

Chapter Two

Occult Powers or Siddhis

General Remarks

The *aṣṭasiddhis* as obtained in the ordinary Yoga are vital powers or, as in the Rajayoga, mental siddhis. Usually they are uncertain in their application and precarious depending on the maintenance of the process by which they were attained.

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It is certainly possible to have consciousness of things going on at a distance and to intervene.

The idea that true Yogins do not or ought not to use such powers, I regard as an ascetic superstition. I believe that all Yogins who have these powers do use them whenever they find that they are called on from within to do so. They may refrain if they think the use in a particular case is contrary to the Divine Will or see that preventing one evil may be opening the door to worse or for any other valid reason, or simply because it is outside the scope of their action, but not from any general prohibitory rule. What is forbidden to anyone with a strong spiritual sense is to be a miracle-monger, performing extraordinary things for show, for gain, for fame, out of vanity or pride. It is forbidden to use powers from mere vital motives, to make an Asuric ostentation of them or to turn them into a support for arrogance, conceit, ambition — or any other of the amiable weaknesses to which human nature is prone. It is because half-baked Yogins so often fall into these traps of the hostile forces that the use of Yogic powers is sometimes discouraged as harmful to the user. But it is mostly people who live much in the vital that so fall; with a strong and free and calm mind and a psychic awake and alive, such pettinesses are not likely to occur. As for those who can live in the true divine consciousness, certain powers are not “powers” at all in that sense, not, that is to say, supernatural

or abnormal, but rather their normal way of seeing and acting, part of the consciousness — and how can they be forbidden or refuse to act according to their consciousness and its nature?

I suppose I have had myself an even more completely European education than you and I have had too my period of agnostic denial, but from the moment I looked at these things I could never take the attitude of doubt and disbelief which was for so long fashionable in Europe. Abnormal, otherwise supraphysical experiences and powers, occult or Yogic, have always seemed to me something perfectly natural and credible. Consciousness in its very nature could not be limited by the ordinary physical human-animal consciousness; it must have other ranges. Yogic or occult powers are no more supernatural or incredible than is supernatural or incredible the power to write a great poem or compose great music. Few people can do it, as things are, — not even one in a million; for poetry and music come from the inner being and to write or to compose true and great things one has to have the passage clear between the outer mind and something in the inner being. That is why you got the poetic power as soon as you began Yoga — Yoga-force made the passage clear. It is the same with Yogic consciousness and its powers; the thing is to get the passage clear, — for they are already there within you. Of course the first thing is to believe, aspire and, with the true urge within, make the endeavour.

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It is not possible to put any credence in the stories about this Swami and Mahabhutan. It is possible that he has practised some kind of Tantric Yoga and obtained a few occult powers, but in all that you have said about him and in the printed papers there is no trace of any spiritual realisation or experience. All that he seems to think about is occult powers and feats of thaumaturgy. Those who take their stand on occult powers divorced from spiritual experience are not Yogis of a high plane of achievement. There are Yogis who behave as if they had no control over themselves — the theory is that they separate the spirit from the nature and live in the inner realisation leaving the nature to a disordered

action “like a child, mad man, pisacha or inert object”. There are others who deliberately use rough or violent speech to keep people at a distance or to test them. But the outbreak of rage of this Swami which you recount seems to have been simply an outburst of fury due to offended egoism. His judgment about Ramana Maharshi is absurd in the extreme.¹ As to his asking for the nail, hair etc. and his presenting of clothes or jumper, it was probably to establish a physical means of establishing an occult influence on you and your wife possibly by some Tantric or magic kriya — in Tibet such magic processes are well known and in common use.

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There are many Yogins of the Vedantic school who follow both siddhis and the final emancipation — they would say, I suppose, that they take the siddhis on the way to Nirvana. The harmonisation is in the supermind — the Divine Truth at once static and dynamic, a withdrawal and extinction of the Ignorance, a re-creation in the Divine Knowledge.

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I am unable to see why you should give up Yoga, because you cannot believe in the action of occult laws and forces or in siddhis. The object of Yoga is realisation of the Divine; these other things are side-matters which need be no part of spiritual experience, nor is belief in them necessary for realisation. Everyone has the right of private judgment in these matters; so you need not worry.

Occult Powers Not the Object of Our Yoga

Yes, the object of our Yoga is to establish direct contact with the Divine above and bring down the divine consciousness from above into all the centres. Occult powers belonging to the

¹ Absurd because the greatness of a Yogi does not depend at all on how long he lives or his state of health, but on the height or the depth of his spiritual realisation and experience.

mental, vital and subtle physical planes are not our object. One can have contact with various Divine Forms and Personalities on the way, but there is no need to establish them in the centres, though sometimes that happens automatically (as with the four Personalities of the Mother) for a time in the course of the sadhana. But it is not a rule to do so. Our Yoga is meant to be plastic and to allow all necessary workings of the Divine Power according to the nature, but these in the details may vary with each individual.

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All these “experiments” of yours are founded upon the vital nature and the mind in connection with it; working on this foundation, there is no security against falsehood and fundamental error. No amount of powers (small or great) developing can be a surety against wandering from the Truth; and, if you allow pride and arrogance and ostentation of power to creep in and hold you, you will surely fall into error and into the power of rajasic Maya and Avidya. Our object is not to get powers, but to ascend towards the divine Truth-consciousness and bring its Truth down into the lower members. With the Truth all the necessary powers will come, not as one’s own, but as the Divine’s. The contact with the Truth cannot grow through rajasic mental and vital self-assertion, but only through psychic purity and surrender.

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An activity on the astral plane in contact with the astral Forces attended by a leaving of the body is not a spiritual aim but belongs to the province of occultism. It is not a part of the aim of Yoga. Also fasting is not permissible in the Asram, as its practice is more often harmful than helpful to the spiritual endeavour.

This aim suggested to you seems to be part of a seeking for occult powers; such a seeking is looked on with disfavour for the most part by spiritual teachers in India because it belongs to the inferior planes and usually pushes the seeker on a path which

may lead him very far from the Divine. Especially, a contact with the forces and beings of the astral (or, as we term it, the vital) plane is attended with great dangers. The beings of this plane are often hostile to the true aim of spiritual life and establish contact with the seeker and offer him powers and occult experiences only in order that they may lead him away from the spiritual path or else that they may establish their own control over him or take possession of him for their own purpose. Often, representing themselves as divine powers, they mislead, give erring suggestions and impulses and pervert the inner life. Many are those who, attracted by these powers and beings of the vital plane, have ended in a definitive spiritual fall or in mental and physical perversion and disorder. One comes inevitably into contact with the vital plane and enters into it in the expansion of consciousness which results from an inner opening, but one ought never to put oneself into the hands of these beings and forces or allow oneself to be led by their suggestions and impulses. This is one of the chief dangers of the spiritual life and to be on one's guard against it is a necessity for the seeker if he wishes to arrive at his goal. It is true that many supraphysical or supernormal powers come with the expansion of the consciousness in Yoga; to rise out of the body consciousness, to act by subtle means on the supraphysical planes etc. are natural activities for the Yogi. But these powers are not sought after, they come naturally, and they have not the astral character. Also, they have to be used on purely spiritual lines, that is by the Divine Will and the Divine Force, as an instrument, but never as an instrumentation of the forces and beings of the vital plane. To seek their aid for such powers is a great error.

Prolonged fasting may lead to an excitation of the nervous being which often brings vivid imaginations and hallucinations that are taken for true experiences; such fasting is frequently suggested by the vital Entities because it puts the consciousness into an unbalanced state which favours their designs. It is therefore discouraged here. The rule to be followed is that laid down by the Gita which says that "Yoga is not for one who eats too much or who does not eat"; a moderate use of food sufficient

for the maintenance and health and strength of the body.

There is no brotherhood of the kind you describe in India. There are Yogis who seek to acquire and practise occult powers but it is as individuals learning from an individual Master. Occult associations, lodges, brotherhoods for such a purpose as described by European occultists are not known in Asia.

As regards secrecy, a certain discretion or silence about the instructions of the Guru and one's own experiences is always advisable, but an absolute secrecy or making a mystery of these things is not. Once a Guru is chosen, nothing must be concealed from him. The suggestion of absolute secrecy is often a trick of the astral Powers to prevent the seeking for enlightenment and succour.

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Ordinarily, all the more inward and all the abnormal psychological experiences are called psychic. I use the word psychic for the soul as distinguished from the mind and vital. All movements and experiences of the soul would in that sense be called psychic, those which rise from or directly touch the psychic being; where mind and vital predominate, the experience would be called psychological (surface or occult). "Spiritual" has nothing to do with the Absolute, except that the experience of the Absolute is spiritual. All contacts with self, the higher consciousness, the Divine above are spiritual. There are others that could not be so sharply classified and set off against each other.

The spiritual realisation is of primary importance and indispensable. I would consider it best to have the spiritual and psychic development first and have it with the same fullness before entering the occult regions. Those who enter the latter first may find their spiritual realisation much delayed — others fall into the mazy traps of the occult and do not come out in this life. Some no doubt can carry on both together, the occult and the spiritual, and make them help each other; but the process I suggest is the safer.

The governing factors for us must be the spirit and the psychic being united with the Divine — the occult laws and

phenomena have to be known but only as an instrumentation, not as the governing principles. The occult is a vast field and complicated and not without its dangers. It need not be abandoned but it should not be given the first place.

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You need not think about the occult Power. Let the Mother's consciousness grow in you and her Force work; occult powers are not indispensable, but if they are needed they will come in their proper time.

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A sincere heart is worth all the extraordinary powers in the world.

Ethical Rules for the Use of Occult Powers

There are a number of rules, really of an ethical, not a spiritual nature, which are necessary for the very safety of the society itself — those, for instance, against an egoistic use of occult secrets; for if that were disregarded, there would be inevitably a clash with other formations on the same plane and consequent disaster.

Thought Reception and Thought Reading

About X's faculty of receiving the thoughts of others, — if this had been of the nature of thought reading, that is to say looking at the minds of others and seeing what is there, the remedy would have been simple; refusal to look would be enough and even the faculty might disappear by atrophy through long discontinuance. But if the thoughts of others come to her of themselves, it may be the psychic opening in her inner mind which it would be difficult to get rid of. If she could remain indifferent or push away these unwelcome visitors behind her and not think of them again, that would be one remedy; it might even be discouraged from coming after a time by this lack of reception. As for why it comes, it is not something that comes but something that is

there, a faculty or a psychic habit of the nature — I use the word psychic in the popular sense, it has nothing to do with what I call the psychic being. If she practises Yoga and is able to make some considerable progress, then it would be possible for her to bar the door to these visitors. At the same time I might say that this power need not be a mere source of trouble; it can be helpful even: for it can give one who has acquired mastery over his own nature the knowledge of the thoughts and feelings around her and she can then help, guide, change what has to be changed in their minds so that they can become more effective for the divine work. I shall await what further you have to tell me about X's experiences before saying anything further about her entry into the field of Yoga.

Occult Powers and Health

Your generalisation cannot stand because it is contradicted by other numerous instances which go to prove the opposite. In my own experience I have found that those who possessed well developed and well organised "psychic" and occult powers were healthy and well poised; indeed they said that in ill health or physical weakness they could do nothing — it impaired their power. These certainly had no lack or deficiency of the red aura.

The woman you speak of was evidently under a vital Influence. A vital Influence always acts by disorganising the system and by disturbing the mental, vital or physical balance. But such cases of phenomena in the vital mind due to a possession or influence have no relation to the true mastery of psychic or occult powers (clairvoyance, clair-audience etc.).

Visions and experiences need not at all depend upon physical weakness or a pathological taint. It is not safe to judge from individual cases. The majority of those who have developed the faculty do not suffer from these defects. Those on the other hand who cannot keep their psychic experiences when in a robust state of health, lose them because then they get into a very external consciousness and feel at ease in it; but the true psychic does not depend for his experiences on disease.

The Power of Healing

I don't know whether I can throw any positive light on X's mystic experiences. The description, at any rate the latter part, is not very easy to follow as it is very allusive in its expressions and not always precise enough to be clear. The first part of the experience indicates a native power of healing of whose action she herself does not know the process. It seems from her account to come from something in herself which should be, from the terms she uses, a larger and higher and brighter and more powerful consciousness with which she is in occasional communion but in which she does not constantly live. On the other hand another sentence seems to point to a Godhead or Divine Presence and it would then be not so much within as above. The language later on would seem to indicate such a Presence giving commands to her to guide others so that they might grow in consciousness. But she distinctly speaks of it as a greater "me" standing behind a blue diamond force. We must fall back then on the idea of a greater consciousness very high up with a feeling of divinity, a sense of considerable light and spiritual authority — perhaps in one of those higher spiritual mental planes of which I speak in *The Life Divine* and the letters. The diamond light could well be native to these planes; it is usually white, but there it might well be blue: it is a light that dispels or drives away all impure things, especially a demoniac possession or the influence of some evil force. Evidently, the use of a power like this should be carefully guarded from the intrusion of any wrong element such as personal love of power, but that need not cause any apprehension as a keen inlook into oneself would be sufficient to reject it or keep it aloof. I think that is all I can say upon the data given in her letter.

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It is difficult to say [*why Christ healed people*] — it looks from the Bible account as if he did it as a sign that he was one sent by the Divine with power.

Miracles

What do you mean by a miracle? What people call a miracle is only something done in a striking way by a process unknown to them which their minds cannot follow.

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I have explained that there is no such thing as a miracle. If a higher consciousness opens a higher power in him, the sadhak has to use it as part of the new consciousness but in the right way, without egoism, selfishness, vanity or pride.

Magic

Jādu (magic) is a special practice which is done by professional magicians or those who learn the art of the magician, but it is no part of Yoga. What happens in Yoga is that sometimes or even very commonly certain powers develop in the sadhak by which he can influence others or make them do things or make things happen that he wants. This and other Yogic powers should never be used by the sadhak for egoistic purposes or to satisfy his vital desires. They can only be used when they become part of the realised divine consciousness by the Mother herself or at her command for good and unselfish purposes. There is no harm in Yogic powers that come naturally as a part of the new consciousness and are not used for a wrong personal purpose. For instance you see something in vision or dream and that happens afterwards in the waking state. Well, that is a Yogic power of prevision, knowing future things which often occurs as the consciousness grows; there is nothing wrong in its happening; it is part of the growth in sadhana. So with other powers. Only one must not get proud or boast or misuse the powers for the sake of desire, pride, power or the satisfaction of the ego.

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By black magic is meant the occultism of the adverse powers — the occultism of the divine Powers is quite different. One is based on unity, the other on division.