Chapter Two
Desire

The Nature of Desire

Most men are, like animals, driven by the forces of Nature: whatever desires come, they fulfil them, whatever emotions come they allow them to play, whatever physical wants they have, they try to satisfy. We say then that the activities and feelings of men are controlled by their Prakriti, and mostly by the vital and physical nature. The body is the instrument of the Prakriti or Nature — it obeys its own nature or it obeys the vital forces of desire, passion, etc.

But man has also a mind and, as he develops, he learns to control his vital and physical nature by his reason and by his will. This control is very partial: for the reason is often deluded by vital desires and the ignorance of the physical and it puts itself on their side and tries to justify by its ideas, reasonings or arguments their mistakes and wrong movements. Even if the reason keeps free and tells the vital or the body, “Do not do this”, yet the vital and the body often follow their own movement in spite of the prohibition — man’s mental will is not strong enough to compel them.

When people do sadhana, there is a higher Nature that works within, the psychic and spiritual, and they have to put their nature under the influence of the psychic being and the higher spiritual self or of the Divine. Not only the vital and the body but the mind also has to learn the Divine Truth and obey the divine rule. But because of the lower nature and its continued hold on them, they are unable at first and for a long time to prevent their nature from following the old ways — even when they know or are told from within what to do or what not to do. It is only by persistent sadhana, by getting into the higher spiritual consciousness and spiritual nature that this difficulty
can be overcome; but even for the strongest and best sadhaks it takes a long time.

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All the ordinary vital movements are foreign to the true being and come from outside; they do not belong to the soul nor do they originate in it but are waves from the general Nature, Prakriti.

The desires come from outside, enter the subconscious vital and rise to the surface. It is only when they rise to the surface and the mind becomes aware of them, that we become conscious of the desire. It seems to us to be our own because we feel it thus rising from the vital into the mind and do not know that it came from outside. What belongs to the vital, to the being, what makes it responsible is not the desire itself, but the habit of responding to the waves or the currents of suggestion that come into it from the universal Prakriti.

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It should be quite clear to you what the two opposite things are, the two things with which every sadhak is faced. One is the vehemence of earthly egoistic desire which brings only confusion and suffering and the other is the peace, force, joy, light of understanding which is the divine in you and which we are striving to establish in you. When you put yourself on the right side, things become easy; when you hesitate and are divided, there is a double state; when something in you receives and clings to the desires, then all goes wrong. You must learn to put always the weight of your choice on the right side. Certainly I shall do all to get the wrong will changed and the right one put in its place — whatever is the resistance or difficulty, that I shall do always.

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It is again the old vain imagination prompted by an uprising of the dissatisfied desires of the vital nature. Evidently the old wrong attitude of desire must have been waiting for its opportunity and it gave the opportunity also for the old vital to
Desire

rise and indulge in its accustomed movements. It is also evident that it was the pressure of the desire coming up from below that removed the Ananda. The psychic Ananda and the desires of the complaining and clamouring vital cannot go together; if desire comes up, the Ananda is obliged to draw back — unless you reject the desire in time and refuse to make any compromise with it. Especially when the Mother was giving you wideness and peace and intense Ananda, it was irrational in the extreme to give room to an external desire and sacrifice all that for its sake.

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Saturate your mind and vital with the Truth and remain calm and still. It is from unsatisfied desire that all suffering arises; take your stand on a calm free from desire. When that has come, all else of the Divine Truth, Love and Ananda can come and stand securely upon it.

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All belongs to the Divine — there must be no ego or desire — only the Divine and its Light, Knowledge, Power, Ananda, action. But all this must come from above — not from the mixed lower cosmic forces.

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It is the vital which (in everybody and not in you only) is restless, full of desires, always falling into dejection and disappointment and sorrow. The only way to escape from it is to get rid of desires — to have no will or desire other than the will of the Divine.

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That is the nature of the vital and its desires\(^1\) — vital desire and its enjoyment and dissatisfactions and uneasinesses almost always go together.

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\(^1\) The correspondent wrote that when he had tried to fulfil a vital desire, it led to a condition of unquietness and misery. — Ed.
If you are anxious for them [material possessions], that means that you have desire and are bound. Ananda is one thing and vital enjoyment is another. One can have the rasa of a beautiful thing, for instance a picture, without wanting or needing to possess it or turn it to one’s own purpose. Where that want comes in, there is vital desire. The sign of freedom from attachment is that one has no craving and can do without things without feeling anything for that or disappointment at their loss or absence or hankering or wish to have them. If one has, one takes the rasa in a free unattached way — if one does not get or loses them, it makes not the slightest difference. The true Ananda is the Ananda of the Divine and when one has the Yogic consciousness, it is the Divine one sees everywhere and has the Ananda of that, but there is no attachment to objects as objects.

It is not necessary to be a Sannyasi to have this inner freedom; it is only necessary to be sincere. There are many who say, “I have no attachment”, but it is a self-deception. Therefore one must examine oneself very closely and strictly and see what is left of desire or attachment and reject it. This is difficult for the ordinary consciousness and never wholly achieved by it, even if things are outwardly given up; it is easy if the higher consciousness is there in all the parts of the being, provided one opens all one’s movements to its Light.

* About the attachment to things, the physical rejection of them is not the best way to get rid of it. Accept what is given you, ask for what is needed and think no more of it — attaching no importance, using them when you have, not troubled if you have not. That is the best way of getting rid of the attachment.

* Kāmanā bāsanā have no part in Yoga, they cannot be its help (sahāya), they can only be hindrances. So long as desire and ego remain, there can be no surrender to the Divine, no fulfilment in the Yoga. They are movements of the vital and cannot be anything else.
Egoless strength is strength which does not act for selfish motives or for the desires of the vital or to carry out the ideas of one's own mind, but exists only for the service of the Divine and as an instrument of the Divine.

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The seat of desire is not so much in the emotional as in the lower vital — but the desires rise up from there into the emotional part and even into the thinking mind.

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It is always the habit of the vital being to find out things by which it persuades the mind and justifies its desires; and circumstances usually shape themselves to justify it still farther. For what we have within us creates the circumstances outside us. What matters is that you should take inwardly a different position in the future.

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When you clutch at anything and try to make it your own with an egoistic sense of possession, then however beautiful and wonderful it may be, it loses its value and becomes ordinary.

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It is often the experience that when one gives up the insistence of desire for a thing, then the thing itself comes. The right attitude is to wait on the Divine Will and seek that only — desire always creates perturbation and even its fulfilment does not satisfy. Aspiration is a different thing. The oscillation between the two conditions you speak of, is the sign of a struggle in the physical consciousness — it must end by the Peace and Power fixing itself there, then the other will disappear.

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The desire for the Divine or bhakti for the Divine is the one desire which can free one from all the others — at the core it is not a desire, but an aspiration, a soul need, the breath of
existence of the inmost being, and as such it cannot be counted among desires.

The Small Desires of the Vital Physical

It is the vital physical that receives these suggestions and obeys these desires. What you have to do is to get the consciousness down into the whole of the vital proper — so that not only the mind but the vital itself will reject these desires. In that case the vital-physical desires will lose half their force.

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If the peace and power that were acting on the head and in the chest have come down into the stomach and below, that would indicate that they are no longer acting on the mind and emotional being only, but fully on the vital also — that is a great progress.

The desires you refer to are those of the vital-physical in the subtle physical consciousness — impulse to talk, essential hunger, thirst, etc. Peace and quietude full in the vital-physical and subtle physical and down even in the lowest levels are necessary for the whole change to be made. The heat of which you speak is that of this subtle principle of vital-physical desire which exists for its own sake, not for the real needs of the body — that is why physical satisfaction does not diminish it.

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These habits of the physical vital are almost automatic in their action and it takes either a very strong will or a persistent effort of self-discipline to get out this automatic, almost reflex action. You should not therefore be discouraged by the difficulty, but go on with the necessary perseverance of the will to press it out of existence.

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It is the small habits of the lower vital being which gather all their strength to resist eviction and try to occupy the con-
Desire 257

sciousness. When they come you must learn to detach your inner consciousness from them entirely so that even when they strongly come they will not be able to occupy the consciousness or get any assent.

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The vital in the physical easily slips back to its old small habits if it gets a chance. It is there that they stick. They go entirely only when that part gets equanimity and a simple natural freedom from all desires.

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You have done rightly about the things. These small desires obstruct greatly the change in the outer consciousness and the being must be free from them if the transformation is not to be hampered there.

Desire and Need

It would certainly be very easy if all that one had to do were to follow one’s desires; but to be governed by one’s desires is not Yoga.

Need and want are not the same thing. The fact that they [the sadhaks] could go on without it [a lemon each day] for so long shows that it was not a need.

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Desire is a psychological movement, and it can attach itself to a “true need” as well as to things that are not true needs. One must approach even true needs without desire. If one does not get them, one must feel nothing.

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The necessities of a sadhak should be as few as possible; for there are only a very few things that are real necessities in life. The rest are either utilities or things decorative to life or luxuries. These a Yogi has a right to possess or enjoy only on one of two conditions —
(1) If he uses them during his sadhana solely to train himself in possessing things without attachment or desire and learn to use them rightly, in harmony with the Divine Will, with a proper handling, a just organisation, arrangement and measure — or,

(2) if he has already attained a true freedom from desire and attachment and is not in the least moved or affected in any way by loss or withholding or deprival. If he has any greed, desire, demand, claim for possession or enjoyment, any anxiety, grief, anger or vexation when denied or deprived, he is not free in spirit and his use of the things he possesses is contrary to the spirit of sadhana. Even if he is free in spirit, he will not be fit for possession if he has not learned to use things not for himself, but for the Divine Will, as an instrument, with the right knowledge and action in the use for the proper equipment of a life lived not for oneself but for and in the Divine.

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It should not be difficult for the man devoted to the spiritual aim [to depend on the Divine for material things] — for he is always expected to rely on the Divine even in his ordinary life in the world — such dependence being part of his mental atmosphere and the constitution of his vital nature.

**Demand and Desire**

If to you X says that her suffering and ill-health are due to your behaviour, to Y she has said it is all due to the bad room she has got! In fact it is due to her vital cherishing desires and getting disappointed because they are not fulfilled. If one cherishes desires, there is bound to be disappointment and suffering, especially if at the same time one does Yoga and takes up the spiritual life. For such desires, demand for vital affection and love from men and demand for physical comforts are not consistent with the spirit of Yoga in which one must turn one’s heart to the Divine and be vitally pure and in physical things must be content with what one gets and equal-minded in all conditions. You were quite right in telling her that these outer
Desire

demands should be given up altogether.

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To yield to depression when things go wrong is the worst way of meeting the difficulty. There must be some desire or demand within you, conscious or subconscious, that gets excited and revolt against its not being satisfied. The best way is to be conscious of it, face it calmly and steadily throw it out.

If the lower vital (not the mind only) could permanently make up its mind that all desire and demand are contrary to the Truth and no longer call for them, these things would lose very soon their force of return.

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It is not a demand to ask for things that one finds helpful, but it becomes a demand if there enters into it a feeling of claim, resentment when it is not conceded or other vital reactions. Be on your guard against any invasion by these reactions; the vital can only be conquered and changed and the physical opened up on a basis of faith and surrender and the psychic response overpowering all others.

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Demand and desire are only two different aspects of the same thing — nor is it necessary that a feeling should be agitated or restless to be a desire; it can be, on the contrary, quietly fixed and persistent or persistently recurrent. Demand or desire comes from the mental or the vital and a psychic or spiritual need is a different thing. The psychic does not demand or desire; it aspires; it does not make conditions for its surrender or withdraw if its aspiration is not immediately satisfied — for the psychic has complete trust in the Divine or in the guru and can wait for the right time or the hour of the divine grace. The psychic has an insistence of its own, but it puts its pressure not on the Divine, but on the nature, placing a finger of light on all the defects there that stand in the way of the realisation, sifting out all that is mixed, ignorant or imperfect in the experience or in
the movements of the Yoga and never satisfied with itself or with the nature till it has got it perfectly open to the Divine, free from all forms of ego, surrendered, simple and right in the attitude and all the movements. This is what has to be established entirely in the mind and vital and in the physical consciousness before supramentalisation of the whole nature is possible. Otherwise what one gets is more or less brilliant, half luminous, half cloudy illuminations and experiences on the mental and vital and physical planes, half truth, half error or at the best true only for those planes and inspired either from some larger mind or larger vital or at the best from the mental reaches above the human that intervene between the intellect and the Overmind. These can be very stimulating and satisfying up to a certain point and are good for those who want some spiritual realisation on these planes; but the supramental realisation is something much more difficult and exacting in its conditions and the most difficult of all is to bring it down on to the physical level.

**Getting Rid of Desire**

The satisfaction of the vital desires is a normal feature of the ordinary life, only it must be controlled and regulated by the mental will, so that one may not be enslaved to the desires. It is only if one turns to the spiritual life that one has to get rid of vital desires.

* It is not Yoga to give free play to the natural instincts and desires. Yoga demands mastery over the nature, not subjection to the nature.

* Is there any time in the “straight path” for satisfying desires? If desire is not mastered, how can there be any straight walking on the straight path?

* You do not seem to have a correct idea of the nature of vital
Desire 261
desire. Vital desire grows by being indulged, it does not become satisfied. If your desire were indulged, it would begin to grow more and more and ask for more and more. That has been our constant experience with the sadhaks and it confirms what has always been known about desire. Desire and envy have to be thrown out of the consciousness — there is no other way to deal with them.

That [indulging desire] is a mistake many have made because the vital wanted to make it. Whether ascetic or non-ascetic, the Yogi, the sadhak must become free from vital desire and spiritually master of the movements of his nature — and for that he must be free from ego and desire and duality. I have always made that quite clear — that indulgence of desire is no more part of this Yoga than it is of Sannyasa. One must be able to use and handle physical things and physical life, but from the spiritual consciousness, not from the level of the vital ego.

It is the old vital nature that feels its human worldly desires will not be satisfied and feels like this. All that has not to be indulged but rejected and swept aside. In its place must come the wideness in which there is a self-existent peace and satisfaction and into that peace and wideness must come the Mother’s greater peace, force, light, knowledge, Ananda.

The vital always wants the things of ordinary life, sex, rich food, enjoyments of all kinds; it does not get full satisfaction out of them, but it feels dissatisfied without them. The only way to get rid of it is to reject desire of these things from the vital itself and to have only the aspiration for the Divine in all parts of the being.

2 The correspondent observed that because Sri Aurobindo had condemned asceticism, many took it as a sanction to continue fulfilling their desires. — Ed.
Everything which it hankers after is desirable to the vital — but the desire has to be rejected. “I won’t desire” is quite the right thing to say, even if “I don’t desire” cannot yet be said by the vital. Still there is something in the being that can even say “I don’t desire” and refuse to recognise the vital desire as part of the true being. It is that consciousness which the peace and power bring that has to be recognised as the true “I” and made permanent in front.

* It is difficult to get rid of desires altogether all at once — if the right ones have the upper hand, that already makes the ultimate victory sure. Therefore don’t allow that to trouble you. A progressive change is the way these things work out — and if the progress has begun, then there can be a fundamental sense of certitude about the outcome of the sadhana and a quiet view upon what has to be done because it is sure to be done.

* Desire always takes a long time to get rid of entirely. But, if you can once get it out of the nature and realise it as a force coming from outside and putting its claws into the vital and physical, it will be easier to get rid of the invader. You are too accustomed to feel it as part of yourself or planted in you — that makes it more difficult for you to deal with its movements and dismiss its ancient control over you.

You should not rely on anything else alone, however helpful it may seem, but chiefly, primarily, fundamentally on the Mother’s Force. The Sun and the Light may be a help, and will be if it is the true Light and the true Sun, but cannot take the place of the Mother’s Force.

* It is good. No one can easily get rid of desires. What has first to be done is to exteriorise them, to push them out on the surface and get the inner parts quiet and clear. Afterwards they can be
thrown out and replaced by the true thing, a happy and luminous will one with the Divine’s.

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It is because both your mind and vital have become sincere that the attack is strong and seems to you abnormal. Before as you were yielding from time to time, the part that wants was not acutely insistent and, when it pressed, it was not so acutely felt by the rest of the vital nature. It is your mental, psychic and higher vital beings that now stand completely apart from it. It is your physical vital that still keeps the desire and is pushed from time to time by opposite forces to make the desire active. It was also this desire that created the physical disturbance from which you suffered a few days ago. You must get rid of this desire of the lower vital altogether.

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The fear is again that of the physical consciousness or of the vital element in it — it is afraid if it gives up desire that it will lose everything — or everything it wants — and gain nothing in exchange or at least nothing it wants. It does not realise that it will get something far greater and more powerful and happy in place of this troubled desire and its doubtful and precarious fruits — for it has been accustomed to think of desire as the only possible motive of life. It does not know that the divine Force is there waiting to descend with its light and peace and joy bringing much greater things and a happier life. When this part can be enlightened and persuaded to want wholeheartedly the change, then a great difficulty, indeed the central difficulty will have gone.

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There was and is the opening before you of a new stage in your spiritual development. For it to realise itself you must progress first in two directions. The first we have already pressed on you — the surmounting of these vital temptations and desires which linked you to the lower movements and invited the pressure of a
hostile Force on your lower vital and your body and the complete surrender of life and body to the One alone. The other is the descent of a full calm and strength and equanimity into these parts so that you may conquer life and its difficulties and do your work for the Divine. This calm and strength had often descended into your mind and higher vital, but these other parts were still open to much weakness and attachment and a self-indulgent movement. That must go if one wants to become a hero and master of spiritual action. In your life at Bogra these things were too much sheltered and allowed to remain; at Shillong you have a chance to be by yourself with the Divine Force and look life in the face from the soul’s inner strength and become master of circumstances. Outer difficulties or inconveniences you should not allow to alarm or depress you. Inner difficulties should also be met with detachment, calm equality, the unshakable will to conquer.

For the rest, you have rightly said, “I must preserve my equanimity and have faith in Divine Guidance when falsehood” — or any trouble or difficulty — “confronts me.” The defect that opened the way to the bodily and other troubles was the faltering in your resolution to conquer the vital and follow the straight and high path and the consequent violent despair and depression it brought in its wake. Let those disappear altogether and do not allow them to rise in that way again. The path of spiritual calm and strength and the consecration of all your forces to the Divine is the one safe way for you and that you must now consistently follow.

Desire and Suppression (Nigraha)

The rejection of desire is essentially the rejection of the element of craving, putting that out from the consciousness itself as a foreign element not belonging to the true self and the inner nature. But refusal to indulge the suggestions of desire is also a part of the rejection; to abstain from the action suggested, if it is not the right action, must be included in the Yogic discipline. It is only when this is done in the wrong way, by a mental ascetic principle or a hard moral rule, that it can be called suppression.
The difference between suppression and an inward essential rejection is the difference between mental or moral control and a spiritual purification.

When one lives in the true consciousness one feels the desires outside oneself, entering from outside, from the universal lower Prakriti, into the mind and the vital parts. In the ordinary human condition this is not felt; men become aware of the desire only when it is there, when it has come inside and found a lodging or a habitual harbourage and so they think it is their own and a part of themselves. The first condition for getting rid of desire is, therefore, to become conscious with the true consciousness; for then it becomes much easier to dismiss it than when one has to struggle with it as if it were a constituent part of oneself to be thrown out from the being. It is easier to cast off an accretion than to excise what is felt as a parcel of our substance.

When the psychic being is in front, then also to get rid of desire becomes easy; for the psychic being has in itself no desires, it has only aspirations and a seeking and love for the Divine and all things that are or tend towards the Divine. The constant prominence of the psychic being tends of itself to bring out the true consciousness and set right almost automatically the movements of the nature.

It is true that the mere suppression or holding down of desire is not enough, not by itself truly effective, but that does not mean that desires are to be indulged; it means that desires have not merely to be suppressed, but to be rejected from the nature. In place of desire there must be a single-minded aspiration towards the Divine.

As for love, the love must be turned singly towards the Divine. What men call by that name is a vital interchange for mutual satisfaction of desire, vital impulse or physical pleasure. There must be nothing of this interchange between sadhaks; for to seek for it or indulge this kind of impulse only leads away from the sadhana.
Your theory is a mistaken one. The free expression of a passion may relieve the vital for a time, but at the same time it gives it a right to return always. It is not reduced at all. Suppression with inner indulgence in subtle forms is not a cure, but expression in outer indulgence is still less a cure. It is perfectly possible to go on without manifestation if one is resolute to arrive at a complete control, the control being not a mere suppression but an inner and outer rejection.

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Not necessarily suppression [is indicated by the refusal to feed a desire], if the refusal of food is accompanied by detachment in the major part of the being. The difference between suppression (nigraha) and self-control (samyama) is that one says, “I cannot help desiring but I will not satisfy my desire”, while the other says, “I refuse the desire as well as the satisfaction of the desire”.

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Nigraha means holding down the movement, but a movement merely held down is only suspended — it is better to reject and dismiss, detaching yourself from it.