

Chapter One

Variations in the Intensity of Experience

The Up and Down Movement in Yoga

The up and down movement which you speak of is common to all ways of Yoga. It is there in the path of bhakti, but there are equally alternations of states of light and states of darkness, sometimes sheer and prolonged darkness, when one follows the path of knowledge. Those who have occult experiences come to periods when all experiences cease and even seem finished for ever. Even when there have been many and permanent realisations, these seem to go behind the veil and leave nothing in front except a dull blank, filled, if at all, only with recurrent attacks and difficulties. These alternations are the result of the nature of human consciousness and are not a proof of unfitness or of predestined failure. One has to be prepared for them and pass through. They are the “day and night” of the Vedic mystics.

As for surrender, everyone has his own first way of approach towards it; but if it is due to fear, “form” or sense of duty, then certainly that is not surrender at all; these things have nothing to do with surrender. Also, complete and total surrender is not so easy as some seem to imagine. There are always many and large reservations; even if one is not conscious of them, they are there. Complete surrender can best come by a complete love and bhakti. Bhakti on the other hand can begin without surrender, but it naturally leads, as it forms itself, to surrender.

You are surely mistaken in thinking that the difficulty of giving up intellectual convictions is a special stumbling-block in you more than in others. The attachment to one’s own ideas and convictions, the insistence on them is a common characteristic and here it seems to manifest itself with an especial vehemence. It can be removed by a light of knowledge from above which

gives one the direct touch of Truth or the luminous experience of it and takes away all value from mere intellectual opinion, ideas or conviction and removes the necessity for it, or by a right consciousness which brings with it right ideas, right feeling, right action and right everything else. Or else it must come by a spiritual and mental humility which is rare in human nature — especially the mental, for the mind is always apt to think its own ideas, true or false, are the right ideas. Eventually it is the psychic growth that makes this surrender too possible and that again comes most easily by bhakti. In any case, the existence of this difficulty is not in itself a good cause for forecasting failure in Yoga.

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The rhythm of up and down is fairly general — it is only a few who keep an even course and even these have slight though comparatively rare drops of the consciousness. But the times vary — although it is true that it comes upon a few at the same time, and occasionally there is a massed general attack and shaking. It seems difficult as yet to eliminate these vicissitudes of the sadhana.

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Everything once gained is there and can be regained. Yoga is not a thing that goes by one decisive rush one way or the other — it is a building up of a new consciousness and is full of ups and downs. But if one keeps to it the ups have a habit of resulting by accumulation in a decisive change — therefore the one thing to do is to keep at it. After a fall don't wail and say, "I'm done for," but get up, dust yourself and proceed farther on the right path.

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After one has got to a certain stage the things gained are never lost — they may be covered over but they return — they have only gone inside and come back to the surface.

Alternations, Oscillations, Fluctuations of Consciousness

It is always like that — some days of experience, some days of no experience (or only experience of peace and quietude) alternating. It is only later on that the consciousness becomes capable of continuous experience and even then there are alternations of the level.

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The reason why there are these alternations of which you complain is that the nature of the consciousness is like that; after a little spell of wakefulness it feels the need of a little sleep. Very often in the beginning the wakings are brief, the sleeps long; afterwards it becomes more equal and later on the sleep periods are shorter and shorter. Another cause of these alternations, when one is receiving, is the nature's need of closing up to assimilate. It can take perhaps a great deal, but while the experience is going on it cannot absorb properly what it brings, so it closes down for assimilation. A third cause comes in in the period of transformation, — one part of the nature changes and one feels for a time as if there had been a complete and permanent change. But one is disappointed to find it cease and a period of barrenness or lowered consciousness follows. This is because another part of the consciousness comes up for change and a period of preparation and veiled working follows which seems to be one of unenlightenment or worse. These things alarm, disappoint or perplex the eagerness and impatience of the sadhak; but if one takes them quietly and knows how to use them or adopt the right attitude, one can make these unenlightened periods also a part of the conscious sadhana. So the Vedic Rishis speak of the alternation of "Day and Night both suckling the divine Child".

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Everyone has these alternations because the total consciousness is not able to remain always in the above experience [*of the higher force working powerfully*]. The point is that in the intervals there should be quietude, at least in the inner being, no

restlessness, dissatisfaction or struggle. If that point is attained, then the sadhana can go on smoothly — not that there will be no difficulties, but there will be no disquietude or dissatisfaction etc. etc.

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The impermanence of the better condition is a fairly general phenomenon. There is an oscillation always, a coming and going till the change that is trying to take place is strong enough to fix itself. This is due to two reasons, first the inability of the vital and physical to give up their old movements at once and accommodate themselves to the new and secondly to the habit of things hiding in the nature somewhere under the pressure from above and turning up as soon as they get an opportunity.

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These slight oscillations always happen until everything is open. They are due to one of two causes, — either

(1) Some small part or movement of the being comes up which is not quite open and needs to have the Influence brought into it, or

(2) A shadow is thrown by the outside force, bringing back, not the old disturbance, but some temporary obscuration or appearance of obscuration.

Do not be disturbed, but immediately become quite quiet and open yourself.

The important thing is not to allow the old strong disturbance and confusion to come back and, secondly, not to allow a long obscuration, even if the obscuration be without a serious disturbance. To keep hold on quiet persistently will prevent the serious disturbance; to keep quiet and steadily open yourself will prevent any long obscuration.

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These oscillations [*of consciousness*] always come. The universal lower Nature tries to come back and resume its hold — the lower vital or the physical consciousness responds, not always because

it wants or likes to do so but because the old habit of response is still so strong that it cannot help it.

The first necessity is to detach yourself, not to regard it as your own, to learn to feel it as something foreign and refuse to be touched or upset. Then it will become easier for the lower vital or physical itself to reject and refuse to admit it.

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These fluctuations in the force of the aspiration and the power of the sadhana are unavoidable and common to all sadhaks until the whole being has been made ready for the transformation. When the psychic is in front or active and the mind and vital consent, then there is the intensity. When the psychic is less prominent and the lower vital has its ordinary movements or the mind its ignorant action, then the opposing forces can come in unless the sadhak is very vigilant. Inertia comes usually from the ordinary physical consciousness, especially when the vital is not actively supporting the sadhana. These things can only be cured by a persistent bringing down of the higher spiritual consciousness into all the parts of the being.

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These fluctuations always take place. By insistence and practice it becomes finally possible to keep the aspiration and the open consciousness above continuously, but even then periods of active progress and periods of assimilation alternate.

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Fluctuations of this kind cannot but come and when they come, one has to remain very quiet and detach oneself from the surface condition and wait for it to pass while calling the Mother's Force. A neutral condition of this kind serves a certain purpose in the economy of the purification and change—it brings up things that have to be transformed or rejected, lifts up some part of the being in order to expose it to the transforming force. If one can understand, remain quiet and detached from the surface movements, not identified, then it goes sooner, the Force can

quickly clear out what rises and afterwards it is found that something has been gained and a progress made.

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Yes, indeed, to keep the fixed consciousness of the soul, even when there are fluctuations in the outer nature, is a great victory. If one can do that, it means that the capacity to arrive is there fixed in the being and only the firm will is needed for the entire certitude.

Fluctuations in the Working of the Force

There are no fixed rules [*about fluctuations in the working of the Force*]. There are simply a mass of tendencies and forces with which one has to become familiar. It is not a fixed machinery which one can manage by devices or by pulling this or that button. It is only by the inner Will, the constant aspiration, by detachment and rejection, by bringing down the true consciousness, force etc. that it can be done.

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I can only say as before, that there is no specific reason [*for fluctuations in the working of the Force*] which the mind can determine. It depends on the total condition and interaction of the forces. One has to hold on to the aspiration and look steadily towards the goal without being disturbed by these inequalities and fluctuations.

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I don't know.¹ Times and seasons vary according to the poise and flux and reflux of the forces in the consciousness. It is not a thing to which you can affix a rationalised and systematised explanation. One can feel it and understand in the essence of the consciousness, but not formulate precise cause and effect.

¹ *The correspondent asked why he felt an emptiness in the morning, a suspension of sadhana. — Ed.*

Lulls, Pauses, Interim Periods

There are always lulls of this kind. One must not get upset — otherwise they are prolonged and disturbances come in. One must remain quiet, aspire steadily but without vehemence or, if one presses for a change, then too with a quiet steady pressure.

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There are always periods when all one can do is to remain quiet and aspire. A continuous activity of the light and power is only possible when the whole being has been prepared and the psychic is constantly in front.

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Everyone has periods when the consciousness is covered up. One has to go on in spite of that, and if you persist in aspiration and keep turned to the Mother, then these periods will diminish and the consciousness more and more open to her.

At such periods instead of allowing these things to hold you, you should separate yourself from them and regard them as something foreign which you have to reject.

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There are always long periods of this kind at the beginning when the first openings of experience are covered up by the restless mind and vital; but with perseverance they diminish — the experience always returns and takes up more and more of the consciousness till it becomes its normal state.

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There are always pauses of preparation and assimilation between two movements. You must not regard these with fretfulness or impatience as if they were untoward gaps in the sadhana. Besides, the Force rises up lifting part of the nature on a higher level and then comes down to a lower layer to raise it; this motion of ascent and descent is often extremely trying because the mind partial to an ascent in a straight line and the vital eager

for rapid fulfilment cannot understand or follow this intricate movement and are apt to be distressed by it or resent it. But the transformation of the whole nature is not an easy thing to accomplish and the Force that does it knows better than our mental ignorance or our vital impatience.

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There is nothing wrong in having intervals of passive peace without anything happening — they come naturally in the sadhana as a basis for fresh action when the nature is ready for it. It is only the vital attitude that turns it into a disharmony, because somewhere in its being there is not the assent to or participation in the peace and passivity. To be able often to rest, repose in all the being outspread in the silent Brahman is an indispensable thing for the Yogi. But the vital wants always fuss, action, to feel that it is somebody doing something, getting on, having progress, on the move. The counterpart to this rajasic fuss is inertia. If the whole being can widen itself out, rest satisfied in the silence, then progressively inertia fades out and gives place to *śama*.

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In the interim periods, if any come, to maintain the calm observing consciousness is the one great necessity.

The dynamic activity of the higher consciousness may be suspended but once manifested its presence is always there.

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They [*certain experiences*] are first indications of an opening — but the opening has to be stabilised and enlarged. Also so long as the external mind is very much on the top they come at intervals only. Continuous experience is only possible when one gets inside and stays there.

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There are always variations in the intensity of experience, due to the necessity of assimilation in the consciousness. It is only at

a much later stage that the consciousness remains always at its highest level.

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These variations are inevitable. They go on until three things are sufficiently and unfluctuatingly established: (1) A fixed peace and gladness. (2) A clear light and understanding. (3) A complete selfless love and surrender.

Drops or Falls of Consciousness

These drops [*of consciousness*] happen to all sadhaks; their causes are various; sometimes it is a pull from below, sometimes an invasion from outside, sometimes a less ascertainable cause. When it happens, one must always remain as quiet as possible behind and call back the better condition.

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A drop of consciousness need not be so serious or take as long a time to repair. A few hours or, if there is much disturbance or mental obstruction, a few days should be sufficient to recover. Sometimes it takes longer if the sadhak continues to be too troubled or agitated or otherwise stands in his own way by dwelling too much on the obstacle. But years are taken only when there is, not a mere dropping of the consciousness, but a strong fall of the whole nature from the path or other very serious accident etc. There is nothing of this kind here or anything that could cause it.

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You must have allowed the consciousness to fall — there may have been some tamasic movement or it may merely be the habit of oscillation between the two conditions [*obscure and luminous*] that still persists.

The speedy removal of the difficulties depends on the continuance of the experiences. Otherwise the consciousness oscillates between the higher and the lower condition — which does not

prevent the ultimate liberation, but does cause delay.

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Yes — if the peace is established, then the falls [*of consciousness*] are only on the surface and do not affect the inner consciousness.

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Fall of the concentration happens to everybody — it has not to be taken as if it were something tragic or allowed to be the cause of depression.

Fatigue, Inertia and Lowering of the Consciousness

The falling down [*of the consciousness*] comes usually by some inertia coming in the consciousness through fatigue or through mere habit of relaxation or it comes through some vital reaction which one may or may not notice or it comes through a wrong movement of the mind. These are the positive lowering causes, but at the back of them is the fact that these alternations are almost inevitable so long as the consciousness is in any way subject to the old nature. The intervals of non-sadhana may however be long or short according to inner circumstances (mainly the power of the will or the psychic or the higher being to restore quickly the true poise).

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An occasional sinking of the consciousness happens to everybody. The causes are various, some touch from outside, something not yet changed or not sufficiently changed in the vital, especially the lower vital, some inertia or obscurity rising up from the physical parts of nature. When it comes, remain quiet, open yourself to the Mother and call back the true condition, and aspire for a clear and undisturbed discrimination showing you from within yourself the cause or the thing that needs to be set right.

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Yes, the ordinary physical consciousness is not able to hold the

contact and it does get tired — also it cannot assimilate much at a time. But it is not always the Divine who takes away the pressure; the lower consciousness itself loses it or gives it up.

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An always intense aspiration, an unswerving and unwavering will turned to the one thing only, help to get through the difficulties without discouragement or falling into depression — they give an impetus for a rapid development. But the difficulties come all the same because they are inherent in human nature. Even the best sadhaks have these periods of suspension of the sadhana, of nothing happening, of the absence of the urge of the inner being. It is when some difficulty arises in the physical nature that has to be dealt with or when a pause has to be made for a veiled preparation, or for some similar reason. Even when the working of the sadhana is in the mind or vital which are more plastic such periods are frequent — when the physical is concerned they must necessarily come and are usually marked not so much by any apparent struggle but by an immobility and an inertia of the energies that were at work before. This is very troublesome to the mind because it suggests entire cessation, incapacity to progress or unfitness. But it is not really so. One must be quiet and go on opening oneself to the working or keeping the will to do so — afterwards there will be a greater progress. Many sadhaks indulge in such a period a spirit of despondency and loss of faith in the future which delays the renewal, but this should be avoided.

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It is difficult to say [*why the veiling of consciousness persists*] — usually it is when something in the mind and vital accepts and indulges the lower forces that this inability to re-enter the true consciousness remains so obstinate. Physical *tamas* can produce long interregnums of obscure consciousness, but not usually with such a violent obstruction — usually only dull and obstinate.

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The depression is not the only cause of suspension of experiences. There are others such as inertia etc. If one can have experiences continuously in spite of these things, that means that a part of the consciousness has definitely separated from the rest and is able to go on in spite of the outer resistance.

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Even if there is physical fatigue sometimes it is not inevitable that it should interfere with the sadhana. The inner movement can always go on.

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When the physical consciousness prevails, often one does not feel any sign or effect [*of inner or higher experiences*] even if they are there.

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How do you expect anything so obtuse and forgetful as the physical consciousness to have the effect if the experiences are not repeated? It is as when you learn a lesson, you have to repeat it till the physical mind gets hold of it — otherwise it does not become a part of consciousness.

Variations during the Day

It happens to most sadhaks that in particular parts of the day they feel concentrated and get results, and in others that condition is not there. This is especially in the earlier stages of the progress. It is only after the higher consciousness, peace etc. have settled in the being that one can usually be at all times in the active condition of sadhana.

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It is often like that — the period of intense activity is limited to a particular part of the day and then the rest of the time there is a lull.

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It is quite usual to have such periods in the day. The consciousness needs time for rest and assimilation, it cannot be at the same pitch of intensity at all times. During the assimilation a calm quietude is the proper condition.

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These variations in the consciousness during the day are a thing that is common to almost everybody in the sadhana. The principle of constant oscillation, relaxation, relapse to a normal or a past lower condition from a higher state that is experienced but not yet fixed in realisation or else realised but not yet perfectly stable, becomes very strong and marked when the working of the sadhana is in the physical consciousness. For there is an inertia in the physical nature that does not easily allow the intensity natural to the higher consciousness to remain constant, — the physical is always sinking back to something more ordinary; the higher consciousness and its force have to work long and come again and again before they can become constant and normal in the physical nature. Do not be disturbed or discouraged by these variations or this delay, however long and tedious; remain careful only to be quiet always with an inner quietude and as open as possible to the higher Power, not allowing any really adverse condition to get hold of you. If there is no adverse wave, then the rest is only a persistence of imperfections which all have in abundance; that imperfection and persistence the Force must work out and eliminate, but for the elimination time is needed.

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There is no mentally definite and rigidly effective reason for the thing [*a fall into inertia*] coming in the evening rather than at 2 p.m. or in the midnight or in the morning. For some people the fall comes in the evening, for some in the morning, for some at other times, and so too with the rise. But the alternations happen to most people in one kind of rhythm or another. The times vary with people and even can vary with the same men. There is no definable reason for it being at a particular time except that it has made itself habitual at that time. The rest is a question of

the play of forces which is observable but the reasons of which escape mental definition.

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That is a frequent experience (though I suppose it is not general) — not only with peace, but other things; there is a tendency towards a lowering of the consciousness in the evening. On the other hand with some it is the opposite. I don't know that it actually depends on work and mixing, though these may have a wearing effect — I find more often that it is a sort of rhythm of rise and fall in the consciousness during the day. Even when peace is perfectly established, there may be this rhythm for other things that are being developed.

The Need for Periods of Assimilation

Intensities like that do not remain so long as the consciousness is not transformed — there has to be a period of assimilation. When the being is unconscious, the assimilation goes on behind the veil or below the surface and meanwhile the surface consciousness sees only dullness and loss of what it had got; but when one is conscious, then one can see the assimilation going on and one sees that nothing is lost, it is only a quiet settling in of what has come down.

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Yes — the system has to take rest so as to assimilate and renew its receptive power.

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When one is assimilating, one is not receiving.

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The periods of assimilation continue really till all that has to be done is fundamentally done. Only they have a different character in the later stages of sadhana. If they cease altogether at an early stage (you are still in a very early stage), it is because all the

nature was capable of has been done and that would mean it was not capable of much.

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What I have written is perfectly clear. The periods of assimilation continue till all that has to be done is fundamentally done. If they stop early, it means that all has been done that could be done and nothing more is possible, the later and more advanced developments of the sadhana are not possible, — if they were, the assimilation periods would continue until all was developed and not cease. The only reason for such a premature end of the sadhana would be that the sadhaka is not capable of going farther.

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The only change in the assimilation periods afterwards is that certain things remain settled while the assimilation applies to others that are not yet settled in the system. E.g. one feels always a constant peace in the inner being, but disturbances go on on the surface, till the surface also has assimilated peace. Or perhaps peace is settled everywhere and always there but knowledge comes and goes or strength comes and goes. Or all these are there but Ananda comes and goes etc. etc.

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There is always a gain or progress at some point after these periods of assimilation if one takes them rightly — however dull or troublesome they may be.

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If your faith is getting firmer day by day, you are certainly progressing in your sadhana and there can have been no fall. An interruption of definite experiences may be only a period of assimilation in which one prepares for a new range of experience. Keep yourself open and aspire.