Chapter One

The Value of Visions

Vision, Experience and Realisation

When you see Light, that is vision; when you feel Light entering into you, that is experience; when Light settles in you and brings illumination and knowledge, that is a realisation. But ordinarily visions are also called experiences.

Sometimes a vision accompanies an experience and is as it were a visual rendering of it or accompaniment to it, but the experience itself is a separate thing.

Vision is something seen in the conscious state (whether with closed or open eyes) which is not of the physical plane. In “conscious state” I include the consciousness of Samadhi when one is unaware of outward things but conscious of things going on within.

Experience is a wide term which covers almost everything that happens in the inner consciousness — usually it indicates either a spiritual happening, e.g. the descent of peace, the feeling of the presence of the Mother, or an occult experience, e.g. a going into the other worlds in dream and seeing and doing things there. There are thousands of different kinds of experience. Visions are a special kind of experience in which the inner eye is active.

Visions do not come from the spiritual plane — they come from the subtle physical, the vital, the mental, the psychic or from planes above the Mind. What comes from the spiritual planes are experiences of the Divine, e.g. the experience of self
everywhere, of the Divine in all etc.

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The Infinite is in all things and can be seen through them when the vision opens.

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By going deep [in meditation] one person may see visions; another may fall in deeper consciousness but see no vision — and so on. The result varies with the nature.

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Yes, it [the higher consciousness] can come down into the mind planes bringing peace, wideness, the cosmic consciousness, the realisation of the Divine, the sense of the cosmic forces and other things — without any breaking of the veil through vision. Ordinarily, however, with most people the inner vision comes first.

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I said [in the preceding letter] the realisation of the Divine in the mind. If there is to be the total realisation, the breaking of the veil is indispensable.

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Usually the visions precede realisation, in a way they prepare it.

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Visions and voices have their place when they are the genuine visions and the true voices. Naturally, they are not the realisation but only a step on the way and one has not to get shut up in them or take all as of value.

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The vision of the higher planes or the idea of what they are can be had long before the transformation. If that were not possible, how could the transformation take place — the lower
nature cannot change of itself, it changes by the growing vision, perception, descent of the higher consciousness belonging to the higher planes? It is through aspiration, through an increasing opening that these visions and perceptions begin to come — the realisation comes afterwards.

**Sensing Supraphysical Things**

No, it was neither optical illusion nor hallucination nor coincidence nor auto-suggestion nor any of the other ponderous and vacant polysyllables by which physical science tries to explain away or rather avoid explaining the scientifically inexplicable. In these matters the scientist is always doing what he is always blaming the layman for doing when the latter lays down the law on things about which he is profoundly ignorant, without investigation or experiment, without ascertained knowledge — simply by evolving a theory *or a priori* idea out of his own mind and plastering it as a label on the unexplained phenomena.

There is, as I have told you, a whole range or many inexhaustible ranges of sensory phenomena other than the outward physical which one can become conscious of, see, hear, feel, smell, touch, mentally contact — to use the new established Americanism — either in trance or sleep or an inward state mis-called sleep or simply and easily in the waking state. This faculty of sensing supraphysical things internally or externalising them, so to speak, so that they become visible, audible, sensible to the outward eye, ear, even touch, just as are gross physical objects, this power or gift is not a freak or an abnormality; it is a universal faculty present in all human beings, but latent in most, in some rarely or intermittently active, occurring as if by accident in others, frequent or normally active in a few. But just as anyone can with some training learn science and do things which would have seemed miracles to his forefathers, so almost anyone, if he wants, can with a little concentration and training develop the faculty of supraphysical vision. When one starts Yoga, this power is often though not invariably — for some find it difficult — one of the first to come out from its latent condition and
manifest itself, most often without any effort, intention or previous knowledge on the part of the sadhak. It comes more easily with the eyes shut than with the eyes open, but it does come in both ways. The first sign of its opening in the externalised way is very often that seeing of “sparkles” or small luminous dots, shapes etc. which was your first introduction to the matter; a second is, often enough, the seeing of circles of light or colour round objects, most easily round luminous objects like a star; seeing of colours is a third initial experience — but they do not always come in that order. The Yogis in India very often in order to develop the power use the method of trāṭak, concentrating the vision on a single point or object — preferably a luminous object. Your looking at the star was precisely an exercise in trāṭak and had the effect which any Yogi in India would have told you is normal. For all this is not fancy or delusion; it is part of an occult science which has been practised throughout the historic and prehistoric ages in all countries and it has always been known to be not merely auto-suggestive or hallucinatory in its results, but, if one can get the key, veridical and verifiable. Your first scepticism may be natural in a “modern” man plunging into these lasting things of the past, present and future, — natural but not justifiable because very obviously inadequate to the facts observed; but once you have seen, the first thing you should do is to throw all this vapid pseudo-science behind you, this vain attempt to stick physical explanations on supraphysical things, and take the only rational course. Develop the power, get more and more experience — develop the consciousness by which these things come: as the consciousness develops, you will begin to understand and get the intuition of the significances. Or if you want their science too, then learn and apply the occult science which can alone deal with supraphysical phenomena. As for what showed itself to you, it was not mere curious phenomena, not even merely symbolic colours, but things that have a considerable importance.

Develop this power of inner sense and all that it brings you. These first seeings are only an outer fringe — behind lie whole worlds of experience which fill what seems to the material
man the gap (your Russell’s inner void) between the earth-consciousness and the Eternal and Infinite.

The Importance of Visions

All visions have a significance of one kind or another. This power of vision is very important for the Yoga and should not be rejected although it is not the most important thing — for the most important thing is the change of the consciousness. All other powers like this of vision should be developed without attachment as parts and aids of the Yoga.

* The particular things seen may be of no importance, but the power of seeing is of importance and can be of great help in the Yoga. It enables you to see things belonging to other planes (other than the physical) and get knowledge that is useful for sadhana — also to have concrete contact with the Mother in those planes (mental, vital, psychic worlds) etc.

* Visions come from all planes and are of all kinds and different values. Some are of very great value and importance, others are a play of the mind or vital and are good only for their own special purpose, others are formations of the mind and vital plane, some of which may have truth, while others are false and misleading, or they may be a sort of artistry of that plane. They can have considerable importance in the development of the first Yogic consciousness, that of the inner mind, inner vital, inner physical or for an occult understanding of the universe. Visions which are real can help the spiritual progress, I mean, those which show us inner realities: one can for instance meet Krishna, speak with him and hear his voice in an inner “real” vision, quite as real as anything on the outer plane. Merely seeing his image is not the same thing, any more than seeing his picture on the wall is the same thing as meeting him in person. But the picture on the wall need not be useless for the spiritual life. All one can say is that
one must not attach oneself too much to this gift and what it shows us, but neither is it necessary to belittle it. It has its value and sometimes a considerable spiritual utility. But, naturally, it is not supreme, — the supreme thing is the realisation, the contact, the union with the Divine, bhakti, change of the nature etc.

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Visions and experiences (especially experiences) are all right; but you cannot expect every vision to translate itself in a corresponding physical fact. Some do, the majority don’t, others belong to the supraphysical entirely and indicate realities, possibilities or tendencies that have their seat there. How far these will influence the life or realise themselves in it or whether they will do so at all depends upon the nature of the vision, the power in it, sometimes on the will or formative power of the seer.

People value visions for one thing because they are one key (there are others) to contact with the other worlds or with the inner worlds and all that is there and these are regions of immense riches which far surpass the physical plane as it is at present. One enters into a larger freer self and a larger more plastic world; of course individual visions only give a contact, not an actual entrance, but the power of vision accompanied with the power of the other subtle senses (hearing, touch, etc.) as it expands does give this entrance. These things have not the effect of a mere imagination (as a poet’s or artist’s, though that can be strong enough) but if fully followed out bring a constant growth of the being and the consciousness and its richness of experience and its scope.

People also value the power of vision for a greater reason than that: it can give a first contact with the Divine in his forms and powers; it can be the opening of a communion with the Divine, of the hearing of the Voice that guides, of the Presence as well as the Image in the heart, of many other things that bring what man seeks through religion or Yoga.

Farther, vision is of value because it is often a first key to inner planes of one’s own being and one’s own consciousness as distinguished from worlds or planes of the cosmic consciousness.
Yoga experience often begins with some opening of the third eye in the forehead (the centre of vision in the brows) or with some kind of beginning and extension of subtle seeing which may seem unimportant at first, but is the vestibule to deeper experience. Even when it is not that, — for one can go to experience direct, — it can come in afterwards as a powerful aid to experience; it can be full of indications which help to self-knowledge or knowledge of things or knowledge of people; it can be veridical and lead to prevision, premonition and other openings of less importance but very useful to a Yogi.

In short, vision is a great instrument though not absolutely indispensable.

But, as I have suggested, there are visions and visions just as there are dreams and dreams, and one has to develop discrimination and a sense of values and kinds and know how to understand and make use of these powers. But that is too big and intricate a matter to be pursued now.

The visions he has between the eyebrows are not imaginations — they could be so only if he thought them first and his thoughts took shape, but as they came independent of his thoughts, they are not visual imagination but vision. This faculty is a useful one in Yoga and it can be allowed to develop; it should not be discouraged. I do not know what he means by not having śraddhā in them. What he sees now are probably only images of subtle (śūkṣma) scenes and objects; but, when developed, this can become a power of symbolic, representative or real vision, showing the truths of things or realities of this or other worlds or representations of the past, present or future.

If the concentration goes naturally to the centre between the eyebrows which is the centre of inner mind and its thought, will and vision, there is no harm in that.

These lights and visions are not hallucinations. They indicate an opening of the inner vision whose centre is in the forehead.
between the eyebrows. Lights are very often the first thing seen. Lights indicate the action or movement of subtle forces belonging to the different planes of being, — the nature of the force depending on the colour and shade of the light. The sun is the symbol and power of the inner or higher Truth — to see it in meditation is a good sign. The sea is also often symbolic, indicating usually the vital nature, sometimes the expanse of consciousness in movement. The opening of vision must be allowed to develop, but too much importance need not be given to the individual visions unless or until they become evidently symbolic or significant or shed light on things in the sadhana etc.

* What was developed in you is a power of true inner vision — this will help you to enter through it into touch with the Divine; you have only to let it develop. Two other things have to develop — the feeling of the Divine Presence and power and inspiration behind your actions, and the inner contact with myself and the Mother. Aspire with faith and sincerity and these will come. I do not wish to give any more precise instructions until I see what happens in you during your stay here; for although the path is common to all, each man has his own way of following it.

* The frequent seeing of lights such as those he writes of in his letter is usually a sign that the seer is not limited by his outward surface or waking consciousness but has a latent capacity (which can be perfected by training and practice) for entering into the experiences of the inner consciousness of which most people are unaware but which opens by the practice of Yoga. By this opening one becomes aware of subtle planes of experience and worlds of existence other than the material. For the spiritual life a still farther opening is required into an inmost consciousness by which one becomes aware of the Self and Spirit, the Eternal and the Divine.
From what he writes it is apparent that he has a capacity [for Yoga], and it is probable that he would have made more progress if he had not shut the door that was opening. Evidently, he made a mistake when he stopped the visions that were coming. Vision and hallucination are not the same thing. The inner vision is an open door on higher planes of consciousness beyond the physical mind which gives room for a wider truth and experience to enter and act upon the mind. It is not the only or the most important door, but it is one which comes readiest to very many if not most and can be a very powerful help. It does not come easily to intellectuals as it does to men with a strong life-power or the emotional and the imaginative. It is true that the field of vision, like every other field of activity of the human mind, is a mixed world and there is in it not only truth but much half-truth and error. It is also true that for the rash and unwary to enter into it may bring confusion and misleading inspirations and false voices, and it is safer to have some sure guidance from those who know and have spiritual and psychic experience. One must look at this field calmly and with discrimination, but to shut the gates and reject this or other supraphysical experiences is to limit oneself and arrest the inner development.

* Visions and voices are not meant for creating faith; they are effective only if one has faith already.

**Visions Not the Most Important Thing**

Visions are not indispensable — they are a help, that is all, when they are of the right kind.

* Anybody with a predisposition can develop the power of seeing visions like that. People are mistaken in thinking it is a sign of great Yogashakti. Apposite and effective visions, those that reveal movements in the occult workings of the nature or help the spiritual growth, are another matter.
Well, it is difficult to explain [what kind of visions help one’s spiritual growth]. I might give the example of St. Paul’s vision on the way to Damascus as an example of a vision which really meant business. You have yourself given the Kurukshetra example. But all visions need not be so stupendous as that — small ones can also be useful.

But the predisposition I spoke of was for visionary display, not for spiritual growth. There are people who can see visions by the hundred and there are those who cannot. But it does not follow that the non-visionary cannot have decisive spiritual experiences or the realisation.

* The kind of vision you want comes only if the general visual power opens and develops. It is not the greatest form of experience; many advance very far and have high experiences and change of consciousness without it. The important thing is to feel the Presence of the Mother with one and in one, her Light, her Power working, her Ananda. The form can be there, if the vision develops, but only as one element of the experience.

* I did not quite understand from your letter what is the nature of these sights and objects that pass like a cinema film before you. If they are things seen by the inner vision, then there is no need to drive them away — one has only to let them pass. When one does sadhana an inner mind which is within us awakes and sees by an inner vision images of all things in this world and other worlds — this power of vision has its use, though one has not to be attached to it; one can let them pass with a quiet mind, neither fixing on them nor driving them away.

* This kind of vision [seeing water, a rose, a tiger] almost anybody can have except those who live too much in the mind. For others it is very near to the surface, this faculty of vision. Many have it in this elementary way without doing any Yoga at all.
The power of occult seeing is there in everyone, mostly latent, often near the surface, sometimes but much more rarely already on the surface. If one practises trāṭak, it is pretty certain to come out sooner or later, — though some have a difficulty and with them it takes time; those in whom it comes out at once have had all the time this power of occult vision near the surface and it emerges at the first direct pressure.

No Reason to Fear Visions

Such visions [of human figures] often happen when the inner sight is open. These were evidently two powers of the supra-physical world. One has to see quietly whatever comes of this kind — there is no reason to fear them, any more than if you saw a picture or moving figures in the cinema.

Wrong Visions and Voices

When the sadhana progresses, one almost always gets the power of vision; what one sees is true if one remains in the right consciousness. There are also wrong voices and experiences. The people who have gone mad, went mad because they were egoistic, began to think themselves great sadhaks and attach an exaggerated importance to themselves and their experiences; this made them get a wrong consciousness and wrong voices and visions and inspirations. They attached so much importance to them that they refused to listen to the Mother and finally became hostile to her because she told them they were in error and checked their delusions. Your visions and experiences are very true and good and I have explained to you what they signify — the wrong ones tried to come but you threw them away, because you are not attached to them and are fixed on the true aim of sadhana. One must not get attached to these things, but observe them simply and go on; then they become a help and cannot be a danger.