Chapter Four

Accidents, Possession, Madness

Accidents

There is no such thing as a mere accident. There is some—perhaps a very slight—unconsciousness in the physical and it is taken advantage of by these small beings of the vital physical plane—who are more mischievous than consciously hostile.

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It is not a bad shakti that gets inside you and from there does these things—it is small forces from outside that amuse themselves by creating small accidents of that kind, taking advantage of some inattention or forgetfulness etc.

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You are right about the accidents. It is chiefly the physical mind’s unconsciousness that makes these accidents or interventions of mischievous forces easy.

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It has often been seen that when an accident takes place at a particular spot, there is a tendency for some time for other accidents to happen there. It was so with a place near Villianur some years ago. There is the same tendency with suicides at a particular place. It is a sort of powerful formation that remains there with or without a vital being (spirit) in charge of the formation.

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It sometimes happens that by a carefully formed formation like this and through the instrumentality of a third person whose movements they control, the hostile forces get through the conscious guard and bring about an accident like this.¹ It is through

¹ The correspondent was cycling down the road when an approaching cyclist collided with him; he fell to the ground and injured his legs. — Ed.
the subconscient that they manage to do it, for the subconscient has not yet either the mass of force descended from above which could have repelled the arriving cycle and turned its movement away or the instinctive sureness which would have felt beforehand what the cyclist was going to do and done just the thing to avoid it. However when the protection is there such accidents even when grave in character are usually reduced to something minor in their results.

That is right. These accidents happen only to disturb you. You must not allow yourself to be disturbed.

Yes — 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.

Possession by Vital Forces

It is one thing to see things and quite another to let them enter into you. One has to experience many things, to see and observe, to bring them into the field of the consciousness and know what they are. But there is no reason why you should allow them to enter into you and possess you. It is only the Divine or what comes from the Divine that can be admitted to enter you.

To say that all light is good is as if you said that all water is good — or even that all clear or transparent water is good: it would not be true. One must see what is the nature of the light or where it comes from or what is in it, before one can say that it is the true Light. False lights exist and misleading lustres, lower lights too that belong to the being’s inferior reaches. One must therefore be on one’s guard and distinguish; the true discrimination has to come by growth of the psychic feeling and a purified mind and experience.

The first attempt of the possessing entity is to separate the person from his psychic, and it is that that creates the struggle. All
depends on the extent and persistence of the possession — how much of the being it occupies and whether it is constant or not.

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That is very interesting — for it agrees with the Mother’s constant insistence that to feel sympathy or any emotion of the weak philanthropic kind with those possessed by vital forces is most dangerous as it may bring an attack upon oneself which may take any form. One must do what is to be done but abstain from all such weakness.

**Neurasthenia**

It is not, certainly, your own vital that engenders these movements, but its revolts seem to have made it subject to the suggestions of a hostile force from outside. If the suggestions had been confined to mental thoughts, that would have been normal, but it seems to have taken power enough to hold your mind and to push you to action. That means either an acute state of neurasthenia due to some wrong movements (the sexual habit you speak of, if you have been indulging, that would explain it) or a vital inability to bear the pressure of a spiritual struggle. The Asuric idea of self-destruction or of a solution through violence on yourself is entirely false and a suggestion of the hostile force, as are too the imaginations against the Mother. If the neurasthenic condition has gone so far or if there is so acute a vital inability to bear the pressure of your inner struggle, the one immediate remedy would be a rest and relief from the struggle. A change of air and surroundings, the restoration of contact with ordinary life and the cessation of a constant preoccupation with your difficulties would seem to be urgent and imperative. An appeasement of the nervous system is needed and, at the moment, this seems to be the only way. I am not suggesting a permanent departure or giving up of the spiritual endeavour. It is quiet and repose that you need, a temporary relief and release from the inner struggle. It is better to do this than to go on in the condition you describe in your letter. Consider what I
have written and reply to me in the morning, so that something may be immediately decided; for the sooner you get the relief you need from these suggestions and their nervous pressure, the better.

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Neurasthenia in the sense it is now given is not nervous debility — that is an antiquated definition. Nervous debility is a special thing, an illness of the physical nervous; — neurasthenia proper is a weakness of the vital nervous. One may be as strong as a bull and hardy as an evergreen, yet have neurasthenia. Its mark is depression, gloom, reiteration of melancholy slogans, broodings on darkness, death, despair. The bull indulges in a sorrowful lowing; the evergreen moans, “Sunshine? sunshine? it is a fable — there is only cloud, mist, rain and tears!” That’s neurasthenia! Of course there are other and more exaggerated forms, but those are not in question. One can get rid of this kind, if the will is determined to do so.

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If you want to get back your faith and keep it, you must first quiet your mind and make it open and obedient to the Mother’s force. If you have an excited mind at the mercy of every influence and impulse, you will remain a field of conflicting and contrary forces and cannot progress. You will begin to listen to your own ignorance instead of the Mother’s knowledge and your faith will naturally disappear and you will get into a wrong condition and a wrong attitude.

Your ailment is evidently in its foundation an illness of the nerves, not an ordinary physical disease. These maladies are a creation of the pressure of hostile forces; they increase if anything in you assents to them and accepts, and the more the mind gives value to them and dwells on them, the more they grow. The only way is to remain quiet, dissociate yourself and refuse to accept it or make much of it, allow the calm and strength that the Mother has been putting around you to enter your mind and permeate your nervous system. To do otherwise
is to place yourself on the side of the hostile forces that are afflicting you. The cure may take time because your nervous system has been long subjected to these influences and, when they are evicted, they return with violence to re-establish their hold. But if you can acquire and keep patience and fortitude and the right consciousness and right attitude with regard to these things, the hold they have will progressively disappear.

There are defects in your vital nature which stand in the way of a settled spiritual progress: but they can be eliminated if, dropping all exaggerated ideas of “sin” and unfitness, you look quietly at them and recognise and reject them. Tranquillise in yourself all over-eager demands and desires, all excitement and exaggeration of opposite feelings and impulses; seek first intensity of devotion but also calm strength, purity and peace. Allow a quiet and steady will to progress to be settled in you; learn the habit of a silent, persistent and thorough assimilation of what the Mother puts into you. This is the sound way to advance.

**Hysteria**

The attacks you speak of can come anywhere. It is an attack of the nervous centres and on the nervous being by contrary vital forces. The fact that it was not allowing you to come here and that it began to go when you steeped yourself in the atmosphere and ideas of *The Yoga and Its Objects* is significant of its origin. As for the other symptoms they were amassing to a height of the restlessness of the nervous being and are quite familiar in such cases. The desire to run away somewhere is a very usual symptom. Hysteria is also an attack by similar forces; but it is only one form; the attack need not take the appearance of any illness. The Doctors usually consider it as a type of what they call neurasthenia, nerve-weakness; but that simply locates the thing without explaining its real nature and cause. In both cases, here and there, it was an attempt to come across your spiritual life by creating a disability and state of disturbance in the vital-physical part of the being. Anyhow the fact that you could not go from
here and that the whole thing could be removed by us at once as soon as you opened somewhere by this feeling of sorrow at going shows that the spiritual life is stronger deep within you, even when covered over, than the opposite forces at their height. That is the main thing.

* In these cases of hysteria usually nothing is gained by humouring or indulgence — firmness generally pays better, because most often there is something there that wants to be interesting and get sympathy and have a fuss made over the person. As for cure, that is a different matter, the subjective cause has to be got rid of and it is not easy.

**Epilepsy**

It is epilepsy. I had surmised from the beginning — the first attack and fall; but the acute condition must have been developed by the shock of the fall on the head — otherwise it might have taken a longer time to develop.

Epilepsy is itself a sign of vital attack, even if there is a physical cause for it — the attacking force not being able to disturb the mental and vital (proper) falls on the body and uses some physical cause (latent or growing) for the base of its action. For everything manifested in the physical must have a physical support or means for its expression.

* I don’t think — I know it is so [that epilepsy and insanity are due to the influence of evil spirits]. Epilepsy however is not possession — it is an attack or at most a temporary seizure. Insanity always indicates possession. The hereditary conditions create a predisposition. It is not possible for a vital Force or Being to invade or take possession unless there are doors open for it to enter. The door may be a vital consent or affinity or a physical defect in the being.
Madness

Insanity is always due to a vital attack, or rather possession although there is often a physical reason as well. Hysteria is due to a pressure from the vital world and there may be momentary possessions also. The same thing cannot be said of ordinary delirium, the cause of which is physical only — except in so far as all illness is an attack of lower forces of Nature, but these lower forces are not vital beings or what we call specifically hostile forces. They are simply performing their role in nature and of course there may be and probably is a being of some kind presiding over each kind of illness — in Bengal they give a special name to some of them and worship them as goddesses to avert the visitation. But as I say these are really Forces, not vital hostiles.

As for the interest of vital beings in possessing men — beings of the vital world are not constituted like men — they take a delight in struggle and suffering and disorder — it is their natural atmosphere. They want besides to get the taste of the physical world without being under the obligation of taking on birth and developing the psychic being and evolving towards the Divine. They wish to remain what they are and yet amuse themselves with the physical world and physical body.

* Loss of balance produces disorder in the consciousness and the adverse forces use that loss of balance for attacking and wholly upsetting the system and doing their work. That is why people become hysterical or mad or filled with the desire to die or go away.

* More easily [a loss of balance] occurs in the women than in the men but in some of the latter also. What produces the loss of balance is an inability to control the vital movements by the reason and an instability of the vital itself so that it sways from one feeling to another, one impulse to another without harmony or order.
Loss of mental balance is due to exaggerated ego, exaggerated sex, acceptance of a hostile force etc.

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I may observe that X does not seem to me to be mad — there is no sign of a dislocation of the thinking mind due to lesion or accident or illness. What there is is a fixed idea and what is called folie de persécution, but that is not due to insanity — people have it who have otherwise an acute and perfectly well-ordered intelligence. X from his photograph appears to have had a mediumistic element in him and to have by some ill-chance entered into contact with powers of the vital plane which were able to put their suggestions in him — in that part of the consciousness which we call the vital mind — so that he is unable to ascertain things in their proper light and is tormented by the suggestions that have driven their furrows there in the form of habitual ideas that tyrannise over him and which he is unable to embrace or refuse. Unfortunately this is a malady of the consciousness, which it is very difficult to cure because the patient himself gives no assistance, as he clings to his fixed idea and even when the influence is taken away, calls it back upon him. Certainly he could be told from here that he is not mad and is not cursed of God — but that of itself might not be sufficient to cure him.

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Usually there is some predisposition [to madness] behind, hereditary, natal (due to some circumstances of birth) or founded in insufficient nervous balance. Often there is in the vital excessive ambition, lust or some other violent Ripu. But these though they might distort or break the sadhana by opening it to undesirable Forces could not bring madness (megalomania, erotic mania, or what is called religious mania) — only if there is some taint or want of nervous balance. Anxiety or excessive stress of meditation would not bring it either except by acting upon some such predisposing weakness. In some cases possession by beings of the vital worlds without any such predisposing cause may be
possible, but that will be more easily curable. There are however cases of people who break down their nervous balance by wrong practices — there the madness has nothing really to do with the sadhana.

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It is quite impossible for the descent of the Divine Grace to produce nausea and nervousness and a general disturbance like that — to think so is self-contradictory and foolish. Sometimes when one has pulled or strained, there is a headache or sensation as if of headache or if one pulls down too much force, then there may be a giddiness but one has only to remain quiet and that sets itself right by an assimilation of what has come down or otherwise. There is never any adverse or troublesome after-consequence. What seems to have happened is that X’s finding the Force he had called down much more than what he was accustomed to, got nervous and went from nervousness into a panic — with the result of an upsetting of his stomach and circulation. If it is not that, then it must have been an attack of illness which he associated with the descent, but the attack seems to be of a nervous character. Probably if he had had the experience of this increased descent some time ago, he would not have been frightened and nothing would have happened, but the madness of Y following on the death of Z has created a panic and at the least thing each person thinks he is going to go mad or die. As nothing upsets the organism more than fear, they create by this general atmosphere of panic danger where there was none.

The idea that Y was sent mad by a descent of Divine Force is an absurdity and an irrational superstition. People go mad because they have a physical predisposition due either to heredity (as in the case of Y and A) or to some kind of organic cause or secret illness, like syphilis gone to the head or colon bacillus similarly misdirected or brain lesion or other material cause, the action being often brought up by some psychological factor (ambition turning to megalomania, hypochondria, melancholia etc.) or on the contrary itself bringing these to the surface. All
that happens in ordinary life and not only in Yoga; the same causes work here. The one thing is that there may be an invasion of an alien Force bringing about the upsetting, but it is not the Divine Force, it is a vital Force that invades. The Divine Force cannot by its descent be the cause of madness any more than it can be of apoplexy or any other physical illness. If there is no predisposition one may have all kinds of attacks from vital or other forces or from one’s own movements of the lower nature, as violent as possible, but there will be no madness.

As to X’s collapse, I did not intend to say anything about it just now,— for mental discussion of causes and consequences is not of much help at this juncture. I must say however that it is not the push for union with the Divine nor is it the Divine Force that leads to madness — it is the way in which people themselves act with regard to their claim for these things. To be more precise, I have never known a case of collapse in Yoga — as opposed to mere difficulty or negative failure, — a case of dramatic disaster in which there was not one of three causes, or more than one of the three at work. First, some sexual aberration — I am not speaking of mere sexuality which can be very strong in the nature without leading to collapse — or an attempt to sexualise spiritual experience on an animal or gross material basis; second, an exaggerated ambition, pride or vanity trying to seize on spiritual force or experience and turn it to one’s own glorification — ending in megalomania; third, an unbalanced vital and a weak nervous system apt to follow its own imaginations and unruled impulses without any true mental will or strong vital will to steady or restrain it, and so at the mercy of the imaginations and suggestions of the adverse vital world when carried over the border into the intermediate zone of which I spoke in a recent message. All the cases of collapse in this Asram have been due to these three causes — to the first two mostly. Only three or

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2 This message is reproduced in Letters on Yoga — III, volume 30 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 296–303. — Ed.
four of them have ended in madness — and in these the sexual aberration was invariably present; usually a violent fall from the Way is the consequence. X’s is no exception to the rule. It is not because she pushed for union with the Divine that she went mad, but because she misused what came down for a mystic sexuality and the satisfaction of megalomaniac pride, in spite of my repeated and insistent warnings. For the moment that is all the light I can give on the matter — naturally I generalise and avoid details.

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Those who fall into insanity have lost the true touch and got into the wrong contact. It is due either to some impurity and unspiritual desire with which the seeker enters into the way or some insincerity, egoism and false attitude or to some weakness in the brain or nervous system which cannot bear the Power it has called down into it.

The safest way is to follow the guidance of someone who has himself attained to mastery in the path. Only that guidance should be implicitly and sincerely followed; one’s own mind and its ideas and fancies must not be allowed to interfere. It goes without saying that it must be a true guidance, not the leading of a tyro or an impostor.

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I am not aware that anyone who has made a true surrender [to his Guru], loses his balance. Those who allow ego to come in naturally may, whether they follow a Guru as most Yogis have done, or try to go on their own individual strength.