Chapter One

The Central Processes of the Sadhana

Four Necessary Processes

As regards X’s question — this is not a Yoga of Bhakti alone; it is or at least it claims to be an integral Yoga, that is, a turning of all the being in all its parts to the Divine. It follows that there must be knowledge and works as well as Bhakti and, in addition, it includes a total change of the nature, a seeking for perfection, so that the nature also may become one with the nature of the Divine. It is not only the heart that has to turn to the Divine and change, but the mind also — so knowledge is necessary, and the will and power of action and creation also — so works too are necessary. In this Yoga the methods of other Yogas are taken up — like this of Purusha-Prakriti, but with a difference in the final object. Purusha separates from Prakriti, not in order to abandon her, but in order to know himself and her and to be no longer her plaything, but the knower, lord and upholder of the nature; but having become so or even in becoming so, one offers all that to the Divine. One may begin with knowledge or with works or with Bhakti or with Tapasya of self-purification for perfection (change of nature) and develop the rest as a subsequent movement or one may combine all in one movement. There is no single rule for all, it depends on the personality and the nature. Surrender is the main power of the Yoga, but the surrender is bound to be progressive; a complete surrender is not possible in the beginning, but only a will in the being for that completeness, — in fact it takes time; yet it is only when the surrender is complete that the full flood of the sadhana is possible. Till then there must be the personal effort with an increasing reality of surrender. One calls in the power of the Divine Shakti and once that begins to come into the being, it at
first supports the personal endeavour, then progressively takes up the whole action, although the consent of the sadhak continues to be always necessary. As the Force works, it brings in the different processes that are necessary for the sadhak, processes of knowledge, of Bhakti, of spiritualised action, of transformation of the nature. The idea that they cannot be combined is an error.

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The object of the sadhana is opening of the consciousness to the Divine and the change of the nature. Meditation or contemplation is one means to this but only one means; bhakti is another; work is another. Chittashuddhi was practise(d) by the Yogis as a first means towards realisation and they got by it the saintliness of the saint and the quietude of the sage. But the transformation of the nature of which we speak is something more than that, and this transformation does not come by contemplation alone; works are necessary, Yoga in action is indispensable.

The Need for Plasticity

One must not treat human nature like a machine to be handled according to rigid mental rules — a great plasticity is needed in dealing with its complex motives.  

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Fundamentally the nature in all is the same and the methods of sadhana have the same principle — but the differences in detail and arrangement are very great.  

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You forget that men differ in nature and therefore each will approach the sadhana in his own way — one through work, one through bhakti, one through meditation and knowledge — and those who are capable of it through all together. You are perfectly justified in following your own way, whatever may be the theories of others — but let them follow theirs. In the end all can converge together towards the same goal.
Work, Meditation and Bhakti

There is no opposition between work and sadhana. Work itself done in the right spirit is sadhana. Meditation is not the only means of sadhana. Work is one means; love and worship and surrender are another.

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It [the value of work in sadhana] depends more on the intensity of the spirit put into it than on the intensity of the work itself. As for the line on which most stress is laid, it depends on the nature. There are some people who are not cut out for meditation and it is only by work that they can prepare themselves; there are also those who are the opposite. As for the enormous development of egoism, that can come whatever one follows. I have seen it blossom in the dhyāni as well as in the worker; Krishnaprem says it does so in the bhakta. So it is evident that all soils are favourable to this Narcissus flower. As for “no need of sadhana”, obviously one who does not do any sadhana cannot change or progress. Work, meditation, bhakti, all must be done as sadhana.

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I have always said that work done as sadhana — done, that is to say, as an outflow of energy from the Divine offered to the Divine or work done for the sake of the Divine or work done in a spirit of devotion — is a powerful means of sadhana and that such work is especially necessary in this Yoga. Work, bhakti and meditation are three supports of Yoga. One can do with all three, or two or one. There are people who can’t meditate in the set way that one calls meditation, but they progress through work or through bhakti or through the two together. By work and bhakti one can develop a consciousness in which eventually a natural meditation and realisation become possible.

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The growth out of the ordinary mind into the spiritual consciousness can be effected either by meditation, dedicated work
or bhakti for the Divine. In our Yoga, which seeks not only a static peace or absorption but a dynamic spiritual action, work is indispensable. As for the Supramental Truth, that is a different matter; it depends only on the descent of the Divine and the action of the Supreme Force and is not bound by any method or rule.

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There are very few among the sadhaks here who at all concern themselves with the supermind or know anything about it except as something which the Mother and I will bring down some day and establish here. Most are seeking realisation through meditation, through love and worship or through activity and work. Meditation and silence are not necessary for everyone; there are some, even among those spoken of by you and others as the most advanced sadhaks, who do their sadhana not through meditation, for which they have no turn, but through activity, work or creation supported or founded on love and bhakti. It is not the credo but the person who matters. We impose no credo; it is sufficient if there is an established and heart-felt relation between ourselves and the disciple.

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I was quite in earnest in speaking of the progress you had made by the psychic movement and the endeavour to detect and remove the ego. I had already written to you strongly approving of that way. It is in our Yoga the way to devotion and surrender — for it is the psychic movement that brings the constant and pure devotion and the removal of ego that makes it possible to surrender. The two things indeed go together.

The other way, which is the way to knowledge, is the meditation in the head by which there comes the opening above, the quietude or silence of the mind and the descent of peace etc. of the higher consciousness generally till it envelops the being and fills the body and begins to take up all the movements. But this involves a passage through silence, a certainemptiness of the ordinary activities — they being pushed out and done as a
purely superficial action — and you strongly dislike silence and emptiness.

The third way which is one of the two ways towards Yoga by works is the separation of the Purusha from the Prakriti, the inner silent being from the outer active one, so that one has two consciousnesses or a double consciousness, one behind watching and observing and finally controlling and changing the other which is active in front. But this also means living in an inner peace and silence and dealing with the activities as if they were a thing of the surface. (The other way of beginning the Yoga of works is by doing them for the Divine, for the Mother, and not for oneself, consecrating and dedicating them till one concretely feels the Divine Force taking up the activities and doing them for one.)

If there is any secret or key of my Yoga which you say you have not found, it lies in these methods — and, in reality, there is nothing so mysterious, impossible or even new about them in themselves. It is only the farther development at a later stage and the aim of the Yoga that are new. But that one need not concern oneself with in the earlier stages unless one wishes to do so as a matter of mental knowledge.

* Poetry by itself does not bring to the goal, but it can help as a means to express and deepen one's aspiration while it gives the vital an activity which can keep it from rusting and maintains its energy. Otherwise it may droop or go dry or sulk or non-cooperate. What will bring towards the goal is the growth of the psychic being, the increase in bhakti, psychic clarity of vision with regard to one's inner movements and the will to get rid of the vital ego, increase in pure self-giving. Meditation and the rest can bring only partial results or often no results until there has been a sufficient psychic preparation. Even with those who begin with a flood of experiences because of some mental or vital preparation in past lives whose results happen to be near the surface, these lead to nothing definite till the psychic preparation is made; they often have all their struggle
still to go through and some sink with their bag of experiences on their head and a magnified ego on their back. It was this psychic growth that suddenly began in you. Don’t let it stop; for through that lies your way. Once that is done, you can meditate and do everything else that may be needful.

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Meditation is one means of the approach to the Divine and a great way, but it cannot be called a short cut — for most it is a long and difficult though very high ascent. It can by no means be short unless it brings a descent and even then it is only a foundation that is quickly laid — afterwards meditation has to build laboriously a big superstructure on that foundation. It is very indispensable, but there is nothing of the short cut about it.

Karma is a much simpler road — provided one’s mind is not fixed on the karma to the exclusion of the Divine. The aim must be the Divine and the work can only be a means. The use of poetry etc. is to keep one in contact with one’s inner being and that helps to prepare for the direct contact with the inmost, but one must not stop with that, one must go on to the real thing. If one thinks of being a “literary man”, a poet, a painter as things worthwhile for their own sake, then it is no longer the Yogic spirit. That is why I have sometimes to say that our business is to be Yogis, not merely poets, painters etc.

Love, bhakti, surrender, the psychic opening are the only short cut to the Divine — or can be; for if the love and bhakti are too vital, then there is likely to be a seesaw between ecstatic expectation and viraha, abhimāna, despair, which will make it not a short cut but a long one, a zigzag, not a straight flight, a whirling round one’s own ego instead of a running towards the Divine.

Surrender and Self-Giving

I may stress one point, however, that there need not be only one way to realisation of the Divine. If one does not succeed or has not yet succeeded in reaching him, feeling him or seeing him
by the established process of meditation or by other processes like japa, yet one may have made progress towards it by the frequent welling up of bhakti in the heart or a constantly greater enlargement of it in the consciousness or by work for the Divine and dedication in service. You have certainly progressed in these two directions, increased in devotion and shown your capacity for service. You have also tried to get rid of obstacles in your vital nature and so effect a purification, not without success, in several difficult directions. The path of surrender is indeed difficult, but if one perseveres in it with sincerity, there is bound to be some success and a partial overcoming or diminution of the ego which may help greatly a farther advance upon the way. I can see no sufficient reason for the discouragement which so often overtakes you and sometimes makes you think that you are not cut out for the path; to indulge such a thought is always a mistake. A too ready proneness to discouragement and a consequent despondency is one of the weaknesses of your vital nature and to get rid of it would be a great help. One must learn to go forward on the path of Yoga, as the Gita insists, with a consciousness free from despondency — anirvinacetasā. Even if one slips, one must rectify the posture; even if one falls, one has to rise and go undiscouraged on the divine way. The attitude must be, “The Divine has promised himself to me if I cleave to him always; that I will never cease to do whatever may come.”

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It is altogether unprofitable to enquire who or what class will arrive first or last at the goal. The spiritual path is not a field of competition or a race that this should matter. What matters is one’s own aspiration for the Divine, one’s own faith, surrender, selfless self-giving. Others can be left to the Divine who will lead each according to his nature. Meditation, work, bhakti are each means of preparative help towards fulfilment; all are included in this path. If one can dedicate oneself through work, that is one of the most powerful means towards the self-giving which is itself the most powerful and indispensable element of the sadhana.

To cleave to the path means to follow it without leaving it
or turning aside. It is a path of self-offering of the whole being in all its parts, the offering of the thinking mind and the heart, the will and actions, the inner and the outer instruments so that one may arrive at the experience of the Divine, the Presence within, the psychic and spiritual change. The more one gives of oneself in all ways, the better for the sadhana. But all cannot do it to the same extent, with the same rapidity, in the same way. How others do it or fail to do it should not be one’s concern — how to do it faithfully oneself is the one thing important.

Aspiration and Will of Consecration

I have never put any ban on bhakti. Also I am not conscious of having banned meditation either at any time. I have stressed both bhakti and knowledge in my Yoga as well as works, even if I have not given any of them an exclusive importance like Shankara or Chaitanya.

The difficulty you feel or any sadhak feels about sadhana is not really a question of meditation versus bhakti versus works. It is a difficulty of the attitude to be taken, the approach or whatever you may like to call it.

If you can’t as yet remember the Divine all the time you are working, it does not greatly matter. To remember and dedicate at the beginning and give thanks at the end ought to be enough for the present. Or at the most to remember too when there is a pause. Your method seems to me rather painful and difficult, — you seem to be trying to remember and work with one and the same part of the mind. I don’t know if that is possible. When people remember all the time during work (it can be done), it is usually with the back of their minds or else there is created gradually a faculty of double thought or else a double consciousness — one in front that works, and one within that witnesses and remembers. There is also another way which was mine for a long time — a condition in which the work takes place automatically and without intervention of personal thought or mental action, while the consciousness remains silent in the Divine. The thing, however, does not come so much by trying as by a very
simple constant aspiration and will of consecration — or else by a movement of the consciousness separating the inner from the instrumental being. Aspiration and will of consecration calling down a greater Force to do the work is a method which brings great results, even if in some it takes a long time about it. That is a great secret of sadhana, to know how to get things done by the Power behind or above instead of doing all by the mind’s effort. I don’t mean to say that the mind’s effort is unnecessary or has no result — only if it tries to do everything by itself, that becomes a laborious effort for all except the spiritual athletes. Nor do I mean that the other method is the longed-for short cut; the result may, as I have said, take a long time. Patience and firm resolution are necessary in every method of sadhana.

Strength is all right for the strong — but aspiration and the Grace answering to it are not altogether myths; they are great realities of the spiritual life.

Sadhana, Tapasya, Aradhana, Dhyana

Sadhana is the practice of Yoga. Tapasya is the concentration of the will to get the results of sadhana and to conquer the lower nature. Aradhana is worship of the Divine, love, self-surrender, aspiration to the Divine, calling the name, prayer. Dhyana is inner concentration of the consciousness, meditation, going inside in Samadhi. Dhyana, tapasya and aradhana are all parts of sadhana.