

Endurance—the Vital's Hunger for Praise—Signs of the Converted Vital

Let endurance be your watchword: teach the life-force in you — your vital being — not to complain but to put up with all the conditions necessary for great achievement. The body is a very enduring servant, it bears the stress of circumstance tamely like a beast of burden. It is the vital being that is always grumbling and uneasy. The slavery and torture to which it subjects the physical is almost incalculable. How it twists and deforms the poor body to its own fads and fancies, irrationally demanding that everything should be shaped according to its whimsicality! But the very essence of endurance is that the vital should learn to give up its capricious likes and dislikes and preserve an equanimity in the midst of the most trying conditions. When you are treated roughly by somebody or you lack something which would relieve your discomfort, you must keep up cheerfully instead of letting yourself be disturbed. Let nothing ruffle you the least bit, and whenever the vital tends to air its petty grievances with pompous exaggeration just stop to consider how very happy you are, compared to so many in this world. Reflect for a moment on what the soldiers who fought in the last war had to go through. If you had to bear such hardships you would realise the utter silliness of your dissatisfactions. And yet I do not wish you to court difficulties — what I want is simply that you should learn to endure the little insignificant troubles of your life.

Nothing great is ever accomplished without endurance. If you study the lives of great men you will see how they set themselves like flint against the weaknesses of the vital. Even today, the true meaning of our civilisation is the mastery of the physical through endurance in the vital. The spirit of sport and of adventure and the dauntless facing of odds which is evident

in all fields of life are part of this ideal of endurance. In science itself, progress depends on the countless difficult tests and trials which precede achievement. Surely, with such momentous work as we have in hand in our Ashram, we have not any less need of endurance. What you must do is to give your vital a good beating as soon as it protests; for, when the physical is concerned, there is reason to be considerate and to take precautions, but with the vital the only method is a sound “kicking”. Kick your vital the moment it complains, because there is no other way of getting out of the petty consciousness which attaches so much importance to creature comforts and social amenities instead of asking for the Light and the Truth.

One of the commonest demands of the vital is for praise. It hates to be criticised and treated as if it were of little importance. But it must be always prepared for rebuffs and stand them with absolute calm; nor must it pay attention to compliments, forgetting that each movement of self-satisfaction is an offering at the altar of the lords of falsehood. The beings of the subtle world of the life-force, with which our vital is connected, live and flourish on the worship of their devotees, and that is why they are always inspiring new cults and religions so that their feasts of worship and adulation may never come to an end. So also your own vital being and the vital forces behind it thrive — that is to say, fatten their ignorance — by absorbing the flatteries given by others. But you must remember that the compliments paid by creatures on the same level of ignorance as oneself are really worth nothing, they are just as worthless as the criticisms levelled at one. No matter from what pretentious source they derive, they are futile and empty. Unfortunately, however, the vital craves even for the most rotten food and is so greedy that it will accept praise from even the very embodiments of incompetence. I am reminded of the annual opening of the Arts Exhibition in Paris, when the President of the Republic inspects the pictures, eloquently discovering that one is a landscape and another a portrait, and making platitudinous comments with

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the air of a most intimate soul-searching knowledge of Painting. The painters know very well how inept the remarks are and yet miss no chance of quoting the testimony of the President to their genius. For such indeed is the vital in mankind, ravenously fame-hungry.

What, however, is of genuine worth is the opinion of the Truth. When there is somebody who is in contact with the Divine Truth and can express it, then the opinions given out are no mere compliments or criticisms but what the Divine thinks of you, the value it sets on your qualities, its unerring stamp on your efforts. It must be your desire to hold nothing in esteem except the word of the Truth; and in order thus to raise your standard you must keep Agni, the soul's flame of transformation, burning in you. It is noteworthy how, when Agni flares up, you immediately develop a loathing for the cheap praise which formerly used to gratify you so much, and understand clearly that your love of praise was a low movement of the untransformed nature. Agni makes you see what a vast vista of possible improvement stretches in front of you, by filling you with a keen sense of your present insufficiency. The encomium lavished on you by others so disgusts you that you feel almost bitter towards those whom you would have once considered your friends; whereas all criticism comes as a welcome fuel to your humble aspiration towards the Truth. No longer do you feel depressed or slighted by the hostility of others. For, at least, you are able to ignore it with the greatest ease; at the most, you appreciate it as one more testimony to your present unregenerate state, inciting you to surpass yourself by surrendering to the Divine.

Another remarkable sign of the conversion of your vital, owing to Agni's influence, is that you face your difficulties and obstacles with a smile. You do not sit any more in sackcloth and ashes, lamenting over your mistakes and feeling utterly crestfallen because you are not at the moment quite up to the mark. You simply chase away depression with a smile. A hundred mistakes do not matter to you: with a smile you recognise

that you have erred and with a smile you resolve not to repeat the folly in the future. All depression and gloom is created by the hostile forces who are never so pleased as when throwing on you a melancholy mood. Humility is indeed one thing and depression quite another, the former a divine movement and the latter a very crude expression of the dark forces. Therefore, face your troubles joyously, oppose with invariable cheerfulness the obstacles that beset the road to transformation. The best means of routing the enemy is to laugh in his face! You may grapple and tussle for days and he may still show an undiminished vigour; but just once laugh at him and lo! he takes to his heels. A laugh of self-confidence and of faith in the Divine is the most shattering strength possible — it disrupts the enemy's front, spreads havoc in his ranks and carries you triumphantly onwards.

The converted vital feels also a joy in the process of realisation. All the difficulties implied in that process it accepts with gusto, it never feels happier than when the Truth is shown it and the play of falsehood in its lower nature laid bare. It does not do the Yoga as if carrying a burden on its back but as if it were a very pleasurable occupation. It is willing to endure the utmost with a smile if it is a condition of the transformation. Neither complaining nor grumbling, it endures happily because it is for the sake of the Divine that it does so. It has the unshakable conviction that the victory will be won. Never for an instant does it vacillate in its belief that the mighty work of Change taken up by Sri Aurobindo is going to culminate in success. For that indeed is a fact; there is not a shadow of doubt as to the issue of the work we have in hand. It is no mere experiment but an inevitable manifestation of the Supramental. The converted vital has a prescience of the victory, keeps up a will towards progress which never turns its back, feels full of the energy which is born of its certitude about the triumph of the Divine whom it is aware of always in itself as doing whatsoever is necessary and infusing in it the unfaltering power to resist and finally conquer its enemies. Why should it despair or complain?

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The transformation is going to be: nothing will ever stop it, nothing will frustrate the decree of the Omnipotent. Cast away, therefore, all diffidence and weakness, and resolve to endure bravely awhile before the great day arrives when the long battle turns into an everlasting victory.