Chapter Two

The Value of Experiences

Experience and Development of Consciousness

It is only by persistent experience and development of consciousness that the veil of Ignorance can be entirely dispelled.

* An experience is an unmistakable thing and must be given its proper value. The mind may exaggerate in thinking about it, but that does not deprive it of its value.

* Trances and experiences have their value. There is no question of less or more important — each thing has its place.

* It is not a question of giving an equal value to everything you do, but of recognising the value of all the different elements of the sadhana. No such rule can be made as that trances are of little value or that experiences are of inferior importance any more than it can be said that work is of no or inferior importance.

* Your experience is the beginning of the fundamental and decisive realisation which carries the consciousness out of the limited mental into the true spiritual vision and experience in which all is one and all is the Divine. It is this constant and living experience that is the true foundation of spiritual life. There can be no doubt about its truth and value, for it is evidently something living and dynamic and goes beyond a mental realisation. It may add to itself in future different aspects, but the essential fundamental realisation you now have. When this is permanent, one can be said to have passed out of the twilight of the mind.
What you have now to do is to allow the realisation to grow and develop. The necessary movements will probably come of themselves as these have come — provided you keep your will single and faithful towards this Light and Truth. Already it has brought you the guidance towards the next step, cessation of the flow of thought, the inner mind’s silence. Once that is won, there is likely to come a settled peace, liberation, wideness. The sense of the need of simplicity and transparency is also a true movement and comes from the same inner guidance. That is necessary for the deepest inmost divine element within behind the mind, life and body to come forward fully in you — when it does you will be able to become aware of the inner guide within you and of a Force working for the full spiritual change. This simplicity comes by a separation from the manifold devious mental and vital movements which lead one in all directions — a quiet, a detachment in the heart which turns one singly towards the one Truth and the one Light till it takes up the whole being and the whole life.

Put your trust in the grace of the One and Divine which has already touched you and opened its door and rely on it for all that is to come.

The Importance of Small Beginnings

What I meant about the experiences was simply this that you have erected your own ideas about what you want from the Yoga and have always been measuring what began to come by that standard and because it was not according to expectation or up to that standard telling yourself after a moment, “It is nothing, it is nothing.” That dissatisfaction laid you open at every step to a reaction or recoil which prevented any continuous development. The Yogin who has experience knows that the small beginnings are of the greatest importance and have to be cherished and allowed with great patience to develop. He knows for instance that the neutral quiet so dissatisfying to the vital eagerness of the sadhak is the first step towards the peace that passeth all
understanding, the small current or thrill of inner delight the first trickling in of the ocean of Ananda, the play of lights or colours the key of the doors of the inner vision and experience, the descents that stiffen the body into a concentrated stillness the first touch of something at the end of which is the presence of the Divine. He is not impatient; he is rather careful not to disturb the evolution that is beginning. Certainly, some sadhaks have strong and decisive experiences at the beginning, but these are followed by a long labour in which there are many empty periods and many periods of struggle.

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If you truly decide in all your consciousness to offer your being to the Divine to mould it as He wills, then most of your personal difficulty will disappear — I mean that which still remains, and there will be only the lesser difficulties of the transformation of the ordinary into the Yogic consciousness, normal to all sadhana. Your mental difficulty has been all along that you wanted to mould the sadhana and the reception of experience and the response of the Divine according to your own preconceived mental ideas and left no freedom to the Divine to act or manifest according to His own truth and reality and the need not of your mind and vital but of your soul and spirit. It is as if your vital were to present a coloured glass to the Divine and tell Him, “Now pour yourself into that and I will shut you up there and look at you through the colours”, or, from the mental point of view, as if you were to offer a test-tube in a similar way and say, “Get in there and I will test you and see what you are.” But the Divine is shy about such processes and His objections are not altogether unintelligible.

At any rate I am glad the experience has come back again — it has come as the result of your effort and mine for the last days and is practically a reminder that the door of entry into Yogic experience is still there and can open at the right touch. You taxed me the other day with making a mistake about your experience of breathing with the name in it and reproached me for drawing a big inference from a very small phenomenon — a
thing, by the way, which the scientists are doing daily without the least objection from your reason. You had the same idea, I believe, about my acceptance of your former experiences, this current and the descent of stillness in the body, as signs of the Yogi in you. But these ideas spring from an ignorance of the spiritual realm and its phenomena and only show the incapacity of the outer intellectual reason to play the role you want it to play, that of a supreme judge of spiritual truth and inner experience — a quite natural incapacity because it does not know even the A.B.C. of these things and it passes my comprehension how one can be a judge about a thing of which one knows nothing. I know that the “scientists” are continually doing it with supra-physical phenomena outside their province — those who never had a spiritual or occult experience laying down the law about occult phenomena and Yoga; but that does not make it any more reasonable or excusable. Any Yogi who knows something about pranayama or japa can tell you that the running of the name in the breath is not a small phenomenon but of great importance in these practices and, if it comes naturally, a sign that something in the inner being has done that kind of sadhana in the past. As for the current it is the familiar sign of a first touch of the higher consciousness flowing down in the form of a stream — like the “wave” of light of the scientist — to prepare its possession of mind, vital and physical in the body. So is the stillness and rigidity of the body in your former experience a sign of the same descent of the higher consciousness in its form or tendency of stillness and silence. It is a perfectly sound conclusion that one who gets these experiences at the beginning has the capacity of Yoga in him and can open, even if the opening is delayed by other movements belonging to his ordinary nature. These things are part of the science of Yoga, as familiar as the crucial experiences of physical Science are to the scientific seeker.

As for the impression of swooning, it is simply because you were not in sleep, as you imagined, but in a first condition of what is usually called svapna samādhi, dream trance. What you felt like swooning was only the tendency to go deeper in, into a more profound svapna samādhi or else into a susūpta trance —
The Value of Experiences

the latter being what the word trance usually means in English, but it can be extended to the *svapna* kind also. To the outer mind this deep loss of the surface consciousness seems like a swoon, though it is really nothing of the kind — hence the impression. Many sadhaks here get at times or sometimes for a long period this deeper *svapna samādhi* in what began as sleep — with the result that a conscious sadhana goes on in their sleeping as in their waking hours. This is different from the dream experiences that one has on the vital or mental plane which are themselves not ordinary dreams but actual experiences on the mental, vital, psychic or subtle physical planes. You have had several dreams which were vital dream experiences, those in which you met the Mother, and recently you had one such contact on the mental plane which, for those who understand these things, means that the inner consciousness is preparing in the mind as well as in the vital, which is a great advance.

You will ask why these things take place either in sleep or in an indrawn meditation and not in the waking state. There is a twofold reason. First, that usually in Yoga these things begin in an indrawn state and not in the waking condition, — it is only if or when the waking mind is ready that they come as readily in the waking state. Again in you the waking mind has been too active in its insistence on the ideas and operations of the outer consciousness to give the inner mind a chance to project itself into the waking state. But it is through the inner consciousness and primarily through the inner mind that these things come; so, if there is not a clear passage from the inner to the outer, it must be in the inner states that they first appear. If the waking mind is subject or surrendered to the inner consciousness and willing to become its instrument, then even from the beginning these openings can come through the waking consciousness. That again is a familiar law of the Yoga.

I may add that when you complain of the want of response, you are probably expecting immediately some kind of direct manifestation of the Divine which, as a rule though there are exceptions, comes only when previous experiences have prepared the consciousness so that it may feel, understand, recognise the
response. Ordinarily the spiritual or divine consciousness comes first — what I have called the higher consciousness — the presence or manifestation comes afterwards. But this descent of the higher consciousness is really the touch or influx of the Divine itself, though not at first recognised by the lower nature.

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“I will try again” is not sufficient; what is needed is to try always — steadily, with a heart free from despondency, as the Gita says, anirvin pacetas. You speak of five and a half years as if it were a tremendous time for such an object, but a Yogi who is able in that time to change radically his nature and get the concrete decisive experience of the Divine would have to be considered as one of the rare gallopers of the spiritual Way. Nobody has ever said that the spiritual change was an easy thing; all spiritual seekers will say that it is difficult but supremely worth doing. If one’s desire for the Divine has become the master desire, then surely one can give one’s whole life to it without repining and not grudge the time, difficulty or labour.

Again you speak of your experiences as vague and dream-like. In the first place the scorn of small experiences in the inner life is no part of wisdom, reason or common sense. It is in the beginning of the sadhana and for a long time the small experiences that come on each other and, if given their full value, prepare the field, build up a preparatory consciousness and one day break open the walls to big experiences. But if you despise them with the ambitious idea that you must have either the big experiences or nothing, it is not surprising that they come once in a blue moon and cannot do their work. Moreover, all your experiences were not small. There were some like the stilling descent of a Power in the body — what you used to call numbness — which anyone with spiritual knowledge would have recognised as a first strong step towards the opening of the consciousness to the higher Peace and Light. But it was not in the line of your expectations and you gave it no special value. As for vague and dreamlike, you feel it so because you are looking at them and at everything that happens in you from the standpoint of
the outward physical mind and intellect which can take only physical things as real and important and vivid and to it inward phenomena are something unreal, vague and truthless. The spiritual experience does not even despise dreams and visions; it is known to it that many of these things are not dreams at all but experiences on an inner plane and if the experiences of the inner planes which lead to the opening of the inner self into the outer so as to influence and change it are not accepted, the experiences of the subtle consciousness and the trance consciousness, how is the waking consciousness to expand out of the narrow prison of the body and the body-mind and the senses? For, to the physical mind untouched by the inner awakened consciousness, even the experience of the cosmic consciousness or the Eternal Self might very well seem merely subjective and unconvincing. It would think, “Curious, no doubt, rather interesting, but very subjective, don’t you think? Hallucinations, yes?” The first business of the spiritual seeker is to get away from the outward mind’s outlook and to look at inward phenomena with an inward mind to which they soon become powerful and stimulating realities. If one does that, then one begins to see that there is here a wide field of truth and knowledge, in which one can move from discovery to discovery to reach the supreme discovery of all. But the outer physical mind, if it has any ideas about the Divine and spirituality at all, has only hasty a priori ideas miles away from the solid ground of inner truth and experience.

I have not left myself time to deal with other matters at any length. You speak of the Divine’s stern demands and hard conditions — but what severe demands and iron conditions you are laying on the Divine! You practically say to Him, “I will doubt and deny you at every step, but you must fill me with your unmistakable Presence; I will be full of gloom and despair whenever I think of you or the Yoga, but you must flood my gloom with your rapturous irresistible Ananda; I will meet you only with my outer physical mind and consciousness, but you must give me in that the Power that will transform rapidly my whole nature.” Well, I don’t say that the Divine won’t or can’t do it, but if such a miracle is to be worked, you must give Him
some time and just a millionth part of a chance.

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There is no reason certainly for despair. The bliss always comes in drops at first, or a broken trickle. You have to go on cheerfully and in full confidence, till there is the cascade.