related? A last question: Does the Divine's Will function in the same way as a man's will does; that is to say, does the Divine also judge the circumstances, deliberate on pros and cons, and then come to a decision? And after coming to the decision does he activate his dynamic energy to translate this decision into action? And who knows, this is perhaps what is called the Divine's Will! But in that case, is it this Will with which we are asked in sadhana to merge our personal will?

The sole answer to all these questions is an emphatic No. But as this book deals with practical aspects of sadhana and not with metaphysical inquiry, we need not spend much time and space here on this discussion. We content ourselves with quoting here just a single meaningful sentence from the Mother and a few lines from Sri Aurobindo's writings. And this will suffice for us in the present essay.

“The divine Will is a vision united with a power of realisation.” (The Mother)

“The Lord sees in his omniscience the thing that has to be done. This seeing is his Will, it is a form of creative Power... this vision of what is to be and therefore of what is to be done arises out of the very being, pours directly out of the consciousness and delight of existence of the Lord, spontaneously, like light from the sun. It is not our mortal attempt to see, our difficult arrival at truth of action and motive...” (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 206-07)

It is this Will that the sadhaka should aspire to know and make sovereign in his life’s activities. But it is important to note that this Divine Will has two aspects which, seeming to be contradictory, are actually complementary to each other, and act to fulfil the far strategic aim of the Divine. Sri Aurobindo has termed one of the aspects *“Will of the Cosmic Divine”* and the other *“Will of the Transcendent Divine”*. The first one expresses the Divine’s *“immediate Will of the moment”*, considering the totality of the prevailing circumstances. But at the same time the other aspect too acts parallelly, with a comprehensive prospective vision of the future. This is the Divine’s *“Will for the future fulfilment.”*

While seeking to know the Divine’s Will at any given moment, the sadhaka should be cognisant of both these Wills of the Divine and develop a double attitude in his consciousness. Otherwise there will arise terrible confusion in his heart and mind, which may easily derail his action from the right spiritual track.

It is clear that the knowledge of the first aspect of the Divine’s Will will enable the sadhaka to maintain a spirit of equanimity in all situations and circumstances, however adverse they may apparently be. He will acquiesce in joy in all the turns of events without any mood of doubt and revolt and impatience. For such being the ‘immediate Will’ of the Divine, his eternal Lover, the sadhaka should accept it fully without the slightest reservation.

But he should not stop at that. For, then, all further progress and advancement will come to a halt. Therefore, the sadhaka has to realise at the same time that this “immediate Will of the moment” is not the Divine’s “ultimate Will”. The Divine wants that the sadhaka should co-operate in the fulfilment of his “Will for the future”, while accepting fully and joyously his “Will for the present.” This second knowledge, i.e., the knowledge of the Devine’s “Will for the future”, will impart to the sadhaka’s consciousness an inextinguishable flame of aspiration, an elan for continual progress and sustained effort for attaining perfect perfection.

Now the question is: How should the sadhaka discover this Divine’s Will and know it to be so and not be misled by any impost or alien will? To answer it properly, we have to introduce then a very important concept which Sri Aurobindo and the Mother have designated as the “central will of the being”.

This “central will of the being” entirely depends on the Divine Will. It is, in fact, the individualised expression of the Divine’s Will. The natural corollary is that the Divine’s Will is always active in the deepest core-consciousness of every human being, making his *adhara* the vehicle of its manifestation.

Thus, at any moment of a sadhaka’s life, before arriving at any decision, if he wants to know the Divine’s Will in the matter in question, he should first try to recognise this ‘central will’ in his ‘heart-centre’, because, as we have just now mentioned, the Divine Will becomes operative in

the individual's life through the 'central will'.

But it is not easy for the extrovert superficial consciousness of the sadhaka to discover this 'central will' in its utter purity and genuineness. For there is a long space of separation between the 'central will' dwelling in the psychic being and the working consciousness of the outer man and this space is peopled with many unhelpful forces which prevent the psychic will from emerging fully to the front of the consciousness.

Otherwise, as the Mother has insisted, it should not be difficult for one to recognise the Voice of the soul or psychic being; for, it does not make a point of hiding itself or playing with the Sadhaka just to make things difficult for him. On the contrary, the soul makes great efforts to help him find it and to make itself heard. Then, why is it that normally we cannot recognise its intimation? The Mother has explained the situation in this way:

"Between your soul and your active consciousness there are two characters who are in the habit of making a lot of noise, the mind and the vital. And because they make a lot of noise, while the soul does not, or, rather, makes as little as possible, their noise prevents you from hearing the voice of the soul." (On Thoughts and Aphorisms, MCW, Vol. 10, p. 24)

These 'noises' created by the mind and the vital are, psychologically speaking, nothing but the personal preferences and antipathies of the sadhaka. If these negative factors could be removed and the sadhaka sincerely wanted to know the Divine's Will in order to carry that out — this last condition is absolutely essential — then, sooner or later he would come to know it. As the Mother has said:

"When you hesitate, when you wonder what to do in this or that circumstance, there come the desire, the preference both mental and vital, that press, insist, affirm and impose themselves, and, with the best reasons in the world, build up a whole case for themselves. And if you are not on the alert, if you don't have a firm discipline, if you don't have the habit of control, they finally convince you that they are right. And as I was saying a little while ago, they make so much noise that you do not even hear the tiny voice or the tiny, very quiet indication of the soul which says, "Don't do it."" (Ibid., p. 25)

But the Mother assures us: *"If you are truly sincere in your will to find and live the truth, then you learn to listen better and better, you learn to discriminate more and more, and even if it costs you an effort, even if it causes you pain, you learn to obey."* (Ibid., MCW, 10, p. 25)

This is so far as the Mother's elucidation of the problem and its solution is concerned. Sri Aurobindo also has made a detailed analysis of the situation in pages 893-94 of *The Life Divine*. The following passage makes it explicit why it is normally so difficult for a sadhaka to receive the intimations of his 'central will', the 'voice' of his psychic being:

"But this psychic influence or action does not come up to the surface quite pure or does not remain distinct in its purity; if it did, we would be able to distinguish clearly the soul element in us and follow consciously and fully its dictates. An occult mental and vital and subtle-physical action intervenes, mixes with it, tries to use it and turn it to its own profit, dwarfs its divinity, distorts or diminishes its self-expression, even causes it to deviate and stumble or stains it with the impurity, smallness and error of mind and life and body."

“After it reaches the surface, thus alloyed and diminished, it is taken hold of by the surface nature in an obscure reception and ignorant formation, and there is or can be by this cause a still further deviation and mixture.

“A twist is given, a wrong direction is imparted, a wrong application, a wrong formation, an erroneous result of what is in itself pure stuff and action of our spiritual being; a formation of consciousness is accordingly made which is a mixture of the psychic influence and its intimations jumbled with mental ideas and opinions, vital desires and urges, habitual physical tendencies.” (The Life Divine, Cent. Ed., pp. 893-94. Paragraphing ours.)

We may conclude from the long discussion that has gone before that there is in the world of manifestation only one Will, the Will of the Divine. *“There is nothing separate or independent; it is a single force, a single consciousness, a single will which moves in the world with innumerable ways of being.”* (The Mother) And what is significant, this Divine Will operative always and everywhere is also active in every individual human being in his ‘central will’ which resides in his central being. But this Will cannot reach the outer consciousness in its pure form; it becomes deformed in many ways and then acts in many different forms. About this polychromous chameleon manifestation of ordinary personal will, Sri Aurobindo has this to say:

“The will itself takes different shapes, [i] the will of the intelligence, [ii] the wishes of the emotional mind, [iii] the desires of the passion and the vital being, [iv] the impulsions and blind or half-blind compulsions of the nervous and the subconscious nature. And all these make by no means a harmony, but at best a precarious concord among discords. The will of the mind and life is a stumbling about in search of right force, right Tapas...” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 762)

In sadhana we are called upon to reject all these spurious forms of personal will and give expression, always and in all situations, to the “right Tapas”, the Divine Will which is besides our own will in the deepest and highest sense. For, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out,

“The divine Will is not an alien Power or Presence; it is intimate to us and we ourselves are part of it; for it is our own highest Self that possesses and supports it. Only, it is not our conscious mental will; it rejects often enough what our conscious will accepts and accepts what our conscious will rejects. For while this secret One knows all and every whole and each detail, our surface mind knows only a little part of things.” (Ibid., p. 90)

The sadhaka has to be cautious about another point; otherwise he would not be able to keep the right attitude in his sadhana; instead, he will fall into many pitfalls, quite many of them being palpably grievous. The point is: Why should the sadhaka renounce his self-will and seek to know the Divine Will in order to fulfil it? Is it for some personal interest, be that interest high and noble and glorious or even garbed in some ‘spiritual’ guise?

No, surely not; for if such is the behind-the-screen motive of the sadhaka in his quest after the Divine Will, he can be sure that the Divine’s Will will not normally manifest in his consciousness. All that the sadhaka will do then in the name of doing the Will of the Divine will be nothing else in reality but the sole satisfaction of the camouflaged appetites of his own ego. Let us listen to what the Mother has said in this regard:

“So long as there will be any personal aspiration, or a personal desire or preference, an

egoistic will, this will always create a mixture and it will no longer be an exact expression of the divine Will. The only thing that should count is the Divine, His Will, His manifestation, and His expression in us and through us.”

Thus, be it noted, the sadhaka should aspire to know and obey the Divine Will, simply because it is the Will of the Divine and for no other extraneous reason. He should on no account allow the slightest intrusion of any of his separate personal reasons to sneak in. And in the measure he will be able to do this, it will be easier for him to know the Divine’s Will. The following guidelines given by the Mother should be his Mantra at all times:

“To exist only for the Divine. To exist only by the Divine. To exist only in the service of the Divine. To exist only by becoming the Divine. All else is falsehood which must vanish.”

“To exist only by becoming the Divine”: this is, of course, the ultimate attainment, but this is surely far beyond the capability of an ordinary sadhaka. Instead, what he can always aspire after and try for in his sadhana is “to exist only for the Divine and in the service of the Divine.” But for that he has to renounce his self-will and turn his consciousness into the neutral purity of a blank state in which the Divine can write whatever He wills without encountering any alien intrusion.

But how to arrive at this state of total absence of self-will? Also, is this annulment of self-will tantamount to the annulment of will-power itself? Sadly, many sadhakas, beginning at where they are now, get into this confusion. They cannot make a distinction between “offering one’s will to the Divine” and “abdication of one’s will itself“. To obviate the confusion, let us discuss the point a little more elaborately.

What the sadhaka has to renounce at the initial stage of his sadhana — and this stage covers a rather long period of time — is the *rajasic* elan for action and the obscure impulses of vital desires, but surely not the strength of his will-power. For ‘will’ is something very very essential for the progress in sadhana. Self-will has, of course, to be eliminated but not the ‘will’ as will. For will is what is indicated by the following poise of mind:

“I shall do and do it I must against all odds, whatever I have honestly understood to be true and judged as my duty at this moment, judged not according to my fancy or impulsive desire but by the sincere and impartial application of my enlightened power of discrimination, viveka.”

It will not do if the sadhaka gives up this resolute ‘will’ pre-maturely. For, in that case, it is not self-will which will cease to function; rather, a tamasic inertia and flabbiness of character will come to replace the rajasic vehemence. And surely that will not be a very laudable change. For the net result will be that the empty ground of the sadhaka’s consciousness will be filled up by all sorts of unhealthy wills and urges rushing in from here, there, and everywhere. And the unwary sadhaka will be eager to carry these out in action under the wrong impression that these impulses have come from the Divine himself. Moreover, the mood of inertia parading itself as a state of “surrender” to the Divine will undermine in the sadhaka all the power of his resistance and completely dull the light of his discrimination.

Therefore the sadhaka has to work on two fronts at the same time: (i) to give no quarter to his self-will and throw out as sincerely as possible and as wholly as practicable all one’s personal preferences, opinions and judgments; and at the same time (ii) to keep up in oneself an ardent

and active will-power whose sole aspiration and effort will to act as an obedient instrument of the Divine's Will.

This is what is called the "offering of the will" and the sadhaka has to start his sadhana with this "offering". He has to pray to the Divine in some such way as follows:

"O Divine, I do not know exactly what I should do now; I have no idea of what your Will is at this moment of my life. Yet, it is a fact that I sincerely want to fulfil your Will and your Will alone. I have kept my will-power ever-awake and ever-ready to execute your Will whatever form that may take. Guide my will along the right path. Make my will aligned with your own, even without my knowing it. So long as I do not come to realise directly and intimately what your Will is, I shall see to it that it be not engaged in satisfying my desires and other ego-movements. Instead, I shall always apply it to the execution of what I sincerely consider to be right according to the best light available to me at this moment. I make it plastic to your touch and wait in expectant silence for your intervention. My *ādhāra* is ready for the command; the only thing I lack is right knowledge. Please fill up this lacuna and guide me even in my ignorance according to your Knowledge and Will so that in future I can 'see' retrospectively how you guided me all the time without my being aware of your Guidance."

This is the attitude into which the sadhaka has to grow, and he has to activate it in ceaseless prayer before any and every one of his actions. And if the sadhaka persists in this attitude with an undimmed zeal, slowly but surely all the veils will fall off from before his eyes and his consciousness will gain in progressive transparency. As a result he will come to recognise the Divine's Will with greater and greater clarity and sureness of perception.

This sadhana of the recognition of the Divine Will will proceed from stage to stage until the sadhaka's will is completely merged with the Divine's Will. A few of the significant ascending stages Sri Aurobindo has described in this way:

"...even before [the] highest approach to identity is achieved, something of the supreme Will can manifest in us as

(i) an imperative impulsion, a God-driven action; we then act by a spontaneous self-determining Force, but a fuller knowledge of meaning and aim arises only afterwards.

(ii) or the impulse to action may come... rather in the heart and body than in the mind; here an effective sight enters in but the complete and exact knowledge is still deferred and comes, if at all, later.

(iii) the divine Will may descend too as a luminous single command.

(iv) or a total perception or a continuous current of perception of what is to be done into the will or into the thought or as a direction from above spontaneously fulfilled by the lower members." (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 207. Paraphrasing ours.)

"And at last will come the last stage of spiritual fulfilment when the sadhaka arrives at a consciousness in which one feels the Force or Presence acting within and moving or governing all the actions and the personal will is entirely surrendered or identified with that greater Truth-Will..." (The Life Divine, p. 903) "The action of the person is [then] the action of the

Ishwara in the person, of the One in the many, and there can be no reason for a separative assertion of self-will...” (Ibid., p. 1006)

Thus comes the culmination in the long sadhana for the conquest of self-will and the enthronement of the Divine Will. But the sadhana itself, even in its initial stages, if practised with a comprehensive thoroughness, is full of a charm of its own. It is impossible to describe the peace and delight that fills the life of a sadhaka who makes sincere effort to abdicate his self-will in all its ramifications and act only according to his “central will” which, as we have mentioned earlier, will be a constant expression of the Divine Will. Here are some pertinent words of the Mother:

“...I may tell you from my personal experience that there is nothing in the world more interesting. If you begin making this effort you will find that... everything becomes so interesting, the least little thing, the least casual meeting, the least word exchanged, ... everything is full of life and interest.” (Questions and Answers 1950-51, MCW, Vol. 4, pp. 88 - 89)

Such is the spiritual recompense for all sincere sadhana.

XVIII.

On Will-power in Sadhana

Lacking in sufficient will-power is a great handicap in the life of a sadhaka. This deficiency alone, when many other propitious conditions are present, has wrecked the spiritual career of many aspirants. Regrettably, when we look at ourselves, many of us will find, that almost daily we give proof of the debility of our will when confronted with a crisis of choice. The state of our mind at these moments of decision is somewhat like this: “We know and understand many things but at the time of practical application we buckle miserably. We have the conviction that as sadhakas we have to reject every prompting of ego and desire, but when it comes to the actual operation of rejection we simply postpone it to a later date. There is no sufficient urge to do immediately all that is needed. It is not that we do not exactly know what we should do and what we should avoid. Knowledge is there in full measure; a vague general resolution to always do the right thing is also not absent; when we talk to other sadhakas we become quite eloquent in advising them what they should do in a given situation. But, strangely, when it is a question of our own practice, we are prone to accept defeat without much resistance. We are quite aware of the Mother’s affirmation: ‘*A drop of practice is better than an ocean of theories, good advices and resolutions.*’ We know all this and even believe in the truth of the statement. But why is it that we cannot translate our knowledge and resolution, in actual practice?”

The only answer that can be offered is that our will-power is not sufficiently developed. There is no strength in us to resist and throw away the temptation. About this lacking in will-power the Mother once spoke to her children in quite harsh terms in course of her class talk of 5 September, 1956:

“Wrong thoughts, wrong impulses, inner and outer falsehood,... so long as one does them or has them through ignorance... one understands, one is in the habit of doing them; it is ignorance, one does not know that it ought to be otherwise. But the moment the knowledge is there, the light is there,... how can one do it again? That I do not understand!

“Then what is one made of? One is made of shreds? One is made of goodness knows what, of jelly?... is there no incentive, no will, nothing? Is there no inner dynamism?...

“But the Grace is there, It is always there, It only asks to be allowed to help — one doesn’t let it work.

“And nothing but this feeling: ‘Oh, I can’t!’ — that’s enough to prevent It from working.

“How can you accept the idea that you can’t? You don’t know — that, yes, you may not know — but once you know, it’s finished!” (Questions and Answers 1956, MCW, Vol. 8, pp. 294-95)

Yes, there are justifiable reasons why the Mother should scold us for the feebleness of our will; we should be ashamed on that account. But ashamed or not, the fact remains that almost at every step of our sadhana-life we give repeated proofs of easily succumbing under pressure. But why should it be so?

All of us have consciously and deliberately chosen the path of spirituality. We know very well what we have to achieve in sadhana and how we should conduct ourselves as sincere sadhakas.

We have sufficient awareness about all that has to be rejected from the present unregenerate nature of the triple instruments of mind and heart and the physical. Yet, it is really surprising that we cannot activate our will-power sufficiently strongly to overcome the manifestations of our weaknesses.

But how can we forget that an indomitable will-power is almost the first requisite the sadhaka should possess if he would like to progress on the path of the Integral Yoga? For we do not want to follow the way of escapist spirituality which seeks to withdraw from life and its activities with the hope of tackling the weaknesses of human nature by bypassing them as far as practicable. We in our sadhana aspire after a total divine transformation of the whole of our nature for that we have to accept life with all its complexities and difficulties. Nature will confront us almost at every step in our daily life with a problem of choice between whether we want to move forward or stagnate or even go backward. And the right choice can be made only with the application of an enlightened will-power. Hence the strength of our will-power will be put to test almost in a ceaseless fashion all along our journey on the path of the Integral Yoga. This will not do for us that off and on, on some infrequent occasions, our will-power flashes forth like an evanescent lightning, does its job and then goes back to dormancy. It has to act instead like a steady blaze of focussed sunlight which is always in action to expose and scorch out all the frailties of our lower nature.

We know that aspiration is one of the principal limbs of the sadhana of the Integral Yoga. But this aspiration, even if constant will remain as an idle impotent dream if it is not accompanied by an effective rejection. And this rejection will surely demand the co-operation of a strong personal will-power. As Sri Aurobindo has said:

“There is a period, more or less prolonged, of internal effort and struggle in which the individual will has to reject the darkness and distortions of the lower nature and to put itself resolutely or vehemently on the side of the divine Light. The mental energies, the heart’s emotions, the vital desires, the very physical being have to be compelled into the right attitude or trained to admit and answer to the right influences.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 54)

The indispensability of a strong personal will in the life of sadhana and the roles it has to play at different stages of the ascending march of spiritual effort has been brought out by Sri Aurobindo in this way:

At the first stage this will will be needed to orient all the movements of our lower nature towards the supernal Light and Truth.

At the second stage this will will have for its important role to persuade all the energies of our ego-being to accept without any cavil the working of the higher Truth and be glad and willing collaborator in that working.

In the third stage, when the sadhaka will become conscious of the higher Power and Influence, his will will have to see to it that all the parts of his being act as faithful instruments of this superior Influence.

In the fourth stage, the will, the strength and the askesis of the sadhaka lose their separate individual character and are felt by him as “activities of that higher Power and Influence at work in the individual.”

Whatever may be the variations of forms of the will's functioning under different circumstances and at different stages, its essential role is to free the sadhaka from his slavery to the compulsions of lower nature and to put him always in the service of the higher. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

"...every part of our energies that is given to the lower existence in the spirit of that existence is a contradiction of our aim and our self-dedication. On the other hand, every energy or activity that we can convert from its allegiance to the lower and dedicate to the service of the higher is so much gained on our road, so much taken from the powers that oppose our progress." (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 65)

We have by now realised the necessity of a strong will-power in the life of sadhana. But what is this will as a psychological element? How should a sadhaka come to know that the inner dynamism he is setting into operation in a particular situation is indeed a genuine will and not simply its deformation or simulacrum?

For in man's psychology there are quite many forces which help with a great spurt of energy and one-pointed vehemence, and may make one believe that he is applying his 'will', when it is not so at all. If we indulge in any of these imitation-forms of 'will-power' it is apt to lead us to some adverse consequences, affecting very much the steady progress in sadhana. Hence it is necessary for a sadhaka to know at the outset how to distinguish a true will from a counterfeit one. Let us then have a short discussion of this tricky point here.

It is said, and said with much truth in it, that the normal life of the general run of humanity is shackled into utter bondage with various fetters of desires. But these desires are not altogether what they seem to be. Each desire has two distinctly separate facets. Or we may otherwise say that each of the desires, when viewed from above and from below, present two different appearances.

Viewed from below, a desire is nothing but a pricking urge of a blind impulse emanating from our lower nature. Most of the time it does not know what it really craves after. Our ego-consciousness is always in turmoil because of the agitating pressure of the mutual interaction of the three modes of nature, these modes being *Tamas* or the principle of inertia, *Rajas* or the principle of vehemence, and *Sattwa* or the principle of bright rigidity. A disturbed state of constant worries and unhappiness has become the universal fate of all ego-consciousness. And all the ills can be traced to one basic cause: 'desire impulsion'. For here at this lower level all desires are altogether blind and ignorant.

But the same desire, when viewed from above, presents an appearance far more deep and true. It then reveals itself to be just the deformation of a spiritual Will. That is to say, what exists as the divine Will-Power, the Seer-Will, *Kavi-kratu*, in the height and depths of our consciousness undergoes a 'beauty-turned-into-beast' metamorphosis under the malefic spell of cosmic Ignorance and becomes the unenlightened desire-will in the dark fold of our lower nature.

We must remember that the Seer-Will, Knowledge-Will, we referred to above is also a Will but surely not of the nature of our well-acquainted desire-will. The Seer-Will represents the Divine 'Desire', the Will of the Divine, which is entirely enlightened and irresistible in action. As Sri Aurobindo writes:

“There is a will, tapas, śakti, by which the secret spirit imposes on its outer members all their action... This Tapas is the will of the transcendent spirit who creates the universal movement, of the universal spirit who supports and informs it, of the free individual spirit who is the soul centre of its multiplicities. It is one will, free in all these at once, comprehensive, harmonious, unified; we find it, when we live and act in the spirit, to be an effortless and desireless, a spontaneous and illumined, a self-fulfilling and self-possessing, a satisfied and blissful will of the spiritual delight of being.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 648-49)

This, then, is the original genuine Will and this we have to establish in ourselves at the culminating stage of our sadhana and make that dynamic in the entirety of our nature’s functioning. But it is a vain hope that a sadhaka can achieve this Will in a relatively short span of sadhana. He has to proceed through many difficult stages before he can expect to be guided in all his actions and inspirations by this supreme Will.

Basing ourselves on Sri Aurobindo’s revelation we may state that there are indeed three stages of a growing spiritual progress by which, first, the personal will is occasionally or frequently enlightened or moved by a supreme Will or conscious Force beyond it, then constantly replaced, and, last, identified and merged in that divine Power-action. In a significant passage of *The Synthesis of Yoga*, already quoted on pp. 228-29 of this book (q.v.), Sri Aurobindo has described with great precision the various possibilities of the supreme Will acting in the sadhaka’s *ādhāra*. It is worth pondering over Sri Aurobindo’s words in order to have a clear perception of where we have to reach in our sadhana of the cultivation of the true Will. Sri Aurobindo says:

“But even before that highest approach to identity is achieved, something of the supreme Will can manifest in us as an imperative impulsion, a God-driven action; we then act by a spontaneous self-determining Force but a fuller knowledge of meaning and aim arises only afterwards. Or the impulse to action may come as an inspiration or intuition, but rather in the heart and body than in the mind; here an effective sight enters in but the complete and exact knowledge is still deferred and comes, if at all, later. But the divine Will may descend too as a luminous single command or a total perception or a continuous current of perception of what is to be done into the will or into the thought or as a direction from above spontaneously fulfilled by the lower members.” (p. 207)

But it is obvious that all these stages mentioned in the passage just quoted are far beyond the reach of us, the novice sadhakas of the Path. We have to start from where we are and what we are and proceed step by step in our unslackening sadhana of the replacement of personal desire-will by the divine Will.

In fact, there are, broadly speaking, five rungs in this ascent of the will Godward. These rungs can be summarily described as follows:

Rung One: Instinctive drives, species-specific urges; blind and ignorant desire-pushes.

Rung Two: Intelligent will but a will enslaved to the lower impulsions, acting as their pleading advocate and trying to rationalise and justify them.

Rung Three: The same intelligent will as above but this time it is truly rational and enlightened, and governed by the sense of ‘duty’, of what one should do and not of what one would like to do. This ‘duty’ of the moment is determined by the sadhaka according to the best light available

to him at that moment.

Rung Four: Will of the Yogi who has already realised his union with the Divine and merged his personal will in the divine Will.

Rung Five: The Will of the Supreme, operative in the universe of manifestation. This is the only true Will; all other wills and urges and yearnings, in all the creatures in all the worlds, are nothing but its deformed guises in a more or less pronounced degree.

About the “desire-pushes” mentioned in the first rung above, it should be noted that these can sometimes take the appearance of a strong ‘will-power’, when actually they are not so. For the definition of a will as given by Sri Aurobindo is: “*Will is the pressure of a conscious force on Nature.*” (Letters on Yoga, p. 566) If that is so, a mere vehemence of the urge or the inflexibility of obstinacy or the unidirectional rush of a passion cannot claim the status of a ‘will’. For such a forceful impulsion, when analysed to its roots, proves to be just a propelling force of the lower Nature to which the individual has ignorantly succumbed at the moment.

So far as the rational will mentioned in the second rung is concerned, this too is not a veritable will; for, the rationalising intelligence here has lost its freedom of judgment, decision and action and is acting solely at the behest of the desire-impulsions of the Nature.

As for the ‘will’ mentioned in the fourth rung above, it is the governing will of a realised soul, *siddha-yogī*. So we exclude it from the purview of our discussion. For we are dealing with the procedure of sadhana meant for a sadhaka who has not yet reached his Goal.

In our present chapter we are mainly concerned with the “intelligent will” of rung three above. Our intention is to indicate the sadhana-procedure, if there is any, by adopting which the sadhaka can develop and intensify his will-power so that it can always be put at the service of his varying exigencies under different situations of life.

The first thing we have to note in this connection is that once the sadhaka has entered the stage of “rationally intelligent will” he is faced with two opposite trends of this will. By adopting Sri Aurobindo’s analysis (Essays on the Gita, pp. 91-92) we may say that this rational will may either take a downward and outward orientation in the ignorant triple play of Nature, or, it may take an upward and inward orientation towards the calm purity of the conscious soul no longer subject to the distractions of Nature.

In the former alternative the subjective being of the individual is at the mercy of the objects of sense and lives in the outward contacts of things. That life is just a life of desires. For, the senses excited by their objects create a restless or often violent disturbance and a strong or even headlong outward movement towards the seizure of these objects and their subsequent enjoyment... The mind of the individual becomes subject to the emotions, passions, longings and impulsions awakened by this outward movement, *bahirmukha-vrti*; the intelligent will loses at the same time the power of calm discrimination and effective mastery. This downward trend of the rational will creates the troubled life of the ordinary, unenlightened, undisciplined man of the world.

A sadhaka worth the name cannot permit himself to lead such a disordered life. For after all he has voluntarily decided to be an aspirant of the spiritual path. Therefore he has to resolutely

choose, with a settled concentration and perseverance, the upward and inward orientation of his intelligent will. And for that the first movement of the sadhaka must be to get rid of blind desire in all its forms; for desire is the whole root of the evil and suffering in man's life. The sadhaka has to acquire the skill of observing the action of Nature without being subject to it and not desiring anything whatsoever what the objective life of vanity and ignorance can offer.

And for this the sadhaka needs a very strong illumined will-power. For he has to overcome almost at every step the downward and outward pulls exercised by the lower Nature. If he already possesses such a will, well and good. But if not, he has to set himself to the task of developing such a will-power. This can be called the "yoga of the will" and has to be practised on two fronts. (1) first a general practice to create the right attitude in oneself befitting a sadhaka; (2) and the specific procedure to be adopted in face of individual cases of temptation.

(1) Generalised practice: This consists of several elements which are as follows:

(i) Never to admit "I can't possibly resist this present temptation." For this avowal on the part of the sadhaka automatically prevents the action of the divine Grace. After all, this "I can't cannot stand the scrutiny. For, it is a fact of spiritual life that whenever a sadhaka sincerely decides to fight against any of his weaknesses, the Divine himself actively intervenes to help him in his enterprise. And what is there impossible for the divine Power?

So if it is ever found that the sadhaka's will is not being able to cope with a particular temptation, it simply means that he has not yet decided really to resist.

(ii) Sometimes it so happens that the sadhaka wants many different things at the same time and these wills are mutually contradictory. This opposition of the wills enfeebles them all and makes them impotent to stand up against particular temptations.

So the sadhaka, instead of remaining as he is now a heterogeneous personality, has to achieve an integrated and homogeneous consciousness. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

"...this aggregate is... a heterogeneous compound, not a single harmonious and homogeneous whole... [full of] different and conflicting tendencies... disparate consortium of habitual motiveforces... many incoherent and inharmonious mental elements... This is the reason why there is a constant confusion and even a conflict in our members... we drift too much or are driven by the stream of our nature and act from whatever in it comes uppermost at the time and seizes the instruments of thought and action..."(The Life Divine, p. 897)

(iii) Even if the will fails in its battle against the temptation, not only once but many times over, the sadhaka should not feel discouraged and give up the effort. Instead of sorrowing and complaining over his temporary failures, he should try again and again; for, as the Mother says, "*La victoire est au plus persistant*" — "*Victory is to the most persistent.*" We must give attention to the following rebuke of Sri Aurobindo:

"...it is the sentimental lachrymose attitude"... "always weeping and complaining and lamenting instead of facing life and overcoming its difficulties"... "that keeps his troubles unsolved and alive. This is a temperament which the gods will not help because they know that help is useless, for it will either not be received or will be spilled and wasted." (Letters on Yoga, pp. 1702-03)

(iv) The sadhaka has to throw out all flabbiness of character and build up in its stead in his psychological disposition the strong joy of a warrior, the joy of scoring victory in one's fight against temptations and the zealous joy of making constant progress.

“Am I not a child of the Divine Mother? How can I then accept ignoble defeat at the hands of my nature's foibles? I must always advance on the path of my spiritual destiny — come what pay” — such an attitude of self-confidence and resolution has to grow up in the sadhaka's heart. Here is the Mother's instruction to her children in this regard:

“What is indispensable in every case is the ardent will for progress, the willing and joyful renunciation of all that hampers the advance; to throw far away from oneself all that prevents one from going forward, and to set out into the unknown with the ardent faith that this is the truth of tomorrow, inevitable, which must necessarily come...” (Questions and Answers 1957, p. 158)

(v) The sadhaka must build up in his consciousness a strong sense of dignity and self-respect. A note of warning has to be sounded here. The dignity we are referring to is not the amour-propre of a self-conscious ego; it is rather the spiritual dignity of an aspiring soul. In other words, the sadhaka should wake up from his attitude of *laissez-aller* and be able to declare at all times with an enthusiastic vigour: “Fie upon me! Am I not a child of the Mother of Might? Do I not claim to be a sincere sadhaka? In that case, how is it that I lapse into self-oblivion so easily and get caught in the traps laid by the six enemies of the spiritual path, these enemies (a) lust and desire, (b) anger and irritation, (c) greed and voracity, (d) delusion and deception, (e) pride and vanity, and, last, (f) envy and jealousy. Do I not profess that I aspire after a divine life? — How can I then act and behave as if I am a worm wriggling in the gutter?”

Such a spirit of inner dignity, if always active in the sadhaka's consciousness, will immensely fortify his will against all alien suggestions and protect him from many a temptation.

(vi) The sadhaka must love and cherish his freedom with all his heart and develop in himself a strong distaste for all kinds of slavery and bondage. He must have an ardent yearning for perfect mastery over his own nature.

Here too we have to sound a note of warning to avoid any confusion and misunderstanding. The ‘freedom’ we are speaking of is a true spiritual freedom and not the arrogant self-assertion of a self-willed ego.

As this love for inner freedom grows in the sadhaka's consciousness, he realises that ‘will’ is essentially the forceful application of the intrinsic freedom of the Purusha or Self against the serfdom Prakriti or Nature seeks to impose. The sadhaka will then have a natural shrinking from surrendering his well-loved liberty and going under the yoke of the wily manoeuvrings of the lower Nature. Let us recall in this connection what Sri Aurobindo has said about the freedom and slavery of the working consciousness of the sadhaka:

“The weak-willed man is governed by his vital and physical impulses, his mental being is not dynamic enough to make its will prevail over them. His will is not ‘free’ because it is not strong enough to be ‘free’, it is the slave of the forces that act on or in his vital and physical nature.

“[In the strong-willed person] the will is so far free that it stands above the play of these forces

and he determines by his mental idea and resolve what he shall or shall not do... the Purusha has begun to emancipate itself and decide what it shall accept or shall not accept — the conscious being has begun to impose itself on the forces that act on it.” (Letters on Yoga, pp. 473-74)

(vii) A hierarchy of values has to be established in the consciousness of the sadhaka. A clear and unhesitant awareness of this hierarchy will help the sadhaka to make the right choice whenever he is confronted with two or more alternative courses of action. Without such a previously established hierarchy of values governing his decisions, the sadhaka is apt to be confused at every step and face the Hamletian dilemma of “to be or not to be, that is the question.”

But what is the standard of reference by whose help the sadhaka will be able to form his hierarchy with the relative values of its different degrees properly fixed?

The criterion is, of course, always the same for all the sadhakas. It may be formulated in this way: Whenever two alternative choices, A and B for example, present themselves to the sadhaka for his possible acceptance or rejection, he should judge the situation dispassionately without any bias positive or negative and determine which of the two alternatives will help him better to advance towards the realisation of his spiritual goal. The same rule applies in the case of other pairs of alternatives such as B and C, C and D,... M and N,... X and Y, etc.

In this way the sadhaka should make up a scale of values with its constituent elements arranged in an ascending order A, B, C, D, E, etc., for example. This is what we have called a ‘hierarchy of values’ valid for a particular sadhaka. If this hierarchy is judiciously constituted and kept available in the sadhaka’s consciousness at temptation at its proper place and accept or reject it following the universal rule of “Always sacrifice the lower for the sake of the higher, whatever may be the emotional inclination at that moment.” Without such a scale of values shining before his eyes, the sadhaka’s will-power will stumble before the task of making the right choice and sticking to it in spite of the immediately alluring prospects presented by the other alternative courses of action.

(viii) A last advice: Along with the seven generalised practices indicated above, the sadhaka should have some regular training in the building up of the strength of his will-power. Two short citations from the Mother’s writings will make the point clear:

“If no will, first of all, to build up a strong will; if one has a strong will, to orient it properly.”

“In order to make the will stronger and stronger, you must educate and exercise it, just as one exercises one’s muscles by repeated particular usage. What is needed is a regular and systematic exercise and training of the will.”

Here ends the eightfold generalised practice the sadhaka has to methodically adopt in order to build up in himself the right attitude conducive to the effective application of his will-power. Now comes the question of how to apply this will whenever the sadhaka is confronted with a problem of choice. This will be the theme of the following Section.

(2) Specific Procedure: Suppose at this very moment a sadhaka is faced with a particular weakness of his nature or a temptation assailing from outside. What should he do to come out victorious in this situation?

By the way, when we speak of a 'temptation', we do not mean by it an ordinary 'unethical' temptation conceived of as such by the conventional norms of a particular society. 'Temptation' has for us a far wider connotation. Any thought, feeling or act not behoving a sincere sadhaka who wants to advance on the spiritual path will be deemed to be a temptation, even if the particular thought, feeling or action is not judged 'unethical' by the society at large or even considered normal and laudable by men of the world. Our sole criterion is 'spiritual' and anything however innocuous, if it does not actively help in the growth of the spirit, is to be judged as a 'temptation' and has to be rejected. As the Mother reminded us:

"In the integral Yoga, the integral life down even to the smallest detail has to be transformed, to be divinised. There is nothing here that is insignificant, nothing that is indifferent. You cannot say, 'When I am meditating, reading philosophy or listening to these conversations I will be in this condition of an opening towards the Light and call for it, but when I go out to walk or see friends I can allow myself to forget all about it.' To persist in this attitude means that you will remain untransformed and never have the true union; always you will be divided..."
(Questions and Answers, MCW, Vol. 3, p. 24)

Let us go back to the point we were discussing. Suppose a particular temptation has come before the sadhaka to test the power of his will; the aspirant is face to face with a weakness of his nature. It is not that he does not know what to do and what not to do. He knows that perfectly well. But for some reason or other he is tempted to do the wrong thing and fails to muster enough of will-power to reject the wrong course of action. What should he do in this situation?

It goes without saying that as a sadhaka he is expected to take the right decision and translate that into action: he has to score victory over his weakness. And for that he must intensify his fighting will and with its help resist and reject the temptation at hand. The procedure to do that effectively consists of a few steps which are indicated below:

1. The very first thing the sadhaka has to do is to establish in his mind and heart an ambience of perfect tranquillity. Any agitation or excitement, fear and trepidation, or the whispering prompting of his self-will will strongly inhibit him from requisitioning sufficient will power which can help him to avoid the wrong track and seek what is right under the circumstances. An absolute calm is therefore the very first necessity.
2. From this background of undisturbed calm the sadhaka has now to throw the searchlight of keen observation into the recesses of his consciousness to detect there all the specific preferences and antipathies that might be hiding there: these preferential desires and shrinkings are bound to sap and mine the vigour of the will-power. Therefore, at least for the time being, all these preferences and antipathies have to be muted and, if possible, a neutral blank created there so that the will of the sadhaka may be enabled to act without any drag from behind.
3. Next, the sadhaka should steadily hold before his consciousness the clear outline of his real goal in life. He should possess a definite unhesitant idea of what is expected of him as a sadhaka of the spiritual path and of all that can nullify the realisation of his goal. The more clear and definite is his conception of the goal, and the more committed he is to the realisation of this goal, the more ardent and powerful will be the resistance of his will against all negative urges and allurements.
4. One of the most effective tricks applied by any invading temptation is to create a blinding

deception in the sadhaka's mind and heart by inflating the temptation's worth, importance and suggestion far beyond its actual measure. Thus the temptation begins to loom large before the sadhaka's consciousness and he loses all sense of perspective making him incapable of judging properly and coming to the right decision.

So, each time he is under some sly attack of a temptation, the sadhaka should step back in his consciousness from the pressing present appearance, place himself in imagination in the background of eternity and infinity, judge from there all the passing vanities life and be totally convinced of the relativity of things however overpowering they may appear to be at the present moment.

This exercise, if properly initiated, will prick the bubble of the threatening temptation and the sadhaka will feel it easy to overcome.

5. Lastly, whenever confronted with the feebleness of will and with the feeling of being incapable of resisting the incoming temptation, the sadhaka should recall the bracing adage: "*Always behave as if the Divine is looking at you, for he is indeed always present.*" He should activate his love for the Divine and try to grow in the living Presence of the Divine Mother. This love and the sense of Presence, if strong and genuine, will immensely fortify his will-power and the conquest over one's weaknesses will almost become a child's play.

Here ends our essay on "Will-power in Sadhana" but the ascent of 'will' does not end here. In this chapter we have mainly dealt with the ways of fortifying our 'rational intelligent will', for with its help only the sadhaka can successfully proceed on the difficult path of spiritual sadhana. But beyond this lies the 'psychic will', the fire of the psychic being; and still beyond is the Knowledge-Will of the Supreme, the Seer-*Tapas* of the Divine. At the culmination of his prolonged sadhana, the aspirant has to merge his self-will completely in this divine Seer-Will, *Kavi-kratu*.

XIX.

Equality in the Integral Yoga

To maintain an attitude of unruffled equanimity at all times and under all circumstances is absolutely essential in the case of a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga. In the paths of sadhana followed by ascetic renunciatory spirituality, equality is not so much stressed, for the sadhakas there solve the problems by segregating themselves from the objects and occasions liable to disturb their sang-froid: there the quality cardinally called for is *Vairagya* or 'Dispassion'. But in the practice of the Integral Yoga which aims at the transformation of the total human nature, the sadhaka has to boldly confront all the vagaries and vicissitudes of life, carry the relentless spiritual battle into the lion's den itself and score victory there. And this hazardous procedure cannot but necessitate the acquisition of *samatā* or equality as the most basic armour of the sadhaka. Without this indispensable attainment the seeker is likely to be bruised and battered at every second step of the Way and may even be completely pushed out from the chosen Path of his sadhana. Hence are the following recommendatory words of Sri Aurobindo:

"The very first necessity for spiritual perfection is a perfect equality." (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 671)

"Equality is the chief support of the true spiritual consciousness..." (Letters on Yoga, p. 661)

Lord Krishna, the great proponent of spiritual synthesis, went so far as to define 'Yoga' as the 'attainment of equality', *'samatvam yoga ucyate'*. According to him the consciousness of a true yogi is always established in equality, *sāmye sthitam*, and a spiritual person worth the name lives always and everywhere and in all situations in a serene mood of unity, *ekatvam āsthitah*.

It is not accidental that we have mentioned the twin attributes of unity and equality almost in the same breath: they are very closely, almost indissolubly, linked and related. For the equality we have been speaking of and which is absolutely essential for the establishment of a genuine spiritual life is not just the harsh power of endurance of the Stoic nor the disappointed resignation of someone for whom the 'grapes are sour' and are therefore of no interest! Nor is it the apparent equality of a dull-witted person who remains unperturbed in many situations simply because for him 'ignorance is bliss'. Also, the so-called 'equality' shown by some men who are hardened in their feelings by the lack of sufficient sensitivity is not judged as such in spiritual parlance.

In fact, true equality is an elevated status of the being, very much positive and dynamic, surcharged with great power, but absolutely calm and quiet in every way. This equality is the reflection in the consciousness of the *siddha-yogi*, of the eternal and infinite Oneness of the supreme Reality, *samam brahma*. One can expect to possess this supernal equality only when one arrives at the concrete experience of the Presence of the 'One-without-second', *ekam eva advitīyam*, in and behind everything in this world of manifestation. It is impossible to attain it in any other way.

Sri Aurobindo has lucidly spelt out the nature of this realisation of *samam brahma* on pages 211-13 of *The Synthesis of Yoga*. Here is an abridged and adapted version of what he has written there:

‘...the worship of the Master... demands a clear recognition and glad acknowledgement of him in ourselves, in all things and in all happenings. Equality is the sign of this adoration... The Lord is there equally in all beings, we have to make no essential distinctions between ourselves and others, the wise and the ignorant, friend and enemy, man and animal, the saint and the sinner... in all we have to see the One disguised or manifested at his pleasure. He is a little revealed in one or more revealed in another or concealed and wholly distorted in others according to his will and his knowledge of what is best for that which he intends to become in form in them... All is our self, one self that has taken many shapes... Even what we have to destroy, we must not abhor or fail to recognise as a disguised and temporary movement of the Eternal.

‘And since all things are the one Self in its manifestation, we shall have equality of soul towards the ugly and the beautiful, the maimed and the perfect, the noble and the vulgar, the pleasant and the unpleasant the good and the evil...

‘...behind the variation we shall always see the Complete and the Immutable who dwells within it and we shall feel, know or at least, if it is hidden from us, trust in the wise purpose and divine necessity of the particular manifestation...

‘And so too we shall have the same equality of mind and soul towards all happenings, painful or pleasurable, defeat and success, honour and disgrace, good repute and ill-repute, good fortune and evil fortune. For in all happenings we shall see the will of the Master of all works and results and a step in the evolving expression of the Divine...

‘Thus supremely balanced we shall continue steadily on our way meeting all things with an equal calm...’ (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 211-13)

But surely one cannot reach in a short time this elevated status of spiritual equality which is the result of an uninterrupted vision of the One in the Many in spite of all disconcerting variations and differences on the surface. In order to be *samatā-siddha*, perfect in equality, the aspirant has to do some serious sadhana stretching over a long period of time. This sadhana for equality has many stages, many a step in the stair of ascension. And in each of these stages or steps the concept ‘equality’ will change its purpose and significance. We have to be vigilant so that we may not inadvertently halt our journey in the middle of our enterprise, taking an intermediate stage of equality to be the final *siddhi*.

Thus in a relatively earlier part of the sadhana the immature, not so well -informed sadhaka may mistake as real equality what Sri Aurobindo has termed as “*an attitude of equal recoil*” and “*equality of equal acceptance*”.

Be that as it may, the very first task the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to attend to in his sadhana is to maintain an attitude of perfect calm and equanimity under all circumstances. The Mother was once asked: “Is there any sign which indicates that one is ready for the path, especially if one has no spiritual teacher?” This is how the Mother answered this very important question:

“Yes, the most important indication is a perfect equality of soul in all circumstances. It is an absolutely indispensable basis; something very calm, quiet, peaceful, the feeling of a great force. Not the quietness that comes from inertia but the sensation of a concentrated power

which keeps you always steady, whatever happens, even in circumstances which may appear to you most terrible in your life. That is the first sign.” (MCW, Vol. 4, p. 97)

So what is most important for the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga is to grow, even in the preparatory period of his sadhana, into the following attitude and way of action and reaction vis-à-vis all objects and persons and events of one's daily life. This sadhana-procedure has been adapted from Sri Aurobindo's writings as we find them in his *Letters on Yoga*, pp . 661-62:

“The sadhaka should not allow any vital movement to carry him away in feeling or speech or action. He must develop a quiet and unmoved mind and heart which means in actual practice not to be touched or disturbed by things that happen or things said or done to the sadhaka. He must look at them with a straight look, free from the distortions created by personal feelings. He should try to understand what is behind them, why they happen, what is to be learnt from them, what is it in oneself which they are cast against and what inner profit or progress one can make out of them. The sadhaka must establish total self-mastery over all vital movements such as anger and fear, sensitiveness and pride, desires and impulses and the rest. He should never let them get hold of his emotional being and disturb the inner peace. He should never speak and act in the rush and impulsion of any of these things. All his speech and action should follow from out of a calm inner poise of the spirit. At the same time the sadhaka should develop an equal view of men and their nature and their acts and the forces that move them. He should try to see the truth about them by pushing away all prejudiced personal feeling in one's seeing and judgment. What is always needed on the part of the sadhaka is a strong and large and equal attitude towards men and things and events and situations.”

Yes, an equal attitude towards men and things and events and situations: as a firm achievement this is surely a sine qua non of true spirituality. But how is it then that most of us, in our daily conduct of life affairs, almost always miserably fail to maintain this laudable attitude of impartial equality? What is the root-cause of this failure? Unless we discover this root-cause and remove it, it will be vain to expect that we shall be able to progress in establishing *samatā* or equality in our daily functioning consciousness.

Why inequality — A clairvoyant analysis of the manifestation of any type of inequality on our part under any provocative situation will make it manifest to us that it is in every case the separative sense of 'ego' and its protean progeny 'desire' which pull the strings from behind and make the sadhaka lose his balance and stumble on the path. This is how it all happens; the sequence of cause and effect follows somewhat the pattern indicated below:

The sadhaka's 'ego', being basically separative in nature, makes him forget that he is in reality one with the supreme Divine. His self-oblivion brings about an acute sense of impotence and limitation. And wherever there is limitation, there cannot but arise a deep sense of lacking and dissatisfaction. This feeling of lacking and want gives rise to the sprouting of a thousand desires.

The sadhaka strains after the fulfilment of a particular desire. First, there is in him tension of inequality in the period of straining. After the object of desire is attained, there is momentary satisfaction but not for long. For by its very nature the object gained loses its previous charm after some time and shows its inadequacy in many ways.

The frustrated desire of the sadhaka then moves away from that object of first love and strains to gain a second object under the mistaken impression that this second object will surely give

him that satisfaction which he failed to receive from the first object. But the hope is belied very soon and the same sense of acute frustration disturbs the poise of the sadhaka without fail.

Then the search is initiated for a third object of desire and the same cycle of tension-laden seeking, momentary seizing and satisfaction, and subsequent disenchantment follows ad infinitum.

Also, 'ego' being separative in its very character, cannot but institute a constant comparison and contrast with the supposed attainments and possessions of other egos around oneself, which, the first ego feels, have somehow eluded his grasp. This gives rise to a continual sense of deprivation and injustice. And this cannot but engender in the person a mood of incessant irritation and inequality.

Thus, with ego and its progeny, desires, lurking below the ground of consciousness with their roots struck deep down, peace and equanimity will always remain beyond the reach of the sadhaka, *sāntim apnoti na kāmakāmī* (Gita II. 70). According to the prescription suggested by Lord Krishna, the only way to the attainment of perfect peace and equality is the uprooting of ego and desires, *nisprahāh nirmamo nirahankārah sāntim adhigacchati* (ibid., II. 71).

But this is easier said than done. To be completely free from all trace of "I-ness" and "My-ness" and from the invasion of all attendant desires is not a task that can be achieved even by many advanced yogis, not to speak of those who are only novices. And it is an indubitable fact that without the possession of equality a sadhaka cannot progress on the path of sadhana. For "*a perfect equality of our spirit and nature is a means by which we can move back from the troubled and ignorant outer consciousness into the inner kingdom of heaven...*" (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 672) So the sadhaka is faced with a dilemma: Without attaining equality, one cannot acquire perfect spiritual equality, but at the same time, without achieving equality, one cannot proceed to the successful elimination of the ego-sense. How to solve the riddle? How to come out of the impasse?

The answer is simple. It is not that only when one phase of sadhana is entirely completed, the other phase may at all begin. Both the phases must march together helping each other all the time. For they are in some intimate way interdependent.

Thus even when we remain on the whole ego-bound creatures harassed by a multitude of desires, we have to undertake the sadhana of equality although in an imperfect way and, may be, under some fictitious garbs. But something is surely better than nothing: though initially imperfect, our sincere practice will progressively lead us to perfection.

Thus our sadhana may have to pass through many imitation stages of equality, which have to be temporarily adopted and exploited for the benefit they may offer us, and then overpassed and rejected in favour of a higher variant of *samatā*.

Thus the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga may have to successively or simultaneously pass through the following forms of equality which are at best some happy simulacra of *samatā*:

(i) The equality of disappointed resignation; (ii) the equality of pride; (iii) the equality of hardness and indifference; (iv) equality arising out of a desire's satiated recoil from itself; etc.

When the sadhaka has proceeded further on the path of sadhana, he may encounter a few other types of pseudo-*samatā*, based on the three modes or Gunas of Nature-Force, viz., *Tamas*, *Rajas* and *Sattwa*. Let us recall that *Tamas* is the mode of inertia, fixed habits and conservatism; *Rajas* that of elan for newness, possession and adventure; and, finally, *Sattwa* is the mode of harmony and balance and light.

Now, the dominance of any one of these three modes of Nature may lead to a particular type of reposeful quiet which may deceitfully take the appearance of ‘equality’. These phoney *samatās* may be recognised by the following signs:

(i) *Tamasic samatā*: The blind torpor of the physical nature and the heavy inertia of the vital being may lead to a temporary numbness of the reacting consciousness, which, in its turn, may create in the sadhaka a distaste for the joys of life and an ossified insensibility.

(ii) *Rajasic samatā*: Not an equal passive recoil, which is the characteristic trait of *Tamas*, but an eager urge for equal acceptance, is the sign of *Rajasic* equality. For the principle of *Rajas* is a principle of battle and struggle, of a vehement impulsion to dominate and subdue everything equally. Therefore the tendency here is that the nature of the *rajasic* sadhaka is ever ready to accept equally the challenges of all experiences without exception, sweet or bitter, happy or sorrowful, pampering or dangerous, and try to come out victorious out of them all.

(iii) *Sattvic samatā*: This *samatā* comes out of the perception of the enlightened reason that everything in life is *anityam asukham*, transitory and doleful, and is therefore not worth hunting after. Hence, to be dispassionate towards everything is the only wise course of action and the only sane attitude to adopt.

But this *Sattvic samatā* cannot be the last *siddhi* we have been aiming at. For this equality too may break down under severe tests and stresses. Therefore the sadhaka has to proceed further, transcend the action of all the three modes of Nature, including that of noble *Sattva*. In Sri Aurobindo’s words:

“Perfect security can only be had by resorting to something higher than the *sattwic* quality, something higher than the discerning mind, to the Self, — not the philosopher’s intelligent self, but the divine sage’s spiritual self which is beyond the three Gunas. All must be consummated by a divine birth into the higher spiritual nature.” (Essays on the Gita, p. 189)

Yes, “a divine birth into the higher spiritual nature” is indeed the apposite solution. But that cannot be achieved soon. The sadhaka has to start from where he is now and proceed slowly towards the establishment of true spiritual equality in all the parts of the being. For that he may have to seek his point of support in either of three principles of his complex nature: (i) the principle of will-power; (ii) the principle of enlightened intelligence; and (iii) the principle of the heart’s love and resignation.

These three ways of sadhana can be succinctly described as follows:

(i) *Samatā* through the Will-Power: The basic principle of this method of sadhana is: ‘Endure, endure; endure by all means. Never be a slave to your nature’s promptings. Establish perfect mastery over her. Whatever may be the churning within, never manifest in action the impulsion suggested by nature.’

This attitude, this discipline, persistently applied, brings out one by one three beneficial results very much conducive to the development in sadhana. In Sri Aurobindo's words:

"First it is found that what was before unbearable, becomes easy to endure; the scale of the power that meets the impact rises in degrees... Secondly, it is found that the conscious nature divides itself into two parts, one of the normal mental and emotional nature in which the customary reactions continue to take place; another of the higher will and reason which observes and is not troubled or affected by the passion of this lower nature... This brings the third power and result... to get rid of the normal reactions [altogether]..." (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 683)

(ii) *Samatā* through impartial Indifference: This sadhana bases itself on the application of the discriminating intelligence of the sadhaka. In the formulation of the Mother, the principle of sadhana adopted here is: "Step back and watch." The sadhaka learns by and by how to place every impact of life in the wider perspective of eternity of Time and infinity of Space. This sort of detached vision will reduce the value and importance of the impact to something relative and insignificant. And it is bound to lose all its power to disturb the poise and equanimity of the Sadhaka. Sri Aurobindo describes this sadhana-procedure in these words:

"The second way is an attitude of impartial indifference. Its method is to reject at once the attraction or the repulsion of things, to cultivate for them a luminous impassivity, an inhibiting rejection, a habit of dissociation and desuetude. This attitude reposes less on the will, though will is always necessary, than on the knowledge." (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 684)

If the sadhaka continues in the sadhana of this method, with sincerity and persistence, he will soon be blessed with three beneficial results. First, he will come to realise that much of his sorrow and suffering and unease arising out of the adverse impacts of life, is self-imposed, voluntary and the inert continuation of the reactions of past habit. They are relative in nature and therefore remediable if only the soul boldly stands up and takes the resolution not to fall an easy prey to their suggestions. The second result will be, as in the case of the first method of equal endurance, a creation of a clear-cut division in the consciousness of the sadhaka with an inner part that remains free and immune and an outer superficial one which may continue for sometime to be still subservient to the old habitual touches of the invading impacts. But this too will end sooner or later with the advent of the third result which will spread the ambience of equanimity even on the outer part of the being.

(iii) *Samatā* through resigned Acquiescence: In this method of sadhana the loving heart of the sadhaka takes the lead and helps him to take the following attitude :

"I know for certain with all my inner feeling that the Divine is All-Good always and everywhere. All that he does in my life is always for my greater future good even if I fail to recognise its true nature and significance at this moment when it has come to me in the appearance of a harsh misfortune. So my constant attitude before every single act of divine Providence should be: "Let Thy Will be done always and everywhere."

It may be noted that as the first method of sadhana indicated above was a way of the will and the second one a way of knowledge and of the understanding reason, the third way is a way of temperament and intimately connected with the principle of Bhakti or loving devotion to the Divine. It is founded on submission to the will of God and on an unegoistic acceptance of things

and happenings as a manifestation of the universal divine Will in time.

This sadhana too brings in time three good effects in the consciousness of the sadhaka: (i) the knots of “I-ness” and “My-ness” get loosened by and by; (ii) all personal desires and demands vanish in time leaving place for only one desire, how to align one’s will always with the Will of the Divine; and (iii) an intense aspiration to be united with the Divine and to be the faithful and perfect Instrument of his manifestation.

As the sadhaka arrives at the culminating point of this sadhana, *“all within... [him becomes] the equal peace and bliss of that union, the one silent bliss that passes understanding, the peace that abides untouched by the solicitation of lower things in the depths of our spiritual existence.”* (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 686)

While seriously pursuing the sadhana of equality the sadhaka may at times be troubled by two or three nagging questions: (i) Will the perfection of equality lead to a blindness of vision obliterating the perception of all variations? (ii) Will equality be tantamount to the killing of our emotional nature culminating in utter insensibility and indifference? (iii) Will not the seeking after equality mortify our urge for progress and perfection?

All these questions arise out of a misunderstanding of the whole affair. This is what Sri Aurobindo says in answer to these misplaced misgivings:

“Equality does not mean a fresh ignorance or blindness; it does not call for and need not initiate a greyness of vision and a blotting out of all hues. Difference is there, variation of expression is there and this variation we shall appreciate, — far more justly... But behind the variation we shall always see the Complete and Immutable who dwells within it...” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 212)

“[Equality] is not a killing of the emotional nature but a transformation... Love will be not destroyed, but perfected, enlarged to its widest capacity, deepened to its spiritual rapture...” (Ibid., p. 677)

“All indeed has to be changed, not ugliness accepted but divine beauty, not imperfection taken as our resting-place but perfection striven after, the supreme good made the universal aim and not evil. But what we do has to be done with a spiritual understanding and knowledge, and it is a divine good, beauty, perfection, pleasure that has to be followed after, not the human standards of these things.” (Ibid., p. 212)

Here ends the essay on the sadhana of equality. Whatever may be the case with other methods of Yoga or the goals sought after by the seekers of other spiritual paths, a perfect equality on the part of the sadhaka is absolutely necessary in the Integral Yoga of self-transformation. Let us close the chapter with an excerpt from Sri Aurobindo which is at once an instruction and an admonition:

“The test it lays down is an absolute equality of the mind and the heart to all results, to all reactions, to all happenings... The tiniest reaction is a proof that the discipline is imperfect... Our selfconquest is only partially accomplished; it is still imperfect or unreal in some stretch or part or smallest spot of the ground of our nature. And that little pebble of imperfection may throw down the whole achievement of the Yoga!” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 95-96)

XX.

On the Psychic Awakening

The path of spiritual sadhana has been compared to a razor's edge, *ksurasya dhārā*; it is very difficult to tread. At every turn of the way there is the possibility of an ambush; at every moment of the journey there arises the dilemma of how to choose the right course of action. Besides, there are a thousand and one lures and temptations to which the sadhaka is constantly exposed by the adverse forces opposed to the successful completion of his sadhana.

How is the seeker going to contend with this ceaseless battle of the path and come out successfully out of all the deceitful traps and dangerous pits? Is it through the valiant efforts put up by his mind and heart and will-power?

But is that not a vain hope based on an act of delusion? For the mind and the vital are themselves, in their normal functioning, seized and controlled by crass ignorance. And is not the potency of the egoistic will drastically limited and almost always ineffective in action? What should the sadhaka do then? If the Guru is present in his physical body, the problem may not arise; but if not? Who will guide the sadhaka then?

Herein comes the great role played by our psychic being, the luminous representative of the Divine, dwelling in the depths of the heart of every man and sending up its infallible warnings and indications from there. But the difficulty is that this psychic being remains mostly hidden behind the thick veils of the sadhaka's ignorance and is practically inoperative in moulding the daily affairs of the sadhaka's life.

But this situation has to be remedied, the psychic being brought to the front and made the constant guide of the sadhaka in all the crises of his sadhana-life. The capital importance of this psychic awakening will be obvious if we recapitulate here the principal stages of the Way that leads to the complete *Siddhi* of the Integral Yoga. The three following passages from Sri Aurobindo's writings will make the position clear:

(1) *"In the spiritual knowledge of self there are three steps of its self-achievement which are at the same time three parts of the one knowledge.*

"The first is the discovery of the soul, not the outer soul of thought and emotion and desire, but the secret psychic entity, the divine element within us. When that becomes dominant over the nature, when we are consciously the soul and when mind, life and body take their true place as its instruments, we are aware of a guide within that knows the truth, the good, the true delight and beauty of existence, controls heart and intellect by its luminous law and leads our life and being towards spiritual completeness... This is the first step of self-realisation, to enthrone the soul, the divine psychic individual in the place of the ego.

"The next step is to become aware of the eternal self in us unborn and one with the self of all beings. This self-realisation liberates and universalises...

"The third step is to know the Divine Being who is at once our supreme transcendent Self, the Cosmic Being, foundation of our universality, and the Divinity within of which our psychic being, the true evolving individual in our nature, is a portion, a spark, a flame growing into the

eternal Fire from which it was lit and of which it is the witness ever living within us and the conscious instrument of its light and power and joy and beauty.”

(The Life Divine, pp. 630-31. Paragraphing ours.)

(2) “...the supramental change is difficult, distant, an ultimate stage... it can only come into the view of possibility after much arduous self-conquest and self-exceeding... One must first acquire an inner Yogic consciousness and replace by it our ordinary view of things, natural movements, motives of life...”

“Next, we have to go still deeper, discover our veiled psychic entity and in its light and under its government psychicise our inner and outer parts, turn mind-nature, life-nature, body-nature and all our mental, vital, physical action and states and movements into a conscious instrumentation of the soul.

“Afterwards or concurrently we have to spiritualise the being in its entirety by a descent of a divine Light, Force, Purity, Knowledge, Freedom and Wideness. It is necessary to break down the limits of the personal mind, life and physicality, dissolve the ego, enter into the cosmic consciousness, realise the self, acquire a spiritualised and universalised mind and heart, life-force, physical consciousness.

“Then only the passage into the supramental consciousness begins to become possible...” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 267-68 Paragraphing ours.)

(3) “This can be done only by the triple transformation... there must first be the psychic change, the conversion of our whole present nature into a soul-instrumentation;

“on that or along with that there must be the spiritual change, the descent of a higher Light, Knowledge, Power, Force, Bliss, Purity into the whole being, even into the lowest recesses of the life and body, even into the darkness of our subconsciousence;

“last, there must supervene the supramental transmutation, — there must take place as the crowning movement the ascent into the Supermind and the transforming descent of the supramental Consciousness into our entire being and nature.” (The Life Divine, p. 891. Paragraphing ours.)

From the three long passages from Sri Aurobindo’s writings quoted above it becomes abundantly clear that, for the successful completion of the sadhana of the Integral Yoga, the very first *siddhi* that is needed by the sadhaka is the awakening of his psychic being and, with its active help, the psychic conversion of our present nature.

But what exactly is meant by the psychic awakening? It is not that the psychic being has been sleeping all the time and it has to be aroused from its sleep. No, the ‘psychic awakening’ is a technical term used in yogic nomenclature. Let us explain.

Since a very long time, for many many lives past, the psychic being of an individual has been exercising beneficial influence upon him, perhaps in slow and small doses, but from behind the opaque covering of the ignorant mind and heart and the physical self of man. But as a result of continuous evolutionary progression of consciousness, a moment comes in the life of every

individual when his occultly dwelling psychic being steps out of its secrecy, becomes active in the forefront of the sadhaka's consciousness and guides him directly from there on to the destination of spiritual realisation. In the nomenclature of sadhana, this is what is called 'psychic awakening' or 'the psychic being coming to the front'.

Many are the propitious contributions made by this psychic awakening to the sadhana-life of the seeker concerned. To cite only a few of them:

(i) Development of pure love and devotion for the Divine; (ii) concrete sense of the constant Presence of the Divine Mother; (iii) sure indications coming from within as regards the way to be followed at any moment; (iv) quietening and purification of the mind and heart and the vital of the sadhaka; (v) opening of all the parts of the lower nature towards the spiritual consciousness reigning above; (vi) mixing of sweetness to the dry rigours of spiritual discipline; (vii) being able to recognise the undesirable impulses of the lower nature not as one's own but alien influences invading from outside. As a result it becomes psychologically easier for the sadhaka to wage a successful battle against the intruding influences and drive them away.

Such is the necessity and indispensability of the psychic awakening in the sadhana of the Integral Yoga. And it is because of this that Sri Aurobindo has reminded us in no uncertain terms that

“One may practise yoga and get illuminations in the mind and the reason; one may conquer power and luxuriate in all kinds of experiences in the vital; one may establish even surprising physical Siddhis; but if the true soul-power behind does not manifest, if the psychic nature does not come into the front, nothing genuine has been done.” (Letters on Yoga , p. 1095)

The foregoing discussion over the last few pages has made clear to us the succession of the steps the sadhaka has to pass through in order to attain the final *Siddhi* in the Integral Yoga. Let us make once again a brief mention of the steps, considering them in the reverse order, that is to say, starting from the consummating goal and descending step by step down the rungs of the stair:

- (i) The supramental transformation of the being and nature of man is the ultimate Goal;
- (ii) this has to be necessarily preceded by the psycho-spiritual transformation;
- (iii) but that can be achieved only if the psychic being can be brought to the front and made active in the outer field of the sadhaka's consciousness;
- (iv) but this psychic emergence is not possible unless the sadhaka undertakes the sadhana of the inwardisation of his consciousness, reaches the psychic centre and is united with it;
- (v) but this 'entry into the inner countries' is not feasible unless and until the mind and the vital of the sadhaka are sufficiently quietened and purified.

Now, this way to the psychic awakening is long and difficult and the programme of sadhana is quite arduous. In the words of the Mother, the path is *“strewn with snares and problems to be solved, which demand an unflinching determination. It is like the explorer's trek through virgin forest in quest of an unknown land, of some great discovery. The psychic being is also a great*

discovery which requires at least as much fortitude and endurance as the discovery of new continents.” (MCW, Vol. 12, p. 33)

Yes, the psychic being is also ‘a great discovery’. For this soul or the psychic is a kind of individual concentration of the divine Grace; it is the Grace’s individual representative in the human being. It is like a particular delegation of the Spirit in mankind, a special help to lead it faster and faster. It is, after all, the soul that makes the individual progress spiritually.

Hence it is incumbent on every sadhaka to make sincere efforts to bring forward his psychic to the forefront of his consciousness. For then and then only he will taste what is meant by true freedom and love and joy. Otherwise there is no other go for him except to lead the sordid and suffocating life of a prisoner in a dark dungeon.

Yet the tragedy is that most men are not aware at all of this state of imprisonment; they feel no urge to undo the prisoner’s status. So the very first necessity for the sadhaka is to create in himself the proper psychological attitude which will inspire him to engage in the sadhana of psychic discovery. It is worth, in this connection, meditating on the following words of the Mother:

“...the vast majority of men are like prisoners with all the doors and windows closed, so they suffocate, which is quite natural. But they have with them the key that opens the doors and windows, and they do not use it... Certainly there is a time when they don’t know they have the key, but long after they have come to know it, long after they have been told about it, they hesitate to use it, and doubt whether it has the power to open the doors and windows or even that it is a good thing to open them! And even when they feel that ‘after all, it might be good’, there remains some fear: ‘What will happen when these doors and windows are opened?...’ and they are afraid. They are afraid of being lost in that light and freedom. They want to remain what they call ‘themselves’. They like their falsehood and their bondage, something in them likes it and goes on clinging to it. They still have the impression that without their limits they would no longer exist.” (MCW, Vol. 9, pp. 431-32)

It thus becomes clear that, in order that the sadhana for the discovery of the psychic being and its subsequent emergence to the front may arrive at its fulfilment, what is needed on the part of the sadhaka is a proper psychological preparation. And a principal element of this preparation should be that the seeker should learn to be guided in his daily life not by the impulses of his impure vital nor by the animal appetites of his blind physical consciousness but by a pure and free and enlightened reason. This reason is not the debating calculating reason of common men but the aspiring intelligence which seeks the truth and truth alone and yearns to know the Divine’s Will at any price.

The quietening of the turmoil of the unregenerate mental and the vital and the establishment in oneself of the ever-awake, ever-vigilant, transparent intelligence: this then is the first step in the preliminary psychological preparation. For, as has already been pointed out, even now the psychic being of the sadhaka, in the midst of his functioning ignorance, has been sending its influences and indications to the surface consciousness of the seeker from its secret dwelling place within; but, because of the constant agitation created by the preferences of the mind, heart and body, much of this psychic influence and inspiration is getting deformed and deviated. The blind prejudices of the mind, the turbid desires of the vital and the tamasic demands of the body are almost blotting out the messages of light emanating from the psychic centre.

With a view to neutralise this nefarious interference, if the sadhaka takes some effective steps to free himself from the egoistic preferences and antipathies of his vital and the mental, he will find to his happy surprise that his secretly dwelling psychic being has started sending to his outer consciousness, in an unimpeded and regular way, its sacred injunctions and prohibitions.

And that it has been doing so can be recognised by the sadhaka by certain psychological signs. Here is what Sri Aurobindo has to say on this point:

“A certain sensitive feeling for all that is true and good and beautiful, fine and pure and noble, a response to it, a demand for it, a pressure on mind and life to accept and formulate it in our thought, feelings, conduct, character is the most usually recognised, the most general and characteristic... sign of the influence of this psyche.” (The Life Divine, p. 893)

But even when the psychic begins sending its messages almost in a more or less uninterrupted way, the sadhaka has to remain vigilant so that he may not misinterpret the significance of these messages. For the risk is there that the psychic influence and action may get easily alloyed, stained and distorted in the earlier stages of sadhana. A twist is often given, a wrong direction imparted, a wrong formation made, and all these may easily lead to an erroneous result of what was in its essence and origin pure and spiritual.

Therefore, in order that the psychic message may be received in its distinct purity the sadhaka should stop agitating in his mind and heart all debating questions like “this?” or “that?”, try to establish quiet there for the time being, and direct his silent but expectant attention inward to hear the voice of the psychic.

And if the preliminary conditions are properly fulfilled, the indications from the psychic centre are bound to come. If they do not, it may be because of two reasons: either the sadhaka’s consciousness is not sufficiently stilled, or he is not yet inwardly ready to carry out in practice the psychic indication if it happens to go counter to his cherished wishes and formations. In the Mother’s words:

“When you hesitate, when you wonder what to do in this or that circumstance, there come the desire, the preference both mental and vital, that press, insist, affirm and impose themselves, and, with the best reasons in the world, build up a whole case for themselves...”

“But if you are truly sincere in your will to find and live the truth, then you learn to listen better and better... and even if it costs you an effort, even if it causes you pain, you learn to obey.”(MCW, Vol. 10, p. 25)

Here at this point it is good to bear in mind the negative traits in the sadhaka’s character which may possibly frustrate his sadhana of inward turning in a safe and secure way and of discovering his psychic being. In Sri Aurobindo’s enumeration these baneful traits are:

(i) *“Too much egoism in the nature of the seeker”* ; (ii) *“[any] strong passion”*; (iii) *“an excessive ambition, vanity or other dominating weakness”* ; (iv) *“an obscurity of the mind”*; (v) *“a vacillating will”*; (vi) *“a weakness of the life-force or an unsteadiness in it or want of balance”*; etc. (See The Life Divine, p. 905)

If the sadhaka possesses any of these failings in a marked degree, he should take immediate

steps to remedy them as soon as possible.

Elsewhere also in his writing Sri Aurobindo has mentioned a few disabling factors which militate against the full emergence of the psychic being and its unbarred overt action. Here are two representative passages:

(1) *“If the mind obeys the urge of the vital ego, then there is little chance of the psyche at all controlling the nature or manifesting us something of its secret spiritual stuff and native movement; or, if the mind is over-confident to act in its own smaller light, attached to its own judgment, will and action of knowledge, then also the soul will remain veiled and quiescent and wait for the mind’s farther evolution.”* (The Life Divine, p. 892)

(2) *“Then only can the psychic being fully open when the sadhak has got rid of the mixture of vital motives with his sadhana and is capable of a simple and sincere self-offering to the Mother. If there is any kind of egoistic turn or insincerity of motive, if the yoga is done under a pressure of vital demands, or partly or wholly to satisfy some spiritual or other ambition, pride, vanity or seeking after power, position or influence over others or with any push towards satisfying any vital desire with the help of the yogic force, then the psychic cannot open... Also, if the mind takes the leading part in the yoga... or if the bhakti or other movements of the sadhana take more of a vital than of a psychic form, there is the same inability.”* (Letters on Yoga, pp. 1098-99)

We have been insisting so far on the negative traits of character which go counter to the successful sadhana of psychic awakening. Now let us mention in the barest outline a few of the positive factors that are very much conducive to the psychic’s emergence in a sadhaka:

“Purity, simple sincerity and the capacity of an unegoistic unmixed self-offering without pretension or demand are the condition of an entire opening of the psychic being.” (Ibid. , p. 1099)

If a sadhaka attends to these conditions and, without getting impatient or discouraged at the delay, keeps the fire of his aspiration burning, learns to concentrate on his heart -centre and go inward, if he maintains faith in the constant action of the Grace of the Mother, instead of relying too much on the efficacy of his own personal effort, if he develops in his heart a genuine love and devotion for the Divine Mother, if all these concomitant conditions are fulfilled by the sadhaka, his psychic being will surely come out of its secret dwelling place within, be active in the outer field of the sadhaka’s working consciousness and engage itself in the task of bringing about the transformation of his nature.

And that it has started doing so will be made evident by the following changes occurring in the aspirant’s nature:

(i) The heart of the sadhaka will be filled with an extraordinary causeless delight ; (ii) the whole of the sadhaka’s life will prove to be an arena of perpetual progress; (iii) the mind and the vital will be enlightened with a new type of clear discrimination; (iv) any mood of depression or discouragement will vanish altogether; (v) the heart will be buoyed up with a sublime and unwavering faith and hope; (vi) a feeling of universal love and generosity towards all will flood the consciousness of the seeker, and all rancour, hatred and irritability will disappear from there; and finally (vii) a new attitude will develop vis-à-vis the dangers and difficulties of life: the

sadhaka will not find them as before an intolerable misfortune but as deliberate opportunities for receiving the loving Grace of the divine Mother. In short, the life of the sadhaka will advance thenceforward along a sun-lit flower-bedecked cosy path .

In the next phase of sadhana the sadhaka's psychic being will take its permanent station in the forefront of his consciousness and continue rectifying all the faults and failings of his still unregenerate nature till the whole being in all its movements is spontaneously oriented towards divine Light, Love, Power and Ananda.

Sri Aurobindo has given a graphic description of this wonderful contribution of the psychic awakening to the life and sadhana of a sadhaka of the Integral Yoga. Here is a portion of what he has said:

“The soul , the psychic entity... takes up its greater function as the guide and ruler of the nature. A guidance, a governance begins from within which exposes every movement to the light of Truth, repels what is false, obscure, opposed to the divine realisation, every region of the being, every nook and corner of it, every movement, formation, direction, inclination of thought, will, emotion, sensation, action, reaction, motive, disposition, propensity, desire, habit of the conscious or subconscious physical, even the most concealed, camouflaged, mute, recondite is lighted up with the unerring psychic light, their confusions dissipated, their tangles disentangled, their obscurities, deceptions, self-deceptions precisely indicated and removed; all is purified, set right, the whole nature harmonised, modulated in the psychic key, put in spiritual order. This process may be rapid or tardy according to the amount of obscurity and resistance still left in the nature, but it goes on unflinchingly so long as it is not complete.” (The Life Divine, pp. 907-08)

Thus will be achieved the psychic transformation, the first of the three transformations that constitute the entire course of our sadhana. This psychic transformation will be followed first by the “spiritual transformation” and then by the “supramental transformation”. But as these two last transformations do not fall within the purview of our present essay, we take the liberty of closing this chapter at this point.

XXI.

Sadhana of the Mind

Mind, Life and Matter, the mental, the vital and the physical are the three instruments of manifestation of the Spirit in the field of embodied existence upon earth. But all these three instruments are in their present normal functioning very much flawed and imperfect. Each one of them confronts a genuine sadhaka with its own specific brand of difficulties and resistances at every step of sadhana. Yet, on that account, we cannot feel disgusted with them and seek to reject or even annul them as far as possible, although many of the adherents of traditional ascetic spirituality would prescribe that method of total rejection in their pure elan for an unburdened flight to the naked splendours of the Spirit.

But that cannot be our method of sadhana in the practice of the Integral Yoga. As the Mother has reminded us:

“When you need to run away from a thing in order not to experience it, it means that you are not above it, you are still on the same level. Anything that suppresses, diminishes or lessens cannot bring freedom. Freedom has to be experienced in the whole of life and in all sensations.” (Me w, Vol. 10. p. 10)

So we have to be clear at the very outset that in spite of all the serious obstacles they put on the sadhaka's Path we must not try to bypass in any way the mental, vital and physical instruments of our being but seek to remedy their defects, purify their functioning and finally transform them into fit vehicles of divine manifestation here upon earth itself. For, is that not the aim of the Integral Yoga?

Our Yoga is not an escapist one nor are we enamored of Nirvanic non-manifestation. Also, we do not want to remain content with experiencing the bliss of the Divine Presence in the depths of our inner being. We aim at the full establishment of the divine Light, Consciousness, Power, Love and Ananda even in the entire field of our outer dynamic nature. In Sri Aurobindo's luminous words: *“Life is the field of a divine manifestation not yet complete: here, in life, on earth, in the body... we have to unveil the Godhead; here we must make its transcendent greatness, light and sweetness real to our consciousness, here possess and, as far as may be, express it.”* (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 68)

If that be so, we have to squarely face the difficulties presented by our Mind, and Life and Body, successfully tackle them and turn these instruments into joyous and capable collaborators in the Supreme's manifestation upon earth. Hence we propose to devote three successive chapters to a succinct delineation of the sadhana-procedure concerning the mental, the vital and the physical parts of our complex being. First with the Mind.

Arjuna in the Bhagavad-Gita piteously complained to Lord Krishna about the intractable difficulties faced by him in his mental part. He said: *“Restless indeed is the mind, O Krishna; it is vehement, strong and unconquerable; I deem it as hard to control as the wind.”* (VI. 34)

But what are the very common normal difficulties faced by the sadhaka in his mind so far as the building up of his spiritual life is concerned? To cite only a few of them: (i) many types of doubts and misgivings are the habitual contributions of Mind, disconcerting the sadhaka at every

step; (ii) Mind is very clever in the art of fallacious reasoning bringing confusion to the sadhaka's consciousness; (iii) Mind has an inveterate tendency to show the white as something black and the black as something white, thus derailing the forward march of the sadhaka; (iv) Mind is over-prompt to offer a 'plausible' explanation to anything and everything even when that surpasses its reach or capability; (v) Mind misses the globality of truth, concentrates only on a fraction of it, and then seeks by all means to project it as the whole of the truth, thus leading to the blocking of the sadhaka's forward movement towards the discovery of the genuine Truth; (vi) etc.

Now all these and allied difficulties presented by Mind arise out of a basic trait of its nature. If the sadhaka would like to turn his mind from being an enemy as at present to a friend in sadhana, he has to carefully recognise this trait, disentangle the knots, and disengage its true role as a harbinger of truth.

Mind : The What and the How of it.

Mind is that principle in our being which is eager to know, understand, discriminate, imagine and play with ideas. It seeks to discover an underlying thread of harmony which interlinks events and objects and phenomena apparently disparate and disjointed.

The second principal characteristic of Mind is that it possesses the necessary capability and skill of organization which helps to 'realise' in fact all that initially remains as abstract ideas, ideals and mere concepts.

All these traits Mind has received from its most fundamental character. To elucidate this basic character Sri Aurobindo writes:

"Mind... is a reflective mirror which receives presentations or images of a pre-existent Truth or Fact, either external to or at least vaster than itself. It represents to itself from moment to moment the phenomenon that is or has been. It possesses also the faculty of constructing in itself possible images other than those of the actual fact presented to it; that is to say, it represents to itself not only phenomenon that has been but also phenomenon that may be... It has, finally, the faculty of forecasting new modifications which it seeks to construct out of the meeting of what has been and what may be, out of the fulfilled possibility and the unfulfilled, something that it sometimes succeeds in constructing more or less exactly, sometimes fails to realise, but usually finds cast into other forms than it forecasted and turned to other ends than it desired or intended." (The Life Divine, pp. 118-19)

"Mind in its essence is a consciousness which measures, limits, cuts out forms of things from the indivisible whole and coins them as if each were a separate integer. Even with what exists only as obvious parts and fractions, Mind establishes this fiction of its ordinary commerce that they are things with which it can deal separately and not merely as aspects of a whole... It is this essential characteristic of Mind which conditions the workings of all its operative powers, whether conception, perception, sensation or the dealings of creative thought. It conceives, perceives, senses things as if rigidly cut out from a background or a mass and employs them as fixed units of the material given to it for creation or possession... Mind may divide, multiply, add, subtract, but it cannot get beyond the limits of this mathematics. If it goes beyond and tries to conceive a real whole, it loses itself in a foreign element; it falls from its own firm ground into the ocean of the intangible, into the abysses of the infinite where it can neither perceive,

conceive, sense nor deal with its subject for creation and enjoyment.” (Ibid., pp. 162-63)

Thus we see that the basic traits of the operations of our ordinary mind are (i) to treat the indivisible as something divisible; (ii) miss the vision of the Truth in its entirety; but, instead, (iii) manipulate truth's numerous shadow-formations; and, finally, (iv) to construct wider and wider circles on the same plane, never being able to transcend it, and considering this movement alone as the progression in knowledge and power.

Now, whenever and wherever Mind becomes operative, these basic features of its functioning cannot but manifest in one form or another, overtly or in a clandestine way behind many deceiving masks. And this deplorable fact gives rise to many problems in the sadhana-life of the aspirant. We give below a short list of the defects, disabilities and wrong tendencies of the impure mind of man. The perusal of this list will make abundantly clear to our readers why a proper sadhana of the mind becomes so very essential for a serious sadhaka.

What a Sadhaka should know about his Mind

(1) The habitual mind of normal man is always in movement: it does not know how to stop. It is in a constant motion of going and coming, vibrating and running — but it does not know why so or to what destination. It is because of this characteristic phenomenon that the Mother has compared the ordinary mind to a restless squirrel caught in a cage.

(2) Our mental field is like a busy crossroads where a thousand unwanted thoughts and suggestions are constantly streaming in and going away from. As Sri Aurobindo has trenchantly put it:

“...we do not really live apart in an inner privacy or solitude, our mind is a receiving, developing and modifying machine into which there is being constantly passed from moment to moment a ceaseless foreign flux, a streaming mass of disparate materials from above, from below, from outside. Much more than half our thoughts and feelings are not our own in the sense that they take form out of ourselves; of hardly anything can it be said that it is truly original to our nature.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 69)

(3) All spiritual truth is in its nature very complex and beyond the grasp of the ordinary intelligence of man. But mind has got an inveterate tendency to seize it in a simplistic manner. It tries to force a multidimensional truth into the confines of a two-dimensional space and makes a futile attempt to explain it in that impossible way. This cannot but lead to various types of self-contradictions. And mind wonders confusedly how to reconcile the pairs of apparently ‘irreconcilable’ opposite truths; such as, personal effort and the action of Grace; free-will and determinism; law and miracles; causality and finalism; etc.

(4) Mind is by nature exclusive in its tendency. It fails to hold all the facets of a truth in the bosom of a harmonised synthesis. Hence its intolerant declaration: “Both cannot be true at the same time; either A or B but surely not A and B; if P is possible, Q is bound to be impossible.”

In this way mind becomes the progenitor of numerous dogmas and inflexible opinions.

(5) Mind moves from the known to the unknown. It has no pure hold on the truth of the future. Hence its faith in that truth is highly deficient. It seeks to test the possibilities of the future on

the anvil of the ascertained facts of the present; it cannot visualise the realisation of the present as but precursor and aid to the already predetermined realisation of the future.

The consequence is that our mind is always afflicted with a strong sense of doubt and disbelief, hesitation and cynicism. It arbitrarily fixes a limit to the future's possibilities: 'Thus far and no farther' is its loud and self-confident assertion.

A sadhaka who falls under the spell of such a doubting mind walks on the path of his sadhana with faltering steps; he cannot run to the future unknown, buoyed by the all-daring spirit of a confident faith.

(6) Our normal mind can never act as an instrument for the secure possession of any truth. It has perforce to move forward basing itself at every step on the fallible crutches of hypotheses and inferences. Let us listen to what Sri Aurobindo has to say on this basic insufficiency of mind:

"...a mere mental activity will not bring a change of consciousness, it can only bring a change of mind. And if your mind is sufficiently mobile, it will go on changing from one thing to another till the end without arriving at any sure way or any spiritual harbour. The mind can think and doubt and question and accept and withdraw its acceptance, make formations and unmake them, pass decisions and revoke them, judging always on the surface and by surface indications and therefore never coming to any deep and firm experience of Truth, but by itself it can do no more." (Letters on Yoga, Part One, p. 161)

(7) When confronted with different alternative courses of action at any moment of one's life, it becomes very difficult for the mind of the sadhaka to come to any sure decision. Man has lost the surity of the species-instinct of subhuman creatures but at the same time has not gained the far greater certainty of spiritual intuition. Hence is the sadhaka's mind always in a state of vacillation. For his mind can, with its so-called logical dexterity, furnish equally cogent reasons for and against any idea, any position or any course of action. Therefore mental proof is no proof at all nor is any mental decision infallible in content.

(8) Man's mind greatly contributes to his miserable state of constant worries and anxieties vis-à-vis the unfolding of his future. Animals are wrapped in a fold of blind darkness; they move from moment to moment; hence they are exempt from any tendency to unnecessary and irrational brooding anxiety. But man's mind lives in half-lights and darkness, amid probabilities and possibilities, and is hence totally uncertain about what is going to happen to him even in the very near future. Thus mind has become for man the great harasser and the most potent agent for the creation in him of a state of disabling anxiety-neuroses. In the words of the Mother:

"With man there has begun this perpetual worrying about what is going to happen, and this worry is the principal, if not the sole cause of his torment. With this objectivising consciousness there has begun anxiety, painful imaginations, worry, torment, anticipation of future catastrophes... Man is too conscious to be indifferent, he is not conscious enough to know what will happen... of all earth's creatures he is the most miserable." (MCW, Vol. 9, p. 303)

Such being the nature of the defects and disabilities and the malign influences of the mind of man, the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga may get puzzled and come to his wit's end. But, instead of feeling unduly discouraged, he should adopt a course of sadhana which will neutralise much of the backward and downward drag exercised by his mind on the progress of his sadhana-life.

But this sadhana has a few distinct parts and stages covering a wide-ranging programme of action. Some of the elements of this programme are applicable to the preparatory stage of sadhana; a few others pertain to the intermediate stage of development; while the rest can be successfully undertaken only by the advanced sadhakas.

Sadhana of the Mind

(1) Acquisition of the Power of Concentration: The mind of man is habitually dispersed in various directions, and occupied and preoccupied with a host of pulls and pushes and varying interests. Mind does not know how to sit still even for a short while. In the Buddhist tradition our mind has been compared to a restless monkey which has developed some itching and oozing skin-eruption all over its body and, to cap it all, someone has sprinkled extra-hot chilli powder over these skin-sores. How quiet will the monkey be under these constraining conditions? So is the case with the normal functioning of our mind. And no sadhana is possible with such a restless dispersed state of our mind. The sadhaka must have to acquire sufficient power of concentration such that his mind may remain steady and settled, as long as he wants, on one chosen field or object or idea already determined by the sadhaka's will.

(2) To make the Mind plastic: A common weakness of our mental being is that it is very much one-sided, and stubborn in its personal opinion. As a result we lose the plasticity so much needed for genuine progress on the Path. In the absence of this plasticity, new light from above cannot enter into our conscious field. The absence of plasticity leads to the diminution of receptivity; and lacking in receptivity, we remain stagnant as "frogs in the well".

As a help to the acquirement of necessary plasticity, the sadhaka should train his mind to defend any 'thesis' and its 'antithesis' in turn with equally valid argumentation and then pass on to the formulation of a 'synthesis' which will harmonise the two first propositions by integrating the partial truths contained in them.

In practical terms, whenever the sadhaka is faced with another person's opinion, however contrary in nature it may appear to be to his own, he should not rush forward impetuously to impose his own view on the other; instead, he should try to place himself in — the interlocutor's position, seek to understand his view with great sympathy. This will help him to widen his mental consciousness instead of keeping it confined in a narrow bound. This will immensely help in the reception of newer and newer light from above and within.

(3) Harmonious ordering of the mental field: One of the most deplorable conditions, but quite a common one at that of man's functioning consciousness is that almost everything there seems to be cloudy and obscure; nothing is quite clear and distinct. There is no well-ordered organisation there.

Our thoughts and feelings and ideas and imaginations, at times blatantly opposed to each other, are allowed to dwell there in utter confusion in a state of uneasy co-existence. This state of affairs has to be remedied. A properly integrated organisation has to be built up there. Only those thoughts and feelings and ideas and urges which are in alignment with the central goal of the sadhaka should be allowed to have their permitted places there; the door should be slammed in the face of all discordant elements.

(4) Building up the mental individuality: The Mother has always insisted that a sadhaka should

patiently disengage his own true nature from the opaque covering of foreign influences pouring in upon him all the time from outside. He should be his own self and not the spurious one with which he identifies himself without even knowing it. The Mother has referred on many an occasion to the absolute necessity of this process of “individualisation”. Here is, for instance, one passage from her *Talk* of 28 July 1954:

“...at least ninety-nine parts of an individual’s character are made of soft butter... on which if one presses one’s thumb, an imprint is made. Now, everything is a ‘thumb’: an expressed thought, a sentence read, an object looked at, an observation of what someone else does, and of one’s neighbour’s will. And all these... are... intermingled, each one trying to get the uppermost and causing a kind of perpetual conflict within...” (MCW, Vol. 6, pp. 256-57)

Hence arises the necessity on the part of every sadhaka to discern his true nature and essential individuality which can stand as a rock of self-defence against all undesirable invading influences.

(5) To be governed by the enlightened reason: Many people live mostly by their impulses; they are not “reasonable” at all. But a sadhaka has to be careful so that he may successfully control all the imperious urges of his impulses and instincts and obey only those inspirations which are in conformity with his deepest aspiration and his luminous ideals in sadhana.

For this the sadhaka has to develop in himself a kind of mental discernment whose role it will be to govern the rest of his being. Of course, in the further development towards spiritual illumination, the reason itself has to be transcended and be replaced by intuition. But that is still miles and miles away. In the meantime the sadhaka has to make the enlightened reason, the liberated intelligence, — freed from the slavery to vital impulses and physical appetites,— the governor of his life. Here is a relevant passage from the Mother’s writings:

“Of course, it is well understood that reason is not the supreme capacity of man and must be surpassed, but it is quite obvious that if you don’t have it, you will live an altogether incoherent life... The least thing will upset you completely and you won’t even know why, and still less how to remedy it. While someone who has established within himself a state of active, clear reasoning, can face attacks of all kinds, emotional attacks or any trials whatever... Well, reason can stand back a little, look at all that, smile and say, ‘Oh! no, one must not make a fuss over such a small thing.’ If you do not have reason, you will be like a cork on a stormy sea.” (MCW Vol. 8, p. 184)

(6) To establish mastery over one’s thought and imagination: We commonly believe that our subjective thoughts and feelings are absolutely innocuous in their bearings. We think and feel and then forget; the matter should end there: such is our habitual conviction. But the fact is otherwise.

Everyone of our thoughts and feelings is very much creative in nature. As soon as it is indulged in, it becomes an independent formation, leaves the mental field of the person, and gets into the environing atmosphere of the universal mind. It then invariably goes on its errand of fulfilling the object which was the subject-matter of the thought. When a strong feeling or will is added to the thought, the latter’s creative potency gets increased manifold.

Not only that. The habitual thoughts and feelings and imaginations that are normally indulged

in by the sadhaka, create a corresponding atmosphere around his being. This ambience, depending on its quality, may bring about beneficial results to the sadhaka's life, or give rise to undesirable happenings or even serious disasters. The sadhaka should therefore be vigilant that he fills his mental arena with those thoughts and feelings and imaginations which are luminous, beneficial and positively creative; he must, on the other hand, scrupulously avoid all thoughts and feelings that are baneful, malign and pessimistically negative.

This mastery over the thought-apparatus of his mental field is a very important element of the sadhaka's sadhana of the mind.

(7) Making and breaking of the principles of action: Man is a mental being. He cannot sacrifice the dignity of his mental status and act under the blind impulses of his physical instincts and vital urges. He has to erect some well-considered principles and direct all his actions under their guidance.

But all principles are relative and are in the nature of discardable scaffolding. Each principle may help the sadhaka temporarily at appropriate time and place. But with the further progress of the being the same principle may act as a chain of bondage when it becomes anachronistic and hampers further progression. Therefore, as soon as its utility is over, the sadhaka should not hesitate to discard it mercilessly and adopt instead a still higher principle which will help the sadhaka make a new lease of progress.

This capacity of making and breaking of rules and principles whenever a genuine need is felt for this operation, is a very important part of the sadhana of the mind. As the Mother has pointed out:

"...the more mental activity one has, the more does one indulge in this little game. And there are ideas to which one clings hooked on to them as though all life depended upon that! I have known people who had fixed upon one central idea in their formation and said, 'All the rest may go to pieces, I don't care, but this idea will stand: this is the truth.' And when they come to yoga, amusingly enough it is this idea which is constantly battered, all the time! All events, all circumstances come and strike at it until it begins to totter, and then one fine day they say in despair, 'Ah, my idea has gone.'

"Someone has said rather poetically, 'One must know how to lose all to win all.' And it is true, especially for the mind, for if you do not know how to lose everything, you can gain nothing." (MCW, Vol. 4, pp. 202-03)

(8) Discouragement of the attitude of the Doubting Thomas: One of the greatest stumbling blocks presented by the mind is that it is by its very nature suspicious and disbelieving. It is prone to indulging in doubting everything and in every field. Many a sadhaka's sadhana-life has been shattered because of this doubting mania. The Mother has warned the aspirants on the spiritual path about this crafty enemy and advised them what to do in this regard. Let us listen to her:

"...when faith has been granted, when one has had this sudden inner illumination, in order to preserve it constantly in the active consciousness individual effort is altogether indispensable. One must hold on to one's faith, will one's faith; one must seek it cultivate it, protect it.

“In the human mind there is a morbid and deplorable habit of doubt, argument, secepticism. This is where human effort must be put in: the refusal to admit them, the refusal to listen to them and still more the refusal to follow them. No game is more dangerous than playing mentally with doubt and secepticism. They are not only enemies, they are terrible pitfalls, and once one falls into them, it becomes tremendously difficult to pull oneself out.” (MCW, Vol. 9, p. 351)

(9) To break the misalliance between the Vital and the Mental: Man’s mind often acts as the misguided advocate of the impure vital. It tries to legitimise and rationalise all the weaknesses and the wrong movements of the unregenerate vital. Instead of acting as the enlightened leader and guide of the beguiled physical and vital parts of man, mind itself loses its freedom by and by and becomes a bond-slave of the two lower parts of our being. The disastrous consequences that then follow in the sadhaka’s sadhana-life have been graphically described by Sri Aurobindo in the following telling passage of *The Life Divine*:

“Man is a mental being and the mind is the leader of his life and body; but this is a leader who is much led by his followers and has sometimes no other will than what they impose on him. Mind in spite of its power is often impotent before the inconscient and subconscious which obscure its clarity and carry it away on the tide of instinct or impulse; in spite of its clarity it is fooled by vital and emotional suggestions into giving sanction to ignorance and error, to wrong thought and to wrong action, or it is obliged to look on while the nature follows what it knows to be wrong, dangerous or evil.” (pp. 899-900)

The sadhaka of the Integral Yoga has to assiduously guard against this disastrous eventuality and resolutely restrain his mind from sanctioning the wrong action and reaction of the errant vital even when it actually fails to bar the vital and the physical from going astray. Mind must keep its light steadily burning, sending the message loud and strong to the unregenerate vital: “Yet I know, what you are doing is wrong!”

This sort of luminous admonition persistently administered to the erring vital will sooner or later bring sense to the vital itself.

(10) Enthronement of the highest level of Mind: Our mind is not a simple unidimensional faculty. There are many stages in its ascending movement, many a level in its dynamic functioning. The sadhaka has to mount step by step the stair of its upward ascension.

Starting with the lowest and most fallible level, the ‘physical mentality’, he has to pass through the next higher stage, the ‘life mentality’, to reach at last what Sri Aurobindo has termed as ‘pure reflective mentality’ of which the ‘true intellectual understanding’ is a very important function. Sri Aurobindo characterises it as follows:

“...it should not be involved in [the] lower movements, but stand back from the object, and observe disinterestedly, put it in its right place in the whole by force of comparison, contrast, analogy, reason from its rightly observed data by deduction, induction, inference and holding all its gains in memory and supplementing them by a chastened and rightly-guided imagination view all in the light of a trained and disciplined judgment. Such is the pure intellectual understanding of which disinterested observation, judgment and reasoning are the law and characterising action.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 296-97)

The sadhaka has to see that, in his normal life-functionings and in his dealings with other men,

he habitually takes recourse to this pure intellectual mentality.

(11) Equality of the thinking Mind: This is the last limb of mental sadhana, apparently most difficult for man the mental creature who is passionately proud of his mental possession.

The fact is that the mind of man, because of its inherent nature, is always engaged in a mental activity whose different elements are ideations, imaginations, beliefs, judgments, opinions, and many others. Now, in its undisciplined functioning the mind of man is stubbornly attached to all these mental formations and cannot look at anything, be that a person, situation or happening, except through the coloured distorting glass of these tightly-held personal possessions of the individual man. But this is a serious obstacle to the reception of truth and the progressing march of sadhana. Hence the sadhaka of the integral Yoga has to make every effort to establish in his mental field a perfectly disinterested equality vis-à-vis all the already-cherished formations. The indispensability of this sadhana has been clearly brought out by Sri Aurobindo in the following passage of *The Synthesis of Yoga*:

“The equality of the thinking mind will be a part and a very important part of the perfection of the instruments in the nature. Our present attractive self-justifying attachment to our intellectual preferences, our judgments, opinions, imaginations... to the current repetitions of our habitual mind, to the insistence of our pragmatic mind to the limitations even of our intellectual truth-mind, must go the way of other attachments and yield to the impartiality of an equal vision. The equal thought-mind will... not hold itself bound and limited by its knowledge or forbidden by it to proceed to fresh illumination, nor lay too fierce a grasp on truth, even when using it to the full, or tyrannously chain it to its present formulations. This perfect equality of the thinking mind is indispensable because the objective of this progress is the greater light which belongs to a higher plane of spiritual cognizance.” (p. 679)

Here ends our essay on the sadhana of the Mind. There are, of course, two other stages: (i) Establishment of mental silence; and (ii) Ascent of consciousness beyond normal mind into the ‘spiritual mind planes’; and, then, further on to Supramental Gnosis and beyond. But these sadhanas are not meant for us who are just pygmies and tyros on the spiritual Path.

XXII.

Sadhana of the Vital

Our last chapter dealt with the sadhana of the Mind. The present one has for its subject matter the sadhana of the Vital.

A thoroughgoing discussion of the place, importance and conversion of the vital in the sadhana of the Integral Yoga is very essential. For the vital, as it is in its present nature, acts mostly as a drag on the upward aspiration of the sadhaka. It appears at times completely incorrigible in nature. What is still more unsettling is the fact that not only does the vital remain itself impure and unregenerate, it constantly invades the functioning of the mind, the heart, and the body consciousness of man making them in their pose turbid and resistant. It becomes thus absolutely necessary that the sadhaka successfully tackles the problem of his vital part, sooner or later, sooner the better. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“...the vital is there and always pressing on the mind and heart, disturbing and endangering the sadhana and it cannot be left to itself for too long. The ego and desires of the vital, its disturbances and upheavals have to be dealt with and if not at once expelled, at least dominated and prepared for a gradual if not a rapid modification, change, illumination.”
(Letters on Yoga, p. 1626)

But what is this vital, what are its specific characteristics and its role in sadhana? The vital is that part of our complex human nature that contains in itself all the effective potency for action; all our dynamic urges, bubbling enthusiasm and the intensity of passions have their seat there. Again, the vital is that field of our being in which the potential thoughts and ideas of our mind give up their static disposition, get transformed into dynamic will, and become ready for their actual realisation in fact.

Such is the primary character of the vital, and this specific character through its multifarious self-manifestation rouses in the vital field the fury of all kinds of desires and emotions, vanity and self-importance, possessive tendency, the spirit of defiance and revolt, and finally an urge to destruction.

For, because of its dynamic propensity the vital is always in movement but, depending on the special situation and circumstance, this dynamic play may be oriented to the East or to the West, may shoot upward to heaven or nosedive downward to hell. The vital is equally capable of creating and destroying. It may light up an ardent fire of aspiration in the heart of the sadhaka but with equal alacrity it may throw there the dampening rag of depression and inertia. And the sadhaka is very much troubled because of this dual tendency of the vital.

In fact, “desire” is the basic manifestation of the vital. Now, this desire is not of a uniform kind. It may take various forms higher or lower, glorious or ignoble, and may widely vary in quality from the sublime to the lowly. Now, the vital is constantly penetrating and influencing, and if possible corrupting, all other parts of our being with this dark miasma of desire. This action seems to be continuous and all-englobing. In Sri Aurobindo’s words:

“The Prana is everywhere in us supporting not only the action of our body, but of our sense-mind, our emotional mind, our thought-mind; and bringing its own law or Dharma in to

all these, it confuses, it limits, it throws into discord their right action and creates that impurity of misplacement and that tangled confusion which is the whole evil of our psychological existence. In that confusion one law seems to reign, the law of desire.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 335)

A relevant question may arise at this point in the readers’ mind: Are there any specific psychological signs and symptoms by which the sadhaka may come to know that he is at any particular moment mainly dominated by his vital being? Let Sri Aurobindo answer this question:

“In others it is the vital self, the being of life, who dominates and rules the mind, the will, the action; then is created the vital man, concerned with self-affirmation, self-aggrandisement, life-enlargement, satisfaction of ambition and passion and impulse and desire, the claims of his ego, domination, power, excitement, battle and struggle, inner and outer adventure: all these are incidental or subordinated to this movement and building an expression of the vital ego.” (The Life Divine, p. 898)

Now for most men in their normal functioning this ‘vital ego’ is the master of the house, *grha-pati*: everything else in the being and nature moves at its sole behest. But, alas, its moods are unpredictable. No one knows for sure not even the gods what queer sudden turn the vital will take at any given moment, ‘*devāh not jānanti kuto manusyāh?*’

If the mood of the vital gets deranged, for whatever reasons, it may lead to many serious and vicious consequences appearing in the sadhana-life of the aspirant. Here is a short illustrative list of these possible evil results:

(i) The sadhaka may suffer from a misplaced sense of apparently causeless sorrow and grievance; (ii) an attitude of constant complaining may seize the sadhaka’s heart; (iii) the slightest hindering to what one wants engenders a sense of rancour and injured innocence; (iv) a proneness to psychological aggressiveness at the slightest provocation may govern the sadhaka’s reactions; (v) any obstacle placed on the path of fulfilment of a desire disturbs the composure of the sadhaka’s heart: if he is strong and robust, he becomes violent; and if he feels himself weak and incapable, he is filled with depression and melancholy; (vi) the aspirant is pricked by an expectation of praise from others; if sufficient recognition of one’s self-claimed worth is not forthcoming, the heart becomes morose and challenging; (vii) the sadhaka becomes ready to make a mountain out of a mole-hill, to raise a storm in a tea-cup, and turn everything into dramatic exaggerations; (viii) the sadhaka’s vital feels a morbid pleasure in all that is perverse and a peculiar fascination for sorrow and suffering; (ix) forms a misalliance with the hostile forces that are opposed to the sadhaka’s progress in sadhana; (x) calls back again and again into the being all those weaknesses of nature which have been chased away from the sadhaka’s consciousness after a prolonged painstaking effort; (xi) deprives the sadhana-life of its natural charm and sweetness and turns it into the dryness of an arid desert ; (xii) adopts an attitude of noncooperation towards the upward aspiration and *tapasya* of the aspirant.

But this is just a small list: the misdemeanours of the disturbed vital are simply legion. But we should not forget that this is one side of the vital being. The vital is not solely and exclusively negative in character. It possesses a very helpful positive side too. The problem is that, a strong dynamism being its essential virtue, the vital may equally take two distinctly different mutually opposed orientations depending on whether it is being rightly guided or not.

It follows then that what is expected of the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga is not the starving and the stunning of the vital into inaction but the constant turning of its dynamism towards the realisation of ‘*satyam, śivam, sundaram*’, of the True, the Good, the Beautiful. The vital is not evil in its very nature. What it always seeks is some sort of delight but normally it has no discriminating power as to wherein to find that delight. And there lies the crux of the problem. As Sri Aurobindo has expressed:

“In all that is developed by the life-force there is developed at the same time a secret delight somewhere in the being, a delight in good and a delight in evil, a delight in truth and a delight in falsehood, a delight in life and an attraction to death, a delight in pleasure and a delight in pain, in one’s own suffering and the suffering of others, but also in one’s own joy and happiness and good and the joy and happiness and good of others. For the force of life-affirmation affirms alike the good and the evil... it takes up altruism as it takes up egoism, sacrifices itself as well as destroys others; and in all its acts there is the same passion for life-affirmation, the same force of action and fulfilment.” (The Life Divine, p. 623)

The Mother also has on her part spoken on many different occasions about the protean behaviour of man’s vital being. The following passage is an adapted version of what she said in one of her *Class Talks of 1953*:

“...this vital is a curious creature. It is a being of passion, enthusiasm and naturally of desire... it is quite capable of getting enthusiastic over something beautiful, of admiring, sensing anything greater and nobler than itself. And if really anything very beautiful occurs in the being, if there is a movement having an exceptional value, well, it may get enthusiastic and it is capable of giving itself with complete devotion — with a generosity that is not found ... in the mental domain nor in the physical. It has that fullness in action that comes precisely from its capacity to get enthused and throw itself wholly without reserve into what it does ... when the vital is enthused over something, it is no longer a reasonable being but a warrior; it is wholly in its action and can perform exceptional things because it does not calculate, does not reason, does not say ‘One must take precautions, one must not do this, must not do that.’ It is not prudent, it flares up... it gives itself totally. Therefore, it can do magnificent things if it is guided in the right way.” (MCW, Vol. 5, pp. 255-56).

This is on the positive side. But the Mother warns too about the whims of the vital being. She says:

“...this vital, if you place it in a bad environment, it will imitate the bad environment and do bad things with violence and to an extreme degree... It follows its passion and enthusiasm. When it has desires, its desires are violent, arbitrary, and it does not at all take into account the good or bad of others; it doesn’t care the least bit. But when it gives itself to something beautiful, it does not calculate either, it will give itself entirely without knowing whether it will do good or harm to it. It is a very precious instrument.” (Ibid., pp. 256-57)

The Mother further adds specifying another characteristic of the vital being:

“There is only one thing the vital abhors; it is a dull life, monotonous, grey, tasteless, spiritless. Faced with that, it goes to sleep, falls into inertia. It likes extremely violent things... it can be extremely wicked, extremely cruel, extremely generous, extremely good and extremely heroic. It always goes to extremes and can be one side or the other, yes, as the current flows.” (Ibid., p.

But the difficulty is that in its current unconverted disposition man's vital is often inclined to what is evil and false; it shrinks from light and is enamoured of darkness. And it is because of this downward inclination that the sadhaka of the spiritual path meets so much difficulty in the vital part of his being. When the aspirant would ardently like to soar in the blue expanse of the sky on the wings of his aspiration, it is the gravitational pull of the vital that drags him down to the flat trivialities of earth.

In the spiritual history of mankind over the last few thousand years, many a device and stratagem have been presented by the Yogis and mystics to gain mastery over this turbulent vital but all have been in vain: the vital has had the last laugh. And the frustrated sadhakas have bemoaned their inescapable earth-bound fate with their flying wings clipped to futility.

Herein lies the genesis of the almost universal attitude of fear and hatred that the traditional ascetic spirituality maintains towards the vital. Its only advice is: "Starve the vital; shun its free play as far as practicable, and prepare yourself or an escapist post-mortem immergence in the Spirit."

But we have already affirmed many a time in course of this book that this sort of escapist spirituality is not the character of the Integral Yoga. We aim at the founding and manifestation of divine life here upon earth itself in the embodied existence of man; and in this task the happy and unquestioning collaboration of the vital is altogether essential. For, no *siddhi* worth the name is possible in our sadhana without the active help of two things which are intrinsic to the vital. These two attributes are: (i) a robust all-conquering strength of will; and (ii) an indomitable elan to engage oneself in the adventure of the unknown, defying all odds and difficulties of the Path.

Hence arises the necessity of making the requisite sadhana for effecting the luminous conversion of the vital and making its pure and flawless functioning a necessary part of the spiritualisation of our nature. The following section deals with a brief outline of this sadhana of the vital.

Sadhana of the Vital

Let us start from the very beginning, from where we are now in the present unregenerate functioning of our vital. This sadhana has many stages; not that all these stages are arranged here with the precision of a mathematical sequence. In other words it is not that a particular stage will necessarily follow the previous one or that it cannot appear at all till the sadhana of the just preceding stage is entirely completed. The sadhana-life of an aspirant in the Integral Yoga is a life of the unexpected. And which foolhardy person would dare dictate to the Divine Shakti when her Grace should act or should not and how much and in which fashion, in the life of a particular sadhaka? So the succession of the stages as indicated below need not be taken too literally: they are just broad indications of the different facets of the sadhana.

The sadhana of the vital has five principal programme-elements. These are as follows:

(i) The control and purification of the vital; (ii) the self-consecration of the vital; (iii) its liberation and conversion; (iv) a full collaboration of the vital in the sadhana-effort of the sadhaka; and (v) spiritual transformation of the vital being.

But even before the sadhaka seriously undertakes the sadhana of the vital, he should, as a preliminary measure, equip himself with an ardent aspiration for the conquest of the vital, build up a solid foundation of patience and perseverance, and possess an indomitable will not to give up the sadhana till the final victory is won. The sadhaka should also see to it that his vital itself, instead of remaining a noncollaborating opponent as at present, develops a zeal for being a pure and perfect instrument for the Spirit's manifestation.

After these preliminary virtues are acquired, the sadhaka proceeds to the execution of the following nine stages of the sadhana of the vital.

First Step: The sadhaka's psychological field presents at every moment the aspect of a crowded arena where all sorts of forces and urges, — desires and drives and impulses, — are jostling together demanding their separate manifestations in action and reaction. Various thoughts, feelings and imaginations too mingle with them.

Now all these coalesce together to form a psychological resultant which then impels the sadhaka to think, feel and act in a particular way. Before succumbing to this push of the resultant the sadhaka should seek first to observe carefully his inner field, disengage the contribution of the vital in this medley, and determine with a clear insight what his vital is driving at that juncture and why. A perfunctory superficial observation may not yield the desired result. The sadhaka has to step back, withdraw inward and cast his searching gaze from there. Sri Aurobindo has spoken about the beneficial results of this psychological exercise in these words:

“But when one goes inside..., we find the sources of all this surface action and there the parts of our being are quite separate and clearly distinct from each other. We feel them indeed as different beings in us, and just as two people in a joint action can do, they too are seen to observe, criticise, help or oppose and restrain each other; it is as if we were a group-being, each member of the group with its separate place and function, and all directed by a central being who is sometimes in front above the others, sometimes behind the scenes.” (Letters on Yoga, pp. 1019-20)

Second Step: After recognising the vital element in the confused medley prevailing in the psychological field, the sadhaka has to determine what this element is seeking to achieve through the suggested action and reaction. But while trying to come to this knowledge, the aspirant has to be entirely sincere in this regard. On no account should he fall a prey to the natural temptation of painting the vital urge always in resplendent colours, making it appear licit and permissible to the mind's eye. One has to be ruthless in demasking the vital of all its camouflages and forcing it to present itself to the discerning eye of the sadhaka in its absolutely undisguised naked form. Here is the Mother's instruction as regards this second step of sadhana:

“To become conscious of the various movements in oneself and be aware of what one does and why one does it, is the indispensable starting-point. [One]... must be taught to observe, to note his reactions and impulses and their causes, to become a discerning witness of his desires, his movements of violence and passion, his instincts of possession and appropriation and domination and the background of vanity which supports them, together with their counterparts of weakness, discouragement, depression and despair.” (MCW, Vol. 12, pp. 21-22)

Third Step: On some occasions this vital element will come with almost an irresistible urge to propel the sadhaka along a specific course of action and reaction and the aspirant becomes ready

to accede to this urge. He loses all freedom of choice and prepares to offer himself as a willing tool in the hands of the propulsive vital

Here at this crucial moment of decision intervenes the third step of sadhana of the vital, whose guiding Mantra is: "Not to manifest in action." Let us explain.

Whatever may be the fury and storm raging in the subjective consciousness of the sadhaka, he should immediately take a firm resolve that till he recovers the composure of his mind and heart and regains his inner liberty in toto, he will not act out the suggested dictate of the propulsive vital. Here is what the Mother would like the sadhaka to do in this situation:

"Well... I am going to try not to do it, and I shall not do it, I shall apply all my strength and I shall not do it.' Even if you have just a little success, it is much. Not a big success, but just a small success, a very partial success: you do not carry out what you yearn to do; but the yearning, the desire, the passion is still there and that produces whirls within, but outside you resist, 'I shall not do it, I shall not move; even if I have to bind myself hand and foot, I shall not do it.' It is a partial success — but it is a great victory because, due to this, next time you will be able to do a little more." (MCW, Vol. 5, p. 213-14)

Fourth Step: After having subdued the propulsive vital for the time being, after having succeeded in not indulging in the action the reaction sought after by the vital, the sadhaka has now to turn his attention inward and build up there in his consciousness a liberated mind and a power of enlightened discrimination. This is such a mind as is a genuine seeker of the truth at any cost and a faithful adorer of the Divine's Will. On no account should this mind justify the blind impulses and appetites of the vital by supplying plausible arguments in its favour. This mind possesses detachment and is free from slavery to the vital's promptings.

But the question is: is it possible to build up such a mind which will act the role of a detached witness even when the vital's turmoil is still effervescing in the subjective field of the sadhaka?

Well, the stage the aspirant has reached is such that he has not indeed manifested in overt action the suggestions of the vital but he has not yet been able to extinguish the raging passions of the vital. In this piquant situation is it at all possible that the sadhaka will be able to effect in his consciousness a partial disidentification and establish the impartial outlook and attitude of a witness? Will it not be a contradiction in terms?

No, it will not be so; and therein lies a mystery of the occult functioning of the human consciousness. Sri Aurobindo has explained this phenomenon in great detail in the chapter "Knowledge by Identity and Separative Knowledge" of *The Life Divine*. Here is a relevant portion of what he has said there:

"... an uprush of wrath... swallows us up so that for the moment our whole consciousness seems to be a wave of anger: other passions, love, grief, joy have the same power to seize and occupy us... But... there is a double movement, a part of ourselves becomes... the passion, another part of us either accompanies it with a certain adherence or... falls short of identification or entire self-oblivion in the movement.

"This identification is possible, and also this simultaneous separation and partial identification, because these things are becomings of our being...; but, since they are only a small part of us,

we are not bound to be identified and occupied, — we can detach ourselves, separate the being from its temporary becoming, observe it, control it, sanction or prevent its manifestation: we can, in this way, by an inner detachment, a mental or spiritual separateness, partially or even fundamentally liberate ourselves from the control of mind nature or vital nature over the being and assume the position of the witness, knower and ruler.” (The Life Divine, p. 525)

Now the more of this disidentification and witness consciousness is established in the sadhaka's being, the more will he be able to extend his sway over the turbulence of the vital.

Fifth Step: The sadhaka will now proceed to reason with the errant vital as if with a misguided recalcitrant child. His pleading may be somewhat as follows:

“Brother Vital, you know everything is transitory, just a passing show of the moment. Even if you gain what you are yearning after so much now, what permanent benefit will accrue out of that? For how long will you remain contented with your acquisition? Only for a short while. After that you will surely be athirst for a new thing; and your frustration with this new thing is bound to follow sooner or later. Then you will hunt after a third new thing and this alternation of expectant tension and ensuing disenchantment cannot but accompany the pursuit of all your recessive desires. So why are you irrationally chasing the will-o'-the-wisp like a wild and irrational unbridled horse? Why don't you ponder a bit?

“Brother Vital; let me draw your attention to a second point of much more importance. Don't you see that because of your impetuosity you are sacrificing a far greater good for the sake of a paltry gain of the moment? You are losing the prospect of an eternal and infinite spiritual bliss because of your infatuation with the vain and cheap pleasure of the vanishing present. Activate your common sense, Vital; don't lose the sense of proportion.

“Brother Vital, cry halt to your reckless course; quieten yourself; choose your action and reaction keeping your future interest in view; and don't be so silly as to lay the axe on your own feet under the blind surge of a moment's passion; etc.”

Sixth Step: Along with this persistent effort at persuading the vital to come back to the right track, the sadhaka will try to apply his strong and enlightened mental will in a steady manner. And in order to make this will really powerful and effective in result, he should at the same time (i) develop in him a clear-sighted faculty of discrimination; (ii) grow into a mind of knowledge convinced of the necessity of attaining a spiritual life; (iii) enthrone in his heart an intense and unvarying love for the Ideal and the Divine; and (iv) awake in his consciousness a constant aspiration for progress and perfection.

These qualities will remove the flabbiness of the sadhaka's will-power and turn it into a really robust and potent instrument for the conversion of the vital.

Seventh Step: But this surface will-power may not be able to deliver the goods on all occasions. For the outer life-self is a very crafty opponent which is not concerned so much with knowledge as with self-affirmation, desire and ego. It attempts always to make the thinking mind its tool and servant which in its turn supports the vital's urge to self-affirmation and justifies its deviant impulses and actions. A mere mental will will not be able to see through the game and get the upper hand over the deceitful vital. In Sri Aurobindo's description:

“...in this vital ego there is frequently a mixture of the charlatan and mountebank, the poser and actor; it is constantly taking up a role and playing it to itself and to others as its public. An organised self-deception is thus added to an organised self-ignorance...” (The Life Divine, p. 533)

Such being the intractable problem with the vital, the sadhaka cannot rely on his surface powers alone. He has to leave the outer domain, go deep within his consciousness, and observe these dramatic subterfuges from there at their sources. He has to contact his psychic being and allow its power and light to fall upon the self-deluded vital to bring about its radical conversion.

Eighth Step: Life as it is normally lived is a movement of obscure desire driven or led by the impulses of a vehement but impure life-force. For the establishment of a veritable spiritual life this turbid life-force on the surface has to be replaced by the luminous Life-Force within which is now waiting behind the veil in our secret subliminal. This true Life-Force has to be evoked from within and made active in the habitual field of our daily action and reaction. This Life-Force, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out, is not the same as the troubled, harassed, divided and striving surface energy with which we are familiar but *“a great and radiant Divine Power, full of peace and strength and bliss...”* (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 167)

Ninth Step: This is not in its nature actually the last step coming at the end of the series. Rather, this should be the constant accompaniment of the sadhaka’s sadhana throughout the entire period of his sadhana-life. This step represents the sending up to the Divine Mother a sincere and steady prayer spontaneously rising from the heart of the aspirant and appealing to the Shakti with the candid trust of a child that, by the action of Her Grace, the importunate vital impulse that may be troubling the sadhaka at that moment, be subdued and neutralised.

Miraculous is the potency of prayer in the case of one who knows how to rightly pray. (See chapter VIII entitled “How to Call and Pray”.)

Let us close this rather long essay on the sadhana of the vital by quoting a significant passage from the Mother’s writings. Being faced with the attack of a vital fury at any moment of his sadhana-life, the sadhaka should resolve:

“I shall apply all my strength and I shall not do it... Next time you will be able to do a little more. That is to say, instead of holding all the violent passions within yourself... you will calm them slowly at first, with difficulty. They will remain long, they will come back... then little by little... that thins out... and you begin to learn the second attitude: ‘Now I want my consciousness to be above those things. There will still be many battles but if my consciousness stands above that ... there will come a time when these will return no longer.’ And then there is a time when you feel that you are absolutely free: you do not even perceive it, and then that is all.” (MCW, Vol. 5, pp. 213-14. Adapted.)

XXIII.

Sadhana of the Body: Physical Transformation in the Integral Yoga

The Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo has for its goal not merely the spiritual liberation of a few isolated individuals from the shackles of phenomenal Ignorance but the establishment of a truly divine life upon earth itself, *ihaiva*. But since Matter is the foundation of all evolutionary efflorescence of life here upon the terrestrial plane, our physical body assumes a supreme importance in the total scheme of our spiritual achievement. A full play of divine life demands as its essential prerequisite a totally transformed physical body which will, as a supple and flawless and transparent instrument, respond fully to each and every call of the self-manifesting Spirit. As Sri Aurobindo has pointed out:

“At present the notation of the body and the physical consciousness has a very large determining power on the music made by this human harp of God; the notes we get from the spirit, from the psychic soul, from the greater life behind our physical life cannot come in freely, cannot develop their high, powerful and proper strain. This condition must be reversed; the body and the physical consciousness must develop the habit of admitting and shaping themselves to these higher strains and not they, but the nobler parts of the nature must determine the music of our life and being.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 702)

Thus, a divine transformation of our physical sheath, *annamaya kosa*, becomes an indispensable concomitant of a veritable divine living in the physical world. But in the actually elaborated status of consciousness of man the mental being, this transformation cannot be achieved nor even initiated on the plane of the physical body. It will then be like putting the cart before the horse. For, where is the necessary lever of transformation or the potent agent, to effectuate this desired change? We should not forget that in reality whatever may be the appearance to the contrary — it is always consciousness and consciousness alone that is the prime determinant. So, before we can at all expect any divine transformation of our physical existence, we must have first to acquire a divine consciousness within and effectuate a total transformation of our inner *Purusha* part. Then and then only can the question of the liberation of our *Prakriti* (Nature) part and the divine transformation of our bodily instrument acquire some practical relevance, not before. In the forthright words of the Mother: *“You must begin from within. I have said a hundred times, you must begin from above. You must purify the higher region and then purify the lower.”* Sri Aurobindo has warned us on his part:

“The transformation to which we aspire is too vast and complex to come at one stroke; it must be allowed to come by stages. The physical change is the last of these stages and is itself a progressive process. The inner transformation cannot be brought about by physical means either of a positive or a negative nature. On the contrary, the physical change itself can only be brought about by a descent of the greater supramental consciousness into the cells of the body.” (Letters on Yoga)

Yes, it should be carefully noted, it is the ‘supramental consciousness’ — understood not in the sense of any and every spiritual consciousness above the plane of mind but in the specific sense in which Sri Aurobindo uses it — which alone possesses the required knowledge and power to effectuate the transformation of our physical being.

In fact, it is the combined action of the descent of Supermind from above and the emergence of

the involved Supermind from behind the veil into the arena of our overtly manifested becoming, that alone can progressively divinise first the totality of our inner existence and, then, proceed to the divinisation of our physical body itself which will be the summit achievement of the evolutionary elaboration of terrestrial life. No other spiritual consciousness or power short of this Supermind, this divine Gnosis and the Truth-Consciousness of *Sachchidananda*, possesses this effective power of integral transformation. And that is why a subjective spiritual liberation of our inner being and an inner change of consciousness alone, — although that remains as the essential precondition for any attempt at physical transformation, — cannot be, as a general rule, sufficient by itself.

But why is it so? Why have the states of the spiritual consciousness attained so far by the Yogis or men of spirit in different climes and times failed to mould the physical existence in the image of divinity? What are the basic difficulties that render this task of physical transformation impossible of realisation?

To have a proper grasp of this intractable problem we must first take note of a few cardinal points concerning the process of transformation in general:

1. In order that a particular part of our complex total existence can be transformed, it is absolutely essential that the part itself seek for this desired transformation. It has to grow self-aware of the necessity for the change and at the same time acquire the requisite capacity to bear the transfiguring touch when it comes.

2. A higher consciousness acting from above and imposing its influence on any lower part of the being, without the latter's self-conscious and willing collaboration, may indeed modify to some extent the prevailing nature and working of this lower part, but can never altogether transform it. Here is a relevant note of warning uttered by Sri Aurobindo:

“If the work were done from above, from some spiritual height, there might be a sublimation or uplifting or the creation of a new structure compelled by the sheer force of the influence from above: but this change might not be accepted as native to itself by the lower being; it would not be a total growth, an integral evolution, but a partial and imposed formation... a creation from outside the normal nature, by imposition upon it, it could be durable in its entirety only as long as there was a maintenance of the creating influence.” (The Life Divine, pp. 915-16)

3. To effectuate the transformation the higher Power and Consciousness has thus to descend into the lower part and dynamically act therein, seeking to awaken in the process the consenting participation of the latter.

But unavoidably this meeting of the higher and the lower has a reciprocal two-way consequence. While the higher tries to transfigure the lower with its own law of nature, *svadhamza*, it itself is at the same time modified and diluted, its light obscured and its effectivity curtailed by the counteraction of the lower. To quote Sri Aurobindo on this point:

“A descent of consciousness into the lower levels is... necessary, but in this way also it is difficult to work out the full power of the higher principle; there is a modification, dilution, diminution which keeps up an imperfection and limitation in the results: the light of a greater knowledge comes down but gets blurred and modified, its significance misinterpreted or its truth mixed with mental and vital error, or the force, the power to fulfil itself is not

commensurate with its light... A mutilated power, a partial effect or hampered movement is the consequence.” (Ibid ., p. 916)

4. Now, this capacity on the part of the higher principle to modify and change the lower without at the same time itself undergoing some dilution or mixture, depends on its essential intrinsic potency. So, *“it is not likely that it will be able to bring about an entire transformation if it is not itself the original Principle of Existence, if it is only derivative, an instrumental power and not the first puissance.” (Ibid., p. 704)*

Now, if we consider the problem of physical transformation in the light of the above four points, we can very well understand why this problem has defied any solution till this day. First of all, our body itself possesses a subconscious conscience of its own which clings with an obstinate fidelity to its past habits and modes of functioning and automatically and invariably offers a dogged opposition to all that seeks to alter its nature. And this is so because the process of evolution upon earth has started from an inconscient base and all that has emerged and developed afterwards has had to appear as a superstructure upon the unchanged foundation of Inconscience.

Thus, even in man who has been so far the summit product of evolutionary becoming, the substance of the normal being is moulded out of this fundamental Inconscience. *“Our ignorance is a growth of knowledge in a substance of being which is nescient; the consciousness it develops, the knowledge it establishes are always dogged, penetrated, enveloped by this nescience... the nescience invades or encompasses or even swallows up and absorbs into its oblivious darkness all that enters into it; it compels the descending light to compromise with the lesser light it enters there is a mixture, a diminution and dilution of itself, a diminution, a modification, an incomplete authenticity of its truth and power.” (Ibid., pp. 960-61)*

It thus follows that, unless this ‘blind Snake of the Inconscience’ be somehow illumined and transmuted, there can be no prospect for any physical transformation. For, this ‘dragon base’ remaining, as it is now, the dead weight and the inconscient sub-stratum of our physical being, the inexorable downward pull towards the original Inertia and Nescience will infructify the action of any intervening Force that seeks to effect a radical transformation. Even the higher spiritual-mental powers such as those whom Sri Aurobindo has named the Higher Mind, the Illumined Mind, the Intuitive Mind and the Overmind, and their intensities, entering into the substance of this inconscient foundation, undergo this inescapable disability and fail to annul the disparity between the consciousness that comes in and its force of dynamic effectuation

Thus, whatever be the degree or status of the subjective spiritual illumination of the sadhaka, this substance of Inconscience constituting his body and physical nature cannot but circumscribe and diminish *“the sovereignty and freedom and dynamism of the Spirit with its own force of adjustment by limitation, demarcation by incapacity, foundation of energy on the repose of an origin Inertia.” (Ibid., p. 962)* And as a consequence the human body remains subject to the established and apparently permanent laws of Darkness and Incapacity and Death.

Faced with this almost insuperable difficulty of physical transformation, most spiritual seekers of the past have tended to turn away from the physical being of man with an attitude of aversion or even downright denial, and reconciled themselves to its supposedly unalterable fate of ever remaining unregenerate and untransformed. But, evidently, this cannot be the right attitude for the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga. Since a divine transformation of all the parts of our existence

including its most material foundation and functioning is the goal envisaged by Sri Aurobindo's Yoga of Integral Transformation, we must now seek for the clue that can resolve the age-old deadlock and open the portals to the transfiguration of our physical being and nature.

We have already seen that a mere static possession of the domains of the spirit in our inner and higher consciousness is not sufficient for the physical transformation; for that to be made feasible there must come about a dynamic descent of the higher consciousness into our physical nature and, at the same time or subsequent to it, a luminous awakening from within evoked in the very bosom of the body-consciousness itself.

Now, it so happens that it is only the supramental Force, the original and final self-determining Truth-Force of the self-existent Infinite, that possesses the necessary potency to entirely overcome the iron hold of the basal Inconscience. For only the Supermind can descend into the subterranean reaches of our existence without losing in any way its full dynamic power of action. To the dark negating Necessity of the Inconscience, Supermind opposes a supremely imperative luminous spiritual Necessity that is irresistible in its power of effectuation.

Hence it follows that if there is to be an entire transformation even of our physical material existence, Supermind or divine Gnosis must have to directly intervene in our earth-nature and overtly act therein. Now, from the point of view of terrestrial evolution, this supramental intervention will take the form of a twofold process. First, when the evolutionary nature is found ready and receptive, there will occur '*a supramental inflow from above, the descent of a gnostic being into the nature*', and, secondly, '*an emergence of the concealed supramental force from below*'. "*...the influx and the unveiling between them will remove... the nature of the Ignorance. The rule of the Inconscient will disappear; for the Inconscience will be changed by the outburst of the greater seen Consciousness within it... into what it always was in reality, a sea of the secret Superconscience.*" (Ibid., p. 968)

As a result of this transmutation of the inconscient foundation of our physically embodied existence, Spirit will become the sovereign occupant of form, our bodily existence will transcend the present law of death, division and mutual devouring, the material substance itself will be transfigured and spiritualised and our body will become the body divine that will "*reflect or reproduce here in a divine life on the earth something of [the] highest greatness and glory of the self-manifesting Spirit.*" (Sri Aurobindo, *The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth*, 1952 edition, p. 74)

Indeed, no limit need be or can be put to evolutionary possibilities. Actuality never exhausts the sum of possibilities. We are reminded here of the beautiful saying of Sri Aurobindo in his *Thoughts and Aphorisms*:

"Impossibility is only a sum of greater unrealised possibles. It veils an advanced stage and a yet unaccomplished journey." (p. 6)

Evolutionary Nature brushes aside all our preconceived notions of plausibility and proceeds always to conquer ever-new terrains of achievement. In the words of the Mother, "*All things (not only those that are conceivable at the moment, but all those that are for the moment inconceivable), all are not only possible, but will be realised.*" (Bulletin, Vol. XIII, No. 3, p. 51)

But an apparently valid question may be raised at this point whether the process of evolution is

still continuing, particularly as far as the form-evolution is concerned. We envisage that the divine body to appear in the course of the future evolution of man will have a different structure and a new type of 'physiological' functioning and acquire hitherto unrealised evolutionary capabilities. But has not the process of organic evolution stopped long since? And in that case cannot we emphatically declare that the human body with its foibles and good points, its chemistry and physiology, has already acquired a well -set unalterable disposition ? And if so, the present structure and habitual responses of the human body must be deemed to be permanent and binding and incapable of any further alteration and amelioration. After all the disbeliever would so declare the body is the product of inconscient physical energy and the consciousness that seems to dwell in it is only a derivative outcome of the operation of this energy. Does it not follow then that once the evolutionary process has come to a stop, there is no further scope for any adaptive improvement and our body system is destined to remain bound down to its present form and functioning? How can one then envisage any physical transformation through the process of the Integral Yoga?

But this train of reasoning is altogether fallacious. For, the implied assumptions and hence the so-called 'conclusions' are only half-truths and has it not been well said that "half-truth is its own Nemesis"? As a matter of fact, doubts and misgivings of the above kind arise from a superficial consideration of the truth of things, which again is due to the thought's concentrating on the appearance alone and missing thereby what lies behind the frontal process. But what then is the real truth after all?

A deeper inquiry reveals to us that :

1. The true foundation is above while the branchings are downward, *ūrdhavudhna nicīna -śakha* (Rig-Veda), *urđhamūlo 'vāksakha* (Gita). Consciousness is not an epiphenomenon of the functioning of Matter; it is on the contrary Matter itself that is a derivative and a phenomenon of Energy. And this Energy that is secretly and universally operative behind all manifestation is not without a Being possessing it and a Consciousness providing it: the Energy is indeed in its essential nature the Consciousness-Force, *cit-śakti*, *cittapas*, or *Sachchidananda*, the Existence-Consciousness-Bliss absolute, whose other name is Divine Reality.

2. Thus our body is not mere unconscious Matter: it is a structure of a secretly conscious Energy that has taken form in it. And consciousness that "*seems to be a result is, — in its reality, though not in its form, — the origin; the effect is in the essence pre-existent to the apparent cause, the principle of the emergent activity precedent to its present field of action.*" (The Life Divine, p. 853)

3. That the embodied soul is at present so much dependent upon the bodily and nervous life, that the physiological functioning of the body governs and determines the reactions of the subjective being, is thus seen to be only a minor and secondary truth. The major and primary truth is that Consciousness is the real and original determinant of our bodily life; it can, if it so wills and under proper conditions, transmit its commands to the bodily instrument and govern its reactions "*even to the overriding of its normal law or conditions of action...*" (Ibid., p. 306)

4. That the body and not the indwelling consciousness appears at present to be the primary determinant is only a provisional evolutionary arrangement. For in the involutory self-shrouding of Consciousness, the principle of Matter represents the nethermost stage of the descent, in which the absorbed Energy is totally oblivious of its origin and real self, and

supports the physical existence in a somnambulist action. Thus in our body, *“the outer force and figure of being, what we might call the formal or form existence as distinguished from the immanent or secretly governing consciousness, is lost in the physical action, is so absorbed into it as to be fixed in a stereotyped self-oblivion unaware of what it is and what it is doing.”* (Ibid., p. 711)

5. But behind the outer veil of material inconscience and the iron-grip of physico-chemical determinism, a secret involved consciousness, cosmic and infinite, is always at work in our body. And without this supporting greater consciousness-force that is ‘awake in all that sleeps’, *yaesa suptesu jānanti*, our physical system itself would have no power of action, nor any organising coherence of all.

6. Now, the whole nīśus of the evolutionary process is to bring out to the front the totality of this involved Consciousness and make that the overt master even over our outer existence and nature.

It follows, therefore, that the evolutionary emergence upon earth cannot stop short with man and mental consciousness. For Mind is no more than an intermediate power of consciousness, limited in vision and limping in action.

Now, evolution being an inverse movement to involution, *“what is an ultimate and last derivation in the involution is the first to appear in the evolution; what was original and primal in the involution is in the evolution the last and supreme emergence.”* (Ibid., p. 853) Thus, Spirit being the original involutory element and factor must represent a finale evolutionary emergence here in earthly manifestation. The evolutionary progression is thus bound to continue in the very nature of things till Supermind, the original Creative medium of the Divine, and the tri-une glory of *Sachchidananda* with its absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, stand evolved and active in the material universe.

7. But what will be the fundamental mechanism of this coming phase of evolution? The old evolutionary procedure relied so far on a prior form-evolution as to be the essential factor in the eventual effectuation of a resultant change of consciousness manifesting in the form. But what is noteworthy is that with the advent of man, the mental being, in the field of evolution, this old procedure has been completely superseded. Indeed, as Sri Aurobindo says

“...in man a reversal is possible, indeed inevitable; for it is through his consciousness, through its transmutation and no longer through a new bodily organism as a first instrumentation that the evolution can and must be effected... it is no longer the change of body that must precede the change of consciousness; the consciousness itself by its mutation will necessitate and operate whatever mutation is needed for the body.” (Ibid., p. 844)

8. With the ultimate emergence of Supermind in evolution, will come about the discovery of all the hidden truths and powers of the now concealed Spirit; and the right dynamisation of the higher knowledge will establish the Spirit’s total mastery over all its fields of operation. Matter in general and the body in particular will then be obedient and flawless instruments of the Spirit and plainly move to fulfil without any let or hindrance all the demands made upon them.

We can then justifiably conclude that when we speak of the ultimate conquest over all the present disabilities of our physical existence, to be brought about through the process of an

evolutionary transformation, we are not indulging in a child-soul's phantasy or its irrational demand for arbitrary miracles nor are we visualising any impossible chimera that goes beyond and outside all possible forces of Nature.

What we are envisaging is the control and conquest of the prevailing determinism of our bodily system by the reverse higher determinism of the supernal grades and powers of our conscious being. And there is nothing "miraculous" or "irrational" here. Indeed, as Sri Aurobindo has pointed out:

"What seems to us supernatural is in fact either a spontaneous irruption of the phenomena of other-Nature into physical Nature or... a possession of the knowledge and power of the higher orders or grades of cosmic Being and Energy and the direction of their forces and processes towards the production of effects in the physical world by seizing on possibilities of interconnection and means for a material effectuality." (The Life Divine, pp. 874-75)

But why at all these misgivings and doubts as regards the prospect of some as yet undreamt-of wonderful achievements to come from a future supramental evolution? Is not our body, even in its actuality, already a marvel product of organic evolution? We do not pause to study and contemplate its weird functioning and its intricate structure; therefore it appears to our blissful ignorance altogether self-evident, simple and natural. But anyone who studies with an unbiased penetrating vision the physiology and the biochemistry of any living body cannot but be struck by the amazing ingenuity displayed by life although acting so far under the heavy lead of a crass frontal ignorance. Instances are indeed legion that go to demonstrate what has been termed by Prof. Walter Cannon 'the wisdom of the body'. Even a slight acquaintance with the organisational details of living bodies and the behaviour patterns of different creatures cannot but convince even the most casual observer that through the apparent inconscience of the workings of physico-chemical energies there must be operative all the while a conscient purposive force behind.

The physical scientist may seek to 'explain away' all these things in terms of physical causality, bearing such ponderous names as 'adaptability', 'homoeostasis', 'feedback reactions', and what more. But this sort of 'explanation' does not go very far. For it explains, if at all, only the phenomenal 'how' and never the intrinsic 'why'.

In conclusion we can very well affirm that it is well-nigh impossible for man's imagination to visualise the wonderful results that will be achieved in the overt frontal plane of life, when the divine Supermind descends from above and the involved Supermind emerges from behind to take charge of the evolutionary process.

This supramental change, be it noted, will involve not only human nature but man's body-structure and its organ-systems as well. For, as the Mother once pointed out, the state of spontaneous immortality for the body cannot come unless and until its structure changes into something other than what it is now. (Bulletin, February 1967, p. 75) Sri Aurobindo also is very much explicit on this point when he speaks of the emergence of the New Body, the divine Body, as a fit vehicle for the untrammelled manifestation of *Sachchidananda* upon earth itself. He says inter alia:

"...the evolutionary urge would proceed to a change of the organs themselves in their material working and use and diminish greatly the need of their instrumentation and even of their

existence... This might go so far that these organs might cease to be indispensable and even be felt as too obstructive: the central force might use them less and less and finally throw aside their use altogether. If that happened they might waste by atrophy, be reduced to an insignificant minimum or even disappear. The central force might substitute for them subtle organs of a very different character or, if anything material was needed, instruments that would be forms of dynamism or plastic transmitters rather than what we know as organs.” (The Supramental Manifestation upon Earth, pp. 69-70)

And it is not that the body-structure and the organ-systems alone will undergo the necessary supramental transfiguration: the very substantial stuff of the body, although still remaining material, will be of an altogether different sort. For, corresponding to the supramental consciousness of the gnostic being there exists what Sri Aurobindo calls “supramental substance”. This supramental substance alone can confer on the physical body the status of a worthy mansion for the self-manifesting Spirit. And this, “*not in the sense of any attachment of obligatory restriction to the corporeal frame, but as an exceeding of the [present] laws of the physical body, — the conquest of death, an earthly immortality.*”

Let us close this essay on ‘Physical Transformation’ with some prophetic lines from Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*:

*“The Spirit shall look out through Matter’s gaze
And Matter shall reveal the Spirit’s face...
The Spirit shall take up the human play,
This earthly life become the life divine.”*
(Bk. XI, C. 1, pp. 709, 711)

XXIV.

Sadhana During our Body's Sleep

It is a fact that most people, including the aspirants after spiritual life, spend almost a third of their existence asleep. Consequently the time devoted to physical sleep well deserves our keen attention and should engage our careful Scrutiny. For, Sri Aurobindo has reminded us that “*sadhana can go on in the dream or sleep state as well as in the waking.*” (Letters on Yoga, p. 1481)

We deliberately used the expression ‘physical sleep’, for, as we shall presently see, it is wrong to assume that the whole of our being sleeps when the physical being goes into dormancy. Be that as it may, the question of sleep gains an urgency in the case of the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga who strive for a progressive inwardisation of their consciousness. We remember in this connection the following words of the Mother:

“To make use of the nights is an excellent thing. It has a double effect: a negative effect, it prevents you from falling backward, losing what you have gained [during the day] — that is indeed painful — and a positive effect, you make some progress, you continue your progress.” (MCW, Vol. 15, pp. 400-01)

But before we can hope to make a proper use of our nights, we must know what sleep and dreams really signify and what they are meant for. Well, simply stated, sleep is the periodic state of more or less complete unconsciousness, during which all voluntary activity remains suspended and the functioning of the senses and the cerebrum or brain proper appears to be naturally and temporarily held in abeyance.

Now, many a hypothesis (e.g., neural theories, biochemical theories, anaemia theories, etc.) has been put forward by the biological scientists to account for the state of sleep in its purely phenomenal aspect, but none has withstood the rigorous exigencies of experimental verification. As Kenneth Walker has so bluntly stated, “although there may be many theories; we are still uncertain as to the real nature and cause of sleep.” N. Kelitman has gone so far as to state that “sleep is a positive act and not just a mere cessation of wakefulness.”

In any case, no proposed or yet to be proposed scientific theory of sleep can do more than account for the bare physiological ‘how’ of the phenomenon. In the very nature of its field of investigation and of the physiognomy of its formulation, it cannot but leave unexplained the essential ‘why’ of the state of sleep.

Yes, sleep is a positive act, but not in the superficial sense of an ‘instinct’ as some investigators would like us to believe. Sleep plays a much profounder role with far-reaching implication and importance. As a matter of fact, in order to know the exact nature of sleep- and of dream-phenomena, their process of origination and provenance, we have to approach the Yogis and mystics and learn from them the occult-spiritual view of these phenomena.

We have already remarked at the outset of this essay that it is a superficial assessment to suppose that our consciousness remains in total abeyance during the period of our physical sleep. “*What is in abeyance is the waking activities, what is at rest is the surface mind and the normal conscious action of the bodily part of us...*” (The Life Divine, p. 422) In fact, during this

dormancy of our physical mind, our consciousness withdraws from its surface preoccupation and becomes instead awake and active in regions of our being as widely distinct as they are disparate in their consequences. Thus the body's sleep does not necessarily mean a state of blank and quasi-total unconsciousness. It is rather of the nature of a transference of wakefulness from outside to inside, a gathering inward away from conscious physical response to the impacts of external things.

As Sri Aurobindo has so lucidly explained, what happens in sleep is that our consciousness withdraws from the field of its waking experiences and enters into inner realms of our being, of which we are not normally aware in our waking state, although they exist all the time and continue to exercise their occult influences upon our life and thought and action. And this is so because "*when we are awake,... all that is put behind a veil by the waking mind and nothing remains except the surface self and the outward world — much as the veil of the sunlight hides from us the vast worlds of the stars that are behind it. Sleep is a going inward in which the surface self and the outward world are put away from our sense and vision.*" (Letters on Yoga, p. 1023) Our consciousness participates during this period in new inner activities of which, alas, only an insignificant portion — the portion actually occurring or getting recorded on the threshold of our surface consciousness — we somehow remember as imperfect and interpretative dreams of our night.

We must carefully note in this connection that it is not our thinking mind that sees dreams and is conscious in a rather incoherent way in sleep. No, if the waking mind were active in the body, one would not be able to sleep. Sleep and waking are determined by the mind's waking condition or activity, or its cessation; when it ceases for a time, then it is the subconscious that is normally there on the surface, and there is sleep. It is this subconscious that becomes active in ordinary dreams. But in profounder dreams in which one goes out into other planes of consciousness, mental, vital, subtle physical, it is part of our subliminal inner being — inner mental, inner vital or subliminal physical — that is usually active. (What we mean by the subconscious, subliminal, circumconscient and superconscient parts of our being will be explained somewhat later on.)

At this point we must hasten to clear a possible confusion that may arise in our readers' minds. For they may have been struck by the queerness of our assertion that in some dreams the sleeping man's consciousness 'may go out into other planes'. They may wonder, 'Obviously this is an absurd statement, for how can there be other planes than the physical?' Yes, however puzzling this may appear to be to the ordinary materially-minded intellectuals, it is an indubitable fact that —

"The physical is not the only world; there are others that we become aware of through dream records, through the subtle senses, through... intuition and vision. There are worlds of a larger subtler life than ours, vital worlds; worlds in which Mind builds its own forms and figures, mental worlds; psychic worlds which are the soul's home; others above with which we have little contact... It is when we enter or contact these other planes that we come into connection with the worlds above the physical. In sleep we leave the physical body, only a subconscious residue remaining, and enter all planes and all sorts of worlds." (Ibid., pp. 1499-1500)

We are by now in a position to offer an occult-spiritual explanation of the phenomenon of dreams. In ordinary sleep, what happens is that our physical body falls into slumber for a period of time and only a subconscious residual consciousness is left in it. The rest of the being stands

back and a part of its consciousness goes out into the various above-mentioned planes and regions of our existence. *“In each we see scenes, meet beings, share in happenings, come across formations, influences, suggestions which belong to these planes.”* (Ibid., p. 1500) When experiences of the wandering inner consciousness get transmitted to the obscure layer floating over the deep subconscious in which our physical being seems submerged for the time being, and our physical mind, in a state of sleep-wakefulness, receives and records and translates them more or less imperfectly, more or less coherently, depending on the state of development of our being, we are said to have dreams.

To understand properly our dreams and to derive maximum spiritual benefit from our dream-study, we must first be clear in more specific terms about the different spheres of our individual existence.

The very first idea that we have to instil in our consciousness is the fact of Yogic discovery that we are not only what we normally know of ourselves but an immense more which we do not know. Our outwardly visible personality is no more than a mere bubble on the ocean of our total existence. As a matter of fact, there are broadly speaking four clear and distinct regions in the totality of our being:

(i) the waking consciousness, (ii) the subconscious, (iii) the intraconscious and circumconscious subliminal, and finally (iv) the superconscious. Apart from a very small and restricted part of our waking individual consciousness, we are normally totally ignorant of the rest of our being — so appalling indeed is the extent and intensity of our present psycho-constitutional ignorance.

Our ordinary ‘waking consciousness’ is a limping and cabined surface consciousness shut up in the body limitation and within the confines of the little bit of personal mind. In this part of our being, we receive consciously only the outer touches and know things in ourselves and in our surroundings only or mainly by the intellect and outer mind and senses. The ordinary man is aware only of this surface self and is quite unaware of all that functions from behind the surface.

The ‘subconscious’ part of our being represents an obscure unconsciousness or half-consciousness submerged below and inferior in its movements to our organised waking awareness. The subconscious is all the time *“swallowing into its depths impressions of past experience as seeds of unconscious habit and returning them constantly but often chaotically to the surface consciousness, sending upwards much futile or perilous stuff of which the origin remains obscure to us, in dream, in mechanical repetitions of all kinds, in untraceable impulsions and motives, in mental, vital, physical perturbations and upheavals, in dumb automatic necessities of our obscurest parts of nature.”* (The Life Divine, p. 559)

The ‘subliminal’ proper in us comprises our inner being, that is to say, our inner mind and inner life and inner physical with the soul or the psychic entity supporting them. It is of the nature of a secret intraconscious and circumconscious awareness which functions behind the veil but is not at all of the obscure subconscious character as depicted in the preceding paragraph. Rather, it is in possession of a brilliant mind, a limpid life-force and a clear subtle physical sense of things.

Now about what we have termed the ‘superconscious’. A whole line of beyond-mental spiritual experiences testifies to the exist-type of a range of being superconscious to all the three elements we have so far spoken of. There is not only something deep within behind our normal self-awareness, but something also high above it is there in this superconscious. *“We are*

inherently and intrinsically conscious of our self and spirit, not as here below by a reflection in silent mind or by acquisition of the knowledge of a hidden Being within us; it is through it, through that ether of superconscience, that we can pass to a supreme status, knowledge, experience.” (Ibid., p. 561)

Now, as we have mentioned earlier, only a very small part of our complex total being comes into our conscious purview. The rest remains hidden behind and above, in the subliminal and the superconscient reaches of being. The ancient Indian wisdom expressed the same fact by dividing our consciousness into three, or rather, four provinces: *jāgrat* or ‘waking state’, *svapna* or ‘dream state’, *susupti* or ‘sleep state’, and finally *tunya* transcending these all. “...*the waking state is the consciousness of the material universe which we normally possess in this embodied existence dominated by the physical mind. The dream state is a consciousness corresponding to the subtler life-plane and mind-plane behind... The sleep state is a consciousness corresponding to the supramental plane proper to the gnosis... The Turiya beyond is the consciousness of our pure self-existence or our absolute being...*” (The Synthesis of Yoga, pp. 498-99)

The sleep state and the dream state are thus seen to be the figurative names for the superconscient and the subliminal that lie respectively beyond and behind our normal waking awareness.

Now it is impossible for us in our normal awareness to get back from our physical mind into these sublimer planes of consciousness. But what is pleasantly striking is the fact that the sleep of common parlance proves rather to be an effective means in exploring these higher and deeper ranges of consciousness which are inaccessible for the moment to the reach of man’s unregenerate waking awareness. Indeed, as Sri Aurobindo has aptly pointed out, the ‘sleep state’ and the ‘dream state’ of the ancient Yogic tradition “*are so named and figured because it is through dream and sleep, — or trance which can be regarded as a kind of dream or sleep, — that the surface mental consciousness normally passes out of the perception of objective things into the inner subliminal and the superior supramental or overmental status. In that inner condition it sees the supraphysical realities in transcribing figures of dream or vision or, in the superior status, it loses itself in a massed consciousness of which it can receive no thought or image.*” (The Life Divine, p. 452)

Such being the case it is not difficult for us to comprehend why the physical state of sleep does play or at least should play an important role in the sadhana-life of an aspirant. Of course, there is the physiological necessity of periodic sleep. For it is well acknowledged that in the prevailing economy of the interchange of energies with the universal forces, none of the dynamic organs of the present imperfect constitution of man’s physical being can function in a ceaseless way without succumbing after a lapse of time to a state of utter fatigue and dullness. And the cerebral activity of man proves no exception to this general rule.

This necessity for periodic rest for our physical and physiological system equally applies in the case of sadhakas. The Mother and Sri Aurobindo would normally recommend seven hours daily sleep for the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga. This physiological necessity for sleep does not, however, constitute the whole truth of the sleep phenomenon. As we shall presently see, our body’s sleep plays a much greater and profounder role than merely to help in the recuperation of our energies through the process of sustained relaxation. For our physical sleep becomes, or can be made to become, a highly valuable means of unloosening, however temporarily, the stone-grip of the ignorance of ‘our waking that is sleep’ and awaking instead in the superior

states of consciousness and being. And herein lies the great role of ‘sleep-trance’ and ‘dream-trance’ — *nidrā-samādhi* and *svapna-samādhi* — to which we shall allude in the sequel.

We have come to know by now that during our body’s sleep different parts of our inner consciousness travel to various supra-physical planes, participate in their happenings and bring back their records which, if we remember them aright, we call ‘dreams’. Now, believe it or not, this dreaming process continues almost throughout our sleep-period although when we wake up, we remain ‘blissfully’ ignorant of this uninterrupted phenomenon. At most we retain a conscious recollection of a tiny number of dreams which have occurred just before our actual time of waking. For the rest of the seven-hour period we erroneously claim that we have had a ‘dreamless slumber’. This so-called ‘dreamless slumber’ is very often no more than a state of dream-consciousness of which all record has been wiped away from the memory of the waking physical mind. And this obliteration may be due to any of the following reasons:

(i) Turn over of consciousness: Our waking consciousness is ordinarily externalised and gazes outward while our inner dream consciousness has its eyes turned inward. Thus the transition from the sleep state to the waking state is very often associated with a reversal, a turning over, “*of the consciousness in which the dream-state disappears more or less abruptly, effacing the fugitive impression made by the dream events (or rather their transcription) on the physical sheath.*” (Letters on Yoga, pp. 1493-94) If the return to waking consciousness is more composed and less abrupt, then perhaps the memory remains of the last of the dreams or of the one that was the most impressive during sleep. Otherwise everything experienced in sleep recedes from the physical consciousness leaving a state of blankness behind.

(ii) Plunge into subconscious: There is another and most usual blank state, the state when one goes ‘deeply and crassly’ into the subconscious. The heavy and inert and altogether unrefreshing ‘subterranean plunge’ of our outer consciousness into the black pit of a complete subconsciousness leads to a state of absolute unconsciousness of which no record reaches our waking awareness.

(iii) Absence of link bridge: In sleep our being passes through a succession of states of consciousness; it does not normally dwell permanently in one particular state. Now, so long as the sadhaka has not been able to develop by sadhana an integral and synthetic awareness encompassing the whole field of sleep, these different states of fleeting consciousness appear each with its own order of realities, so much so that in our passage through them through one state to another, the consciousness of the previous state of things slips away from us and its contents are altogether lost or, even when vaguely caught in memory, seem odd and uncertain and hence forgotten in no time.

(iv) *Sachchidananda* immobility: Given the most favourable circumstances, when the sadhaka is in a highly developed consciousness, he may pass in sleep through a succession of states of progressively deepening sleep-consciousness to reach at last what Sri Aurobindo has termed as “a pure *Sacchidananda* state of complete rest, light and silence,” a state of “*susupti* in the *Brahman* or *Brahmaloka*” (Ibid., p. 1484), and retraces one’s way after a brief stay there, to come back again to the waking physical state.

Referring to this state of “*luminous and peaceful and dreamless slumber rest*”, the Mother says, “*you can hardly call it sleep, for it is extremely conscious*”. But she warns that this state of *Sachchidananda* immobility of consciousness cannot be attained in sleep by chance; “*it requires a long training*”.

Apart from the four principal factors of oblivion elaborated above, there are a few other reasons which militate against the successful retention, in our waking memory, of the dream experiences we may have had during our body's sleep.

During sleep the inner being becomes consciously active but the waking being coming to its own at the end of the sleep-period fails to retain any memory of these activities of the night. In any case, the higher and deeper dreams are remembered only under three situations:

“(i) if they are strongly impressed on the recording consciousness; (ii) one wakes immediately after one of them; (iii) one has learned to be conscious in sleep, i.e., follows consciously the passage from plane to plane.” (Ibid., p. 1494)

The discussion so far must have made it abundantly clear that our sleep-field is not a simple blank tract but is rather rich with variegated phenomena. Our dreams are not of one kind or of one quality; they range over a very large spectrum. Often in the same night we may have several dreams which belong to widely different categories and thus have different intrinsic values so far as the aspirant's sadhana is concerned. Therefore the very first part of the discipline of the night should naturally deal with the question of how to recall and recognise our dreams and how to distinguish between them.

As regards the multifarious natures and provenances of the dreams a sadhaka is to encounter in his sleep-life, we are quoting here two passages from Sri Aurobindo's writings. These passages — one from *The Synthesis of Yoga* and the other one from *Letters on Yoga* — summarise the situation in a most comprehensive way. Here are the passages:

“The dreams of the physical mind are an incoherent jumble made up partly of responses to vague touches from the physical world round which the lower mind-faculties disconnected from the will and reason, the buddhi, weave a web of wandering phantasy, partly of disordered associations from the brain-memory, partly of reflections from the soul travelling on the mental plane, reflections which are, ordinarily, received without intelligence or coordination, widely distorted in the reception and mixed up confusedly with the other dream elements, with brain-memories and fantastic responses to any sensory touch from the physical world.” (The Synthesis of Yoga, p. 500)

“It is a very small number of dreams that can be so explained [that they arise by external stimuli] and in many cases the explanation is quite arbitrary or cannot be proved. A much larger number of dreams arise from subconscious impressions of the past without any stimulus from outside. These are the dreams from the subconscious which are the bulk of those remembered by people who live in the external mind mostly. There are also the dreams that are renderings of vital movements and tendencies habitual to the nature, personal formations of the vital plane. But when one begins to live within then the dreams are often transcriptions of one's experiences on the vital plane and beyond that there is a large field of symbolic and other dreams which have nothing to do with memory... there are also prophetic dreams and many others.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 1496)

As the Mother has pointed out, although there are dreams which are “*merely the malignant informers of our weaknesses or the malicious destroyers of our daily effort for progress*”, there are others “*which should on the contrary be cultivated as precious auxiliaries in our work within and around us.*” Vol. 2, p. 32)

Thus, although it is a fact that apart from those vague, incoherent and insignificant dreams that are occasioned by ‘purely physical circumstances such as the state of health, digestion, position on the bed, etc.’, most of our ordinary sleep-existence is made up of dreams of which the subconscious is the builder. This too is a fact that during the period of our physical sleep our consciousness may move on the profounder reaches of our being and this subliminal exploration of the inner planes provides us occasionally with dreams from these planes — or should we not rather say ‘dream-experiences’? — for these are really transcripts direct or symbolic of what we actually experience in us or around us while dwelling in these subliminal realms of our existence. Immense is the value of these subliminal dreams. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

“If the subliminal thus comes to the front in our dream-consciousness, there is sometimes an activity of our subliminal intelligence... problems are solved which our waking consciousness could not solve, warnings, premonitions, indications of the future, veridical dreams replace the normal subconscious incoherence.” (The Life Divine, p. 424)

A few words may be said here about ‘dream-formations’ and actual ‘dream happenings’. Some dreams are very obviously mere formations, devoid of any reality, which one meets mostly on the vital plane, at times on the mental plane. Sri Aurobindo has this to say about these ‘dream formations’:

“Sometimes they are the formations of your own mind or vital; sometimes they are the formations of other minds with an exact or modified transcription in yours; sometimes formations come that are made by the non-human forces or beings of these other planes. These things are not true and need not become true in the physical world... The proper course with them is simply to observe and understand and, if they are from a hostile source, reject or destroy them.” (Letters on Yoga, p. 1488)

‘Dream happenings’ are of a different nature altogether. These dreams are records of actual happenings seen or experienced by us on other planes of our own being or of universal being into which we enter during our body’s sleep. *“These have sometimes ... a strong bearing on our own inner and outer life or the life of others, reveal elements of our or their mental being and life-being or disclose influences on them of which our waking self is totally ignorant...”* (The Life Divine, p. 424)

There is also a category of dreams which may be called ‘premonitory’ or ‘previsional’. If there is no interference of the constructing mind and its imaginations nor of the vital being and its interpretative preferences, if the recording consciousness remains sincere and passive, then these premonitory and previsional dreams can reveal to the sadhaka important events of the future and these can help him in two distinct but equally fruitful ways. In one of her Wednesday class talks the Mother clarified what these two different ways signify in their practical consequences. Here is a relevant passage from her talk:

“When you have control over your nights and are conscious of your sleep and your dreams..., you see the difference between the two: what is given to you as a warning so that you may intervene, and what is given to you as an intimation so that you may take the right attitude towards what is going to happen. It is always a lesson, but it is not always the same lesson. At times you can act with your will; at times you must learn the inner lesson which the incident is about to give you so that you may be ready for the event to have a fully favourable consequence.”

Finally a word about ‘symbolic dreams’. At times there is a great divergence between what is sought to be conveyed through a particular dream and the actual figure and imagery that the dream-consciousness adopts to convey it. The meaning is quite often wrapped up under the inscrutable cover of its symbolic representations. For others to attempt to decipher a sadhaka’s dream is often a vain enterprise. The clue remains hidden in the sadhaka’s own consciousness. It is he and he alone who has to develop his intuitive-spiritual consciousness to unravel the mystery of the meaning. At this point, it will not be inappropriate if we sound a note of warning to the sadhakas: they should not seek to “psychoanalyse” their dreams following the tenets of the now fashionable scientific discipline. And the reason is not difficult to comprehend. However, we do not want to spend any time in unravelling these reasons here.

But, even if we leave this question of psychoanalysis behind, the fact remains that a proper and systematic dream-study is always a very important part of the sadhana-life of the aspirants. At first consideration one might think that the subject of dreams is an altogether secondary one; for this nightly activity generally seems to have very little importance compared to the activity of our waking state. But if we examine the question a little more closely and if we have carefully followed all that has been written in the preceding pages of this essay, we cannot fail to see that this is not at all the case. For the sadhakas a clairvoyant cultivation of their sleep-life and a judicious study of their dream-experiences become an essential part of their spiritual effort, for one can learn much by controlling one’s dreams. As the Mother has said, “*It is a tremendous field of observation — there is no end to the discoveries you can make in you dreams.*” (MCW, Vol. 15, p. 349)

All dreams do indicate something, and dream-experiences can convey truths that are not so easy to obtain in the waking state. In the waking state one is conscious only of a certain limited field and action of one’s nature. In sleep one can become vividly aware of things beyond this field — a larger mental or vital nature, or else a subtle physical or a subconscious nature which contains much that is there in one but not distinguishably active in the waking state.

Some dreams are manifestations of the erratic activities of certain mental faculties which associate ideas, conversations and memories that come together pell-mell. Such dreams, if recalled with accuracy, are apt to reveal to the sadhaka the confusion that secretly prevails in his mental being when the latter is not subject to the control of his will.

Yes, it is the waking mind which thinks and wills and controls more or less the life in the waking state. During the body’s sleep that mind is withdrawn and there is no possibility of ordinary control. As a result, a sadhaka may act or react in his dream unfoldment in a way totally foreign to what he is accustomed to in his waking period. Hence it is sometimes said that it is only in a man’s sleep that his true nature is revealed. The knowledge of this spontaneously operative subterranean nature will immensely help the sadhaka in detecting and then eradicating the still existent weak points of his unregenerate nature.

We must therefore learn to know all our dreams whatever be their quality, nature or field of origin, and derive the necessary lessons they are capable of offering. But for that we must first learn four essential things: (i) how to reduce the number of ordinary, futile and tiring dreams; (ii) how to cultivate the significant dreams worth having; (iii) how to recall on waking all the important dreams we may have had during our sleep; and finally (iv) how to maintain an uninterrupted ‘witness consciousness’ throughout our sleep period without disturbing in the least our body’s restful relaxation.

But all these depend fundamentally on the art of entering the state of sleep. It will not do for the sadhaka to get to his bed without proper psychological preparation, then roll there for some time, and finally go into sleep one knows not how and when.

How best to enter the state of sleep

On many occasions the Mother has referred to this very important question of rightly getting into sleep, and has given detailed instructions as regards how to do it. We summarise below her observations in this regard:

“You must lie flat on your back and relax all the muscles and nerves... to be like what I call a piece of cloth on the bed, nothing else remains. If you can do that with the mind also, you get rid of all stupid dreams that make you more tired when you get up than when you went to bed. It is the cellular activity of the brain that continues without control, and that tires much. Therefore, [what is needed is] a total relaxation, a kind of complete calm, without tension, in which everything is stopped. But this is only the beginning.

“Afterwards, a self-giving as total as possible of all, from top to bottom, from the outside to the inmost, and an eradication, also as total as possible, of all resistance of the ego, and you begin repeating your mantra—your mantra, if you have one or any other word which has power over you, a word leaping from the heart, spontaneously, like a prayer that sums up your aspiration. After having repeated it a few times, if you are already accustomed to it, you get into some sort of a trance. And from that trance you pass into sleep. The trance lasts as long as it should and quite naturally, spontaneously you pass into sleep. But when you come back from this sleep, you remember everything, the sleep was but a continuation of the trance...

“Even for those who have never been in trance, it is good to repeat a mantra, a word, a prayer before going into sleep. But there must be a life in the words, I do not mean an intellectual signification, nothing of that kind, but a vibration. And on the body its effect is extraordinary: it begins to vibrate, vibrate, vibrate... and quietly you let yourself go as though you wanted to get into sleep. The body vibrates more and more and still more and away you go.” (Bulletin, November 1960, pp. 87-89)

We have just now talked about how to enter the state of sleep. There is a right procedure for waking up too. We have already seen that during our body's sleep different parts of our consciousness travel to different supraphysical planes of being. One must allow all this consciousness to return to the body before one attempts to come out of sleep. This is what the Mother has advised the sadhakas to do:

How to Retain the Awareness of Dreams

“One must never startle anyone out of his sleep because he must have time to get back into his body. It is not good, when getting up, to jump out of bed — hop: One must remain quiet for awhile, as though one were bringing oneself back into oneself in quiet movement. One must try to gather one's consciousness, and all the nightly experience, in one's body. One must remain very quiet for a while, with eyes closed, in a mood of inner assimilation, and when it is done properly and one feels that everything is there, one gets up quietly, composedly.” (Questions and Answers 1955, p. 136. Adapted.)

‘One gets up quietly, composedly’: that is all right so far as that goes. But the matter does not end there for the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga. For he has to remember all his dreams and know clearly all the experiences he had during his sleep.

But what is normally observed is the regrettable fact that except for the last or the most impressive dream, a sadhaka, on waking up, appears to have clean forgotten all other dreams and all that has occurred during the period of his sleep. Now the question is, how to cure this disability. On this point too the Mother has spoken a lot and that too on many occasions. In order to recall the vanishing and the already vanished dreams, the Mother would advise the sadhaka to adopt the following procedure:

“One must first remember that the absence of the precise memory of the dreams is very often due to the abruptness with which the return to waking consciousness takes place. The recalling of the dreams is facilitated if certain psychological and even physical precautions are observed for a slow and peaceful transition from the sleep state to the waking state.

Therefore, as a practical measure, the sadhaka, before going to sleep, should make a strong formation in his mind that he should not get up abruptly from the sleep state, and in the morning, on waking up, he should take good care not to make any abrupt physical movement like moving his head or even opening his eyes, because if one makes any abrupt movement, immediately and automatically the memory of the dreams vanishes.

The sadhaka must remain with the head absolutely motionless on the pillow, without stirring, until he can quietly recall to himself the consciousness which went out, and recall it as one pulls at something, very gently, without any knocking and without haste, in a state of attention and concentration. And, then, if one remains quite motionless, very quiet, and does not begin to think of all kinds of things, the returning consciousness will bring back first a vague impression and then an indistinct memory, sometimes a fragmentary memory. But if one remains in that same state of expectant and receptive immobility, then it can become more and more a distinct memory. But for this one must have sufficient time at one’s disposal.

One must try to follow the trail of vanishing dreams and recall them one by one. For this the sadhaka, [as we have indicated before] should keep his head exactly where it was at the moment of waking up, not open his eyes, and then make himself like a tranquil mirror within and concentrate there. He will perhaps catch just a tiny end of the tail of his last dream. He should catch it and start pulling gently, without stirring in the least. Then first one part of the dream comes, a little later another. One tries to go backward; the last comes first. Suddenly the whole dream appears.

The sadhaka repeats the dream to himself several times until it gets fixed in all its details. Once that dream is settled, one continues not to stir and tries to go further in, and suddenly one catches the tail of something else. It is more distant, more vague, but one can still seize it. And here also one hangs on, gets hold of it and pulls, and the sadhaka sees that everything changes and he enters another world. All of a sudden one has an extraordinary adventure: it is another dream. One follows the same process. And once this second dream gets fixed in memory, the sadhaka begins to penetrate still more deeply into himself, as though he was going in very far, very far. And the operation continues.” (Adapted from the Mother’s Entretiens 1953, 1955)

Thus, the slipping away of the memory of our nights can be greatly remedied and a power

developed of going back in memory from dream to dream, from state to state, till a sufficiently coherent knowledge of our sleep life may be built up. But this daily training of our physical memory to follow back the thread of our dream-activities fails to give its full dividend for the simple reason that in this way we are able to transform into conscious phenomena of the waking state those dreams alone which were already conscious during sleep. For where there was no consciousness, there can be no memory.

The sadhaka should therefore seek now to extend the participation of his consciousness to a greater number of activities in the sleeping state. The Mother's injunction to the sadhakas is: "*Be conscious! Be conscious of the night as well as of the day.*" And Sri Aurobindo assures us: "*It is even possible to become wholly conscious in sleep and follow throughout from beginning to end, or over large stretches the stages of our dream-experience...*" (The Life Divine, p. 425)

There is indeed a great need to remain conscious in sleep itself and change by degrees its ordinary nature of *tamasic* absorption into that of a luminous and blissful exploration of the inner and higher worlds of our being; for only in that way we may hope to bring back to our waking consciousness the sublime and fruitful experiences we may have had in sleep.

How to grow conscious in sleep?

The training of our physical memory to follow back the thread of our dream activities has now to be supplemented in the second place by the process of extending the participation of consciousness to a greater number of activities in the sleeping state.

Now, "*the daily habit of going with interest over the various dreams of the night, thus transforming their vestiges little by little into precise memories as well as that of noting them down on waking, are very helpful from this point of view.*"

"*By virtue of these habits, the mental faculties will be induced to adapt their mechanism to the phenomena of this order and to direct upon them their attention, curiosity and power of analysis.*"

"*It will then produce a sort of intellectualisation of dream, achieving in the process the double result of interspersing the conscious activities more and more intimately in the play, hitherto disordered, of the activities of the sleeping state, and of augmenting progressively the scope of these activities by making them more and more rational and instructive.*"

"*Dreams would then take on the character of precise visions and, at times, of dream revelations...*" (The Mother: Words of Long Ago, pp. 44-45)

But along with this participation of mental consciousness, this revelatory intellectualisation of dreams, we must now try to cultivate in sleep a still higher and deeper mode of consciousness. In fact, our sleep-life should be as much a part of sadhana as the waking one, and the developing consciousness that we attain in our waking state through spiritual aspiration and endeavour should extend itself fully and continuously also to the sleep state.

It is true that at the beginning and for a long time it becomes difficult to maintain the consciousness at the same pitch at night, for "*the true consciousness comes at first in the waking state or in meditation, it takes possession of the mental, the vital, the conscious physical, but the*"

subconscious vital and physical remain obscure and this obscurity comes up when there is sleep or an inert relaxation.” (Sri Aurobindo: Letters on Yoga, p. 1480) But with the growth of an intense sadhana in our waking state, and when we develop our inner being, live from within outward, and our subconscious is enlightened and penetrated by the supernal light, this disparity and dislocation of consciousness disappears, and the sadhaka’s sadhana goes on “*in the dream or sleep state as well as in the waking.*” (Ibid., p. 1481)

But it is worth reminding the sadhaka that the cart should not be put before the horse and the sleep-sadhana should not take precedence over the sadhana during the waking state; the case is the other way round. As Sri Aurobindo has so trenchantly put it:

“The sleep consciousness can be effectively dealt with only when the waking mind has made a certain amount of progress. It is usually only if there is much activity of sadhana in the day that it extends also into the sleep-state. Once one is in full sadhana, sleep becomes as much a part of it as waking.” (Ibid., p. 1481)

Once the sleep-sadhana is undertaken in right earnest, as a natural complement to the sadhana of the waking state, and as the sadhaka becomes progressively conscious and master of his sleep-activities, he achieves many interesting results of which a few may be mentioned below to satisfy the curiosity of the readers.

(i) There can be created a separation, even in sleep, between

‘*Prakriti*’ and ‘*Purusha*’, that is to say, between the executive Nature part and the detached and observing ‘Witness consciousness’ (*sāksī-cetanā*). (ii) One can know, while in the act of dreaming, that one is indeed dreaming. One can then organise one’s dream-phenomena and exercise a good control over the actual course and the denouement of any particular dream, (iii) One can maintain a continuity in one’s sleep-life; that is to say, each succeeding night one can take up and carry further a past continuous sleep-experience of the previous night, (iv) Even during one’s sleep-period, if, for whatever reason, one wakes up, one can go back to sleep and continue the same dream from the point where one had left it. (v) One can exercise one’s conscious will-power to prevent undesirable dreams from coming in and invoke, instead, good and instructive dreams to fill the sleep-existence, (vi) One can build up bridges of communication between different states through which our consciousness moves during the same night, and thus maintain a conscious and continuous recollection of all the sleep-experiences, (vii) One can deliberately build up during one’s sleep beautiful formations and then help them to be realised in waking life at some future date, (viii) By sustained practice one can, in sleep, pass from consciousness to deeper consciousness in a long succession until one reaches the psychic and rests there, or else from higher and higher consciousness until one attains rest in *Sachchidananda* silence and peace. (ix) One can progressively change one’s sleep into a yogic repose and transform one’s dreams into various dream-experiences or, even, into *svapna-samādhi*, ‘dream-trance’, (x) And many others.

Two more points and we have come to the end of our essay on Sadhana during our body’s sleep.

The first point concerns a possible doubt and fear that may arise in the mind of some of our readers that any attempt at the conscious utilisation of the nights may affect the depth of the sadhaka’s sleep and thus deprive him of the efficacy of his nightly rest, which may prove in the long run detrimental to the maintenance of his physical health. But this sort of fear and doubt

has got no basis in fact. For, as we have already pointed out, it is not with the waking mind's physical consciousness that one seeks to be conscious in sleep. It is another and a higher order of consciousness that the sadhaka cultivates while, at the same time, leaving the body and the brain profoundly and peacefully asleep.

The second point is in the nature of a note of warning. Through a proper cultivation of the fields of sleep-existence, when the inner sleep-consciousness begins to develop, and along with it appear striking dream-experiences as distinct from ordinary dreams, the sadhaka may feel like withdrawing from the waking status, go within and follow the development there even when there is no fatigue or need of sleep — so alluring become the experiences of dream-consciousness, so overwhelming the charm thereof.

But this attraction of the sleep-world must not be allowed to encroach on the waking hours; it should be kept at its proper place and time and confine its operations to the normal hours of sleep. Otherwise, as Sri Aurobindo has warned us, there may be an undesirable unbalancing and a decrease of one's hold on outer realities.

An assiduous sadhana during the body's sleep is richly rewarding from more than one point of view. But the requisite mastery over the nights cannot be acquired in an easy canter. It requires patience, perseverance and an untiring zeal. But the mastery is worth acquiring and the sadhakas of the Integral Yoga should on no account ignore it.

XXV.

The Conquest over the Hostile Forces

Sri Ramakrishna, the Saint of Dakshineswara, speaks at one place in course of his autobiographical narration: “Do you know, how many things I used to see when I would go into meditation? One day while I was meditating under a Bilva tree, the Evil Being came to me and tried to tempt me in various ways. He offered me money, name and fame, sex pleasure, powers of various sorts, etc. I invoked the Mother’s aid. A very secret thing, indeed. The Mother appeared. I asked her to decapitate him.”

While reading this type of account our ‘modern’ minds brought up in the milieu of a scientifico-materialistic bias get puzzled and wonder: ‘The Evil Being coming to tempt us? What is that? We can very well understand that every sadhaka has his weaknesses of nature and has to confront and tackle them in course of his sadhana. But what is this strange story of some disembodied supraphysical beings coming to confuse the sadhaka? Is it at all true to fact?’

But this is not peculiar to Ramakrishna alone. When we go through the lives of past Yogis and mystics of various ages and countries and read the accounts of their periods of sadhana, we come across similar statements and narrations. Have we not heard that Mara the Evil Being came to tempt Buddha, and Satan the Force of Darkness tendered in the desert diabolical advice to Jesus the Son of God?

It is not well known that the saintly writer John Bunyan, the famous author of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, composed another spiritual allegory whose significant title is *The Holy War of King Shaddai upon Diabolus*. Shaddai is here, of course, the Divine; and Bunyan’s book minutely deals with the variegated account of the wily attempts of Diabolus or the Devil to possess Mansoul and the final victory of King Shaddai.

Does it mean then that we, in our spiritual sadhana, have to confront not only the common weaknesses and obstacles of our lower Nature but also the more devious and subtle oppositions of invisible hostile forces and evil-intentioned beings who try to frustrate our spiritual advancement? Yes, such is the experiential testimony given by the great Yogis of the past both in the East and in the West. Here are two statements, one each from Sri Aurobindo and the Mother:

“The forces that stand in the way of sadhana are the forces of the lower mind, vital and physical nature. Behind them are adverse powers of the mental, vital and subtle physical worlds.” (Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga*, Cent. Ed., p. 635)

“...there are all the difficulties of ignorance of the different states of being, to which are added the endless malice and the unbounded cunning of the hostile forces in the world.” (The Mother, *Questions and Answers 1950-51*, MCW, Vol. 4, pp. 251-52)

It is thus clear that the life of sadhana is not always sunlit and the sadhaka has to pass through many difficulties and ordeals; and all this is due to the fact of these adverse forces and beings mounting almost a ceaseless attack on the sadhaka’s consciousness. So it is very much essential for the smooth progress of sadhana that every sadhaka should know the ways of attack of these hostile forces, their ruses and stratagems, and how not to respond to them but rather drive them

away each time they try to turn up before the aspirant.

Yes, at any cost not to respond to their suggestions — this is the most effective weapon of defence available to the sadhaka against these dark forces. For, if he does not take their bait and show any affinity to their prompting, these adversary beings will not be able to disturb his sadhana, however virulent may be their assault or ambush.

And for being able to reject always the lure or the threat of these hostiles, the sadhaka must develop and keep steady in his consciousness the firmness of will, sincerity of purpose, fidelity to the Goal, and a total faith in and dependence upon the Presence and Grace of the Divine. The sadhaka should never forget what is conveyed by the following words of Sri Aurobindo:

“It is a fact always known to all yogis and occultists since the beginning of time, in Europe and Africa as in India, that wherever yoga or Yajna is done, there the hostile Forces gather together to stop it by any means. It is known that there is a lower nature and a higher spiritual nature — it is known that they pull different ways and the lower is strongest at first and the higher afterwards. It is known that the hostile Forces take advantage of the movements of the lower nature and try to spoil through them, smash or retard the siddhi... But it has also always been known that those who are sincere and faithful in heart and remain so and those who rely on the Divine will arrive in spite of all difficulties, stumbles or falls.” (Letters on Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 1731)

By the way, it should not be thought that all the subtle forces belonging to the supraphysical realms are invariably forces of darkness and try to perpetuate the reign of evil in the world. There are beings and forces of Light too which are very much helpful to the sadhaka's sadhana and co-operate with the action of the Divine. But we are speaking here principally of the adverse forces because our present chapter has for its subject matter: (i) What is meant by a hostile Force? (ii) Do hostile forces really exist? (iii) How do they act in the sadhaka's consciousness? (iv) And how to frustrate their inimical action?

Although not tangible to the normal consciousness of man, these adverse forces and beings do really exist and are very much active in the world. *“The reality of the Hostiles and the nature of their role and trend of their endeavour cannot be doubted by anyone who has had his inner vision unsealed and made their unpleasant acquaintance.”* (Letters on Yoga, Part One, p. 24)

We have mentioned at the outset of this essay that the existence and nature of these adverse forces has been known to the inquiring spirit of man since the earliest recorded history of the race. The occult traditions of ancient Egypt and Cabbala are full of their accounts. Zoroaster of ancient Persia specifically warned the aspirants of the spiritual path about the clever ploys of these hostile beings. The Vedas of India called them the Panis who like nocturnal robbers plunder the sadhakas of their truth-light, *rtam jyotih*, *hiranyam jyotih*. Devi Saptashati, commonly known as the Chandi, held in equal reverence with the Gita, has described in great detail the symbolic names and functions of these undivine hostile beings and their ways of waging war against the Divine. Below are the names and the functional roles of some of these adverse beings:

(1) Chikshura or the power of distraction; (2) Chamara or the covering power; (3) Udagra or morbid egoism; (4) Mahahanu or Ego-will; (5) Asiloma or envy; (6) Baskala or the spirit of possession; (7) Bidalaksha or the spirit of malice; etc.

These evil forces and hostile beings act on different planes of consciousness. Their functions vary and they are more or less powerful depending on their respective fields of activity. Some are *Asuras* of a very high order. The *Mahabharata* calls them '*pūrve devāh*', the 'former gods'. They were godly in nature at one time but subsequently revolted against the Divine and became *Asuras*. The *Asuras* are generally found on the mental plane. *Rakshasas* and *Pishachas* function in the lower vital. A few hostiles are active in the physical consciousness: the Theosophists call them 'obscure elementals'. But what is noteworthy is that the hostile beings and forces have absolutely no access to the spiritual plane.

But why are these adverse forces and beings permitted by the Supreme to exist in the world and tempt and disturb the *sadhakas* in their spiritual *Tapasya*? There is a significant verse in Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*: "*Nothing is utterly vain that the One has made.*" So, such must be the case with these hostile forces also. In fact, they fulfil a very necessary role in the life of the *sadhakas*, although in a negative and roundabout way. Let us explain.

When any *sadhaka* of the Integral Yoga starts on the path of his *sadhana*, he has to carry with him a heavy load of weaknesses and difficulties pertaining to his lower nature. But many of these frailties and foibles remain quite hidden from the view of the *sadhaka*, generally lodged in the 'subterranean' reaches of consciousness far below the level of the waking awareness.

Yet, it cannot be gainsaid that in our Yoga of integral transformation, unless and until all these hidden weaknesses are brought out into the open, successfully tackled and transformed back into their divine counterparts, the *sadhana* cannot come to its culminating fulfilment.

But it is a deplorable fact that most of us have a deep-seated tendency to keep our weaknesses out of our sight as far as possible and as long as practicable. We continue to indulge in these same weaknesses but under their camouflaged forms. And in that way our *sadhana* remains barren and unfruitful, apparently without any visible and detectable causative factors. But the real culprits are within, sending up from there their noxious fumes vitiating our specious outer life and consciousness. About these grim attacks coming from below and behind, Sri Aurobindo writes in *Savitri*:

*"The dread visages of the adversary Kings.
The dreadful powers held down within his [man's] depths
Become his masters or his ministers;
Enormous they invade his bodily house,
Can act in his acts, infest his thought and life...
Grey forces like a thin miasma creep
Stealing through chinks in his closed mansion's doors,
Discolouring the walls of upper mind
In which he lives his fair and specious life,
And leave behind a stench of sin and death..."*
(Book Seven, Canto 2, Cent. Ed., p. 480)

If it is a fact that most of our vicious weaknesses are hidden behind the veil and if this too is a fact that without their proper eradication our *sadhana* cannot reach its fulfilment, whoever and whatever helps to ferret out these shrouded weaknesses from their secret lairs so that they may be brought out into the open and vanquished in an overt combat, does a good service to us. And the so-called hostile forces and beings fulfil this role admirably. For they mercilessly target these

weaknesses of the sadhaka, excite them either through lure or through menace, and project them out into the waking consciousness with such fury that the sadhaka cannot ignore them any longer. There are then left only two alternatives before the sadhaka: either to succumb to the suggestions prompted by the hostiles and thus go downhill and get lost, or to marshal courage and confidence and give a successful fight to the weaknesses as a loyal and loving child of the Divine Mother and clear them out from one's nature. Thus a necessary victory will be gained and a further advancement made on the path. To quote Sri Aurobindo:

"...once our minds are reasonably fixed in the central vision and our wills are on the whole converted to the single pursuit, Life becomes our helper. Intent, vigilant, integrally conscious, we can take every detail of its forms and every incident of its movements as food for the sacrificial Fire within us. Victorious in the struggle, we can compel Earth herself to be an aid towards our perfection and can enrich our realisation with the booty torn from the powers that oppose us." (The Synthesis of Yoga, Cent Ed., p. 68)

Yes, "with the booty torn from the powers that oppose us." And this is the great contribution of the adverse forces and beings that they put to test the sincerity of the sadhaka almost at every step of the Path. And it is only for this purpose that they have been permitted by the Divine to exist and be active in the world. Here are some pertinent excerpts from Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's writings throwing great light on this delicate question:

(1) *"They [the hostile forces in the world] are there, do you know why? They have been tolerated, do you know why? — simply to see how long one can last out and how great is the sincerity in one's action."* (The Mother, MCW, Vol. 4, p. 252)

(2) *"...the adverse forces — which of course are responsible for all difficulties — are tolerated in the world in so far as they serve to make the world completely conscious. This indeed is true."* (The Mother MCW, Vol. 6, p. 462)

(3) *"The hostile forces have a certain self-chosen function: it is to test the condition of the individual, of the work, of the earth itself and their readiness for the spiritual descent and fulfilment. At every step of the journey, they are there attacking furiously, criticising, suggesting, imposing despondency or inciting to revolt, raising unbelief, amassing difficulties... But this opposition has been permitted from of old not merely as a test or ordeal, but as a compulsion on us to seek a greater strength, a more perfect self-knowledge, an intenser purity and force of aspiration, a faith that nothing can crush, a more powerful descent of the Divine Grace."* (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 1734)

(4) *"When their [the hostile forces'] presence in the world is no more of any use, they will disappear. Their action is used as a testing process, so that nothing may be forgotten, nothing left out in the work of transformation. They will allow no mistake. If you have overlooked in your own being even a single detail, they will come and put their touch upon that neglected spot and make it so painfully evident that you will be forced to change. When they will no longer be required for this process, their existence will become useless and they will vanish."* (The Mother, MCW, Vol. 3, p. 66)

(5) *"Attacks from adverse forces are inevitable: you have to take them as tests on your way and go courageously through the ordeal. The struggle may be hard, but when you come out of it you have gained something, you have advanced a step. There is even a necessity for the existence of*

the hostile forces. They make your determination stronger, your aspiration clearer.” (The Mother, Ibid., p. 34)

(6) *“When the world is ready to receive the new creation, the adverse forces will disappear. But so long as the world needs to be tempted, kneaded, churned in order to be prepared, the adverse forces will be there to be the temptation and that which strikes you, pushes you, prevents you from sleeping, compels you to be absolutely sincere.”* (The Mother, MCW, Vol.7,p.366)

Such is then the beneficial contribution made by the hostile forces in the life of sadhana of a sincere sadhaka. Of course, it is not that they voluntarily seek to do good to the sadhakas. If they did, they would not have been called adverse or hostile forces. But notwithstanding their evil intention, the fact remains that, through divine dispensation, their action, apparently negative and deleterious, becomes conducive to the progress of the sadhaka if he knows how to take advantage of these attacks.

But how do these hostile forces attack? What are their modes of action? And how to distinguish between the mechanical action of an ordinary weakness of nature and the intentional action of an adverse force?

For the fact remains that normal human defects are one thing; they are only the working of the lower nature of the Ignorance. But the action of the hostile forces is a special intervention coming from the supraphysical realms and creating in the sadhaka violent inner conflicts, abnormal depressions, very negative thoughts and impulses, and various dark suggestions, e.g. abandoning the sadhana, revolt against the Divine, anxiety about possible calamities and catastrophes apparently irresistible, and so on.

There are natural movements of the ordinary human nature which take time to get rid of. These we normally call forces of the ‘lower nature’ but these should not be confused with the adverse forces; they are only ordinary movements and not hostile. They have of course to be changed but that can be done quietly over a period of time. But the hostiles are a different proposition. They are different in nature, different in their mode of action and different in their consequences if not properly handled in time. The following long excerpt from Sri Aurobindo is most revealing in this connection. Every sadhaka has to read it carefully and bear in mind all the points made:

“The normal resistance of the lower Nature in human beings and the action of the Hostiles are two quite different things. The former is natural and occurs in everybody; the latter is an intervention from the non-human world.

“But this intervention can come in two forms. (1) They use and press on the lower Nature forces making them resist where they would otherwise be quiescent, making the resistance strong or violent where it would be otherwise slight or moderate, exaggerating its violence when it is violent. There is besides a malignant cleverness, a conscious plan and combination when the Hostiles act on these forces which is not evident in the normal resistance of the forces.

“(2) They sometimes invade with their own forces. When this happens there is often a temporary possession or at least an irresistible influence which makes the thoughts, feelings, actions of the person abnormal — a black clouding of the brain, a whirl in the vital, all acts as if the person could not help himself and were drawn by an overmastering force.

“On the other hand instead of a possession there may be only a strong Influence; then the symptoms are less marked, but it is easy for anyone acquainted with the ways of these forces to see what has happened.

“Finally it may be only an attack, not possession or influence; the person then is separate, is not overcome, resists.” (Letter s on Yoga, Cent. Ed., pp. 1731-32. Paragraphing ours.)

Sri Aurobindo assures us that there are some sadhakas who are never attacked or even touched by the hostile forces. They can follow the sunlit path with the aid of the higher Light and Power. All of us should seek to emulate their example. But for that to happen we have to develop a number of spiritual qualities in our character and adopt a certain healthy attitude towards these adverse forces.

The qualities needed are, of course, (i) patience, (ii) persistence, (iii) purity, (iv) faith, (v) love and devotion for the Divine, (vi) calm and equality, (vii) self-confidence and resolution of will, (viii) vigilance and power of discrimination, (ix) steadiness of aspiration, (x) sincerity, (xi) constant invocation of the grace and protection of the Divine Mother, etc.

It is difficult for the ordinary sadhaka to acquire all these qualities in full in the early part of his spiritual career. So he cannot reasonably expect that he will never be troubled by any adverse forces or be the object of malice of the Hostile Beings. But if he is reasonably sincere and has faith and confidence in the Divine, he can surely reduce to a minimum the virulence of the suggestions of the dark forces and then attend to the eradication of his natural weaknesses as those of a machinery which have to be set right in a much more smooth fashion.

But for that the sadhaka has to develop an attitude behoving a sincere aspirant of the Path and follow certain standards of conduct vis-à-vis these forces of darkness. The following passages from the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother will surely help the sadhaka to choose the right guidelines for his action and reaction:

(1) *“You must not allow yourself to be disturbed. ...it is because they [the hostile forces] know that Peace is the basis and if that is there in full, all the rest will come. So they want anyhow to prevent it.”* (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, Cent. Ed., p. 1765)

(2) *“It is so that they [the hostile suggestions] must be regarded — without interest, with indifference. That removes the necessity for constant struggle which is itself a form of interest, and it is as discouraging and more to these suggestions.”* (Ibid., p. 1764)

(3) *“You ought to realise that these things are attacks which come on you... When it comes, you have to realise that it is an attack and refuse instead of accepting it... This state which tries to come upon you and seize is not part of your true self, but a foreign influence. To yield to it and to express it would therefore be not sincerity...”* (Ibid., pp. 1752, 1749)

(4) *“It is no use alleging that there are good reasons for their rising — even if all the alleged reasons were true, they would not justify your indulging them, for in a sadhaka nothing can justify that. There is no need to understand — for there is only one thing that is necessary to understand — that, reason or no reason,... [these] have no place in the spiritual life.”* (Ibid., p. 1752)

(5) “...to think too much of the hostile Powers is to bring in their atmosphere... The worst thing for sadhana is to get into a morbid condition, always thinking of ‘lower forces, attacks’.” (Ibid., p.1764)

(6) “Fear is the one thing that one must never feel in face of them, for it makes them bold and aggressive.

“Moreover, fear... calls the thing feared — it must therefore be thrown out altogether.” (Ibid., p. 1764)

(7) “By unnecessary ‘testing’ one dangerously invites this hostile pressure and raises up things which one has to banish. To be conscious is necessary, but quiet self-examination is sufficient for that — raising up difficulties under plan of testing is quite the wrong method.” (Ibid., p. 1747)

(8) “Whatever point the adverse forces choose for attack, however small it may seem to the external human mind, becomes a crucial point and to yield it up may be to yield to them one of the keys of the fortress. Even if it is a small postern door, it is enough for them if they can enter.” (Ibid., p. 1735)

(9) “If you look closely, you will see that when these Forces work now it is in a perfectly irrational instinctive way, repeating always the same movements without any intellectual or higher vital power behind them. Theirs is now an irrational mechanical method which obscures more in the lowest physical and subconscious than anything else. That means that their true justification for being there is gone.” (Ibid., p. 1744)

The existence and the adverse action of the hostile forces is an acknowledged fact of the occult dispensation of the world. These inimical forces and beings try to disturb the spiritual pursuit of the sadhakas. If through the Grace of the Divine or through some other propitious factors, a sadhaka can manage to escape on the whole the vicious attacks of these forces, it is undoubtedly well and good for him. But even if he is not so fortunate, he can surely do so much as to keep himself separate in his consciousness, not to be overcome by the hostile suggestions, and to resist them with all his good will. A sincere prayer to the Divine Mother accompanying this personal effort at resistance will do the rest. And the sadhaka will surely come out of his ordeal with a fresh ground of victory gained. In the case of this relatively more advanced stage of sadhana, when the sadhaka can habitually and at will create this separation and keep the hostile forces at bay, these latter will be reduced in their action to a state as described by Sri Aurobindo below:

“They [the hostile attacks on the outer being] are felt as suggestions, or a touch on the surface mind, vital, physical or as movements in the atmosphere (the personal or the general environmental consciousness) — but for the inner being it is like gusts or storms outside. If they penetrate by chance into the house, they are immediately ejected and the doors and windows banged on them — there is nothing that accepts them or tolerates them inside.” (Ibid., p. 1757)

We end this chapter with a passage from the Mother’s writings which indicates the way a sadhaka should proceed in order to always score a victory over the hostile forces:

“The only way to fail in your battle with the hostile forces is not to have a true confidence in the divine help. Sincerity in the aspiration always brings down the required succour. A quiet call, a

conviction that in this ascension towards the realisation you are never walking all alone and a faith that whenever help is needed it is there, will lead you through, easily and securely.”
(MCW, Vol.3, p. 34)

XXVI.

Is All That Happens In Life Always For The Best?

Some time or other, whenever a sadhaka has to face a totally unapprehended turn of calamitous events which he cannot prevent with his all too limited power and resources, he asks himself this puzzling question: “Is my life rigorously governed by some sort of determinism, by an ineluctable fate and an unalterable chain of causes and effects? Can’t I change the course of my life in any way? Am I bound hand and foot by my Karma, or pushed about by some arbitrary fiat of a despot, divine or undivine?”

Another related question intrigues the sadhaka at the same time: “All that happens in my life, has it any purpose or significance? Or is everything totally meaningless?”

The problem becomes still more puzzling, almost of the nature of a riddle, when we come across the following statement of the Mother: “*What has happened had to happen but something better could have happened.*” The ideas conveyed by the two separate clauses of this compound sentence, do they not contradict each other? If the assertion “All that has happened had to happen” is indeed true, how could there have been any possibility that “something better could have happened?” Does it then mean that both determinism and freedom of action are, in some mysterious way, operative at the same time in the life of a man? And if such is the case, how are the two factors reconciled?

As the questions are in appearance quite perplexing, let us try to seek the right answers by a step-by-step approach.

The very first proposition we have to start with — and this is a proposition that is based on the indubitable testimony of the highest and deepest spiritual experiences of the Yogis — is that “*We whirl not here upon a casual globe / Abandoned to a task beyond our force...*” (Sri Aurobindo’s *Savitri*, Book One Canto IV). There is a Divine Guidance shaping without exception every event of an individual’s life. Nothing is otiose and vain and “*all that happens in the progress of the soul has its meaning, its necessity, [and] its place*”. (Sri Aurobindo)

Whatever be the appearances to the contrary, even in the darkest moment of one’s life, the sadhaka should not entertain any doubt about the active Presence of the Divine near him and His ceaseless Guidance carrying him ever forward on the Path:

*“Even through the tangled anarchy called Fate
And through the bitterness of death and fall
An outstretched Hand is felt upon our lives...
Whatever the appearance we must bear,
Whatever our strong ills and present fate,...
A mighty Guidance leads us still through all.”*

(Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, Book One, Canto IV)

The second proposition we have to take into consideration is as regards the purpose of this constant divine Guidance. We must bear in mind that this Guidance is least concerned with the fulfilment of the interests of the ego or with the satisfaction of the desires of the

physical-vital-mental self of man. *“Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine,... the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.”* (Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, Part Four, pp. 1627-28)

This last point is very important and the sadhaka should always keep this in focus. Otherwise, in the normal course of the circumstances of his life, whenever his egoistic expectations will stand frustrated, he will lose faith in the reality of the Guidance and come to believe that his life's vicissitudes are after all made up of a series of random accidents.

The sadhaka must believe with all his heart that the divine Guidance is always there and has been leading him to the Divine through the progressive growth of his consciousness. All the circumstances of his life tend, without his knowing it, towards the development of his being and consciousness, not only what seem good, fortunate or successful but also the struggles, failures, difficulties and upheavals. (Ibid., p. 1628. Adapted.)

The third proposition is as regards the pre-determined Goal of this divine Guidance. For, surely a Goal there is and every individual soul, whoever he may be and at whatever stage of development he may actually be, is being certainly led to the one common final destination: Union with the Divine and its accompanying attainments, such as, divine Light, Love, Life, Peace, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Power, Bliss, Harmony, etc. As Sri Aurobindo has affirmed in his Epic poem, *Savitri*:

*“In its unshaken grasp it keeps for us safe
The one inevitable supreme result
No will can take away and no doom change,
The crown of conscious Immortality...
After we have served this great divided world
God's bliss and oneness are our inborn right.”*

(Book One Canto IV)

Now comes the fourth proposition which deals with the nature of the way to the final fulfilment. Will everybody follow the same track and undergo the same series of experiences, both positive and negative, on the path of spiritual adventure? The answer is: No, not at all. The Goal remaining the same for all, there may be a thousand and one ways to reach the destination. And therein lies a great truth of spiritual life which reconciles the two apparently opposite principles of determinism and freedom. Sri Aurobindo has explained the situation in this way:

“...with each person the guidance works differently, according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of further experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course: they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all, the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness.” (Letters on Yoga, Part Four, p. 1628)

We now come to the fifth proposition. Given the totality of the factors, both objective and subjective, which are operative in a sadhaka's life and consciousness at a given moment of his

spiritual journey, the divine Guidance, through the exercise of a prescient supreme Wisdom, chooses the shortest path to the Ultimate Goal and arranges events in the sadhaka's life, in a way conducive to the following of this optimum pathway.

And, therefore, this one cannot but be the best possible disposition, given the prevailing circumstances. Yes, the best possible disposition even if it takes at times the Opposite appearance of ignorance, darkness, pain and suffering, obloquy and illness, and finally unexpected death.

Thus is vindicated the truth of the statement that whatever has happened in one's life had to happen as the best possible course in terms of all the various factors prevailing at that moment. And as this has been decided upon by the all-seeing supreme Wisdom, it cannot but be that this has had to happen.

This is so far as the present event is concerned but what about the future? Therein lies another significant facet of spiritual truth. And this leads us to our sixth and last proposition which allows the sadhaka a certain margin of freedom of choice.

For, the outer objective factors remaining the same, if the sadhaka can somehow change his subjective disposition, a new resultant of the assembly of factors will be created and the divine Wisdom, taking cognisance of this altered situation, will decide upon a new shortest path to the final Goal.

Now a few of the possible subjective factors by whose judicious handling the 'resultant' can be altered to one's advantage are: (i) sincerity; (ii) right attitude; (iii) aspiration; (iv) ardent willpower; (v) heartfelt prayer; (vi) self-surrender to the Divine; (vii) an unshakable faith and confidence in the Divine Shakti.

Any of these factors rightly introduced will modify the rigour of the law of determinism, alter the course of fate, and help the sadhaka to move towards his final Goal along a more sunlit path.

Thus is validated the truth of the second half of the Mother's pithy statement: "Something better could have happened."

So the ideal attitude for the sadhaka of the Integral Yoga should always be a double one:

Once something has happened in his life, even though at times unpleasant in nature, he should accept it with equanimity and consider it to be the best possible arrangement for his advancement to the spiritual Goal — given, of course, the totality of the prevailing factors.

Thus what has happened had not only to happen but is surely for the best. But the sadhaka should not for that matter miss the point that this is only a relative best, relative to his psychological make-up at the moment. This relative best can always be turned into a better relative best by properly acting on the seven factors mentioned above.

And thus is solved the riddle of the co-existence of a rigorous fate and the moderating power of a luminously acting freedom of choice.

Let us close this chapter with a significant passage from Sri Aurobindo's *Savitri*:

*“The will of the Timeless working out in Time
In the free absolute steps of cosmic Truth
Appears a hard machine or meaningless Fate ...
But the Spirit’s consent is needed for each act
And freedom walks in the same pace with Law.”*

(Book Six Canto II)