Chapter One

The Nature of the Vital

Living in the Vital

Man is a mental being and cannot come from the vital, although part of him may live on the vital plane or rather in connection with it. Most men in fact live much in the vital and therefore when they practise sadhana it is first on the vital plane that they find themselves, in dreams, experiences etc. When the supramental opens then something will descend from the supramental in each as he becomes ready and forms a supramental Purusha in him. What he is now, cannot limit what he will become.

That [a routine of work and study] is not living in the vital — these are physical and mental occupations merely. Living in the vital is a psychological condition.

Most people live in their vital. That means that they live in their desires, sensations, emotional feelings, vital imaginations and see and experience and judge everything from that point of view. It is the vital that moves them, the mind being at its service, not its master. In Yoga also many people do sadhana from that plane and their experience is full of vital visions, formations, experiences of all kinds, but there is no mental clarity or order, neither do they rise above the mind. It is only the minority of men who live in the mind or in the psychic or try to live on the spiritual plane.

Of course most men live in their physical mind and vital, except a few saints and a rather larger number of intellectuals. That is why, as it is now discovered, humanity has made little progress in the last three thousand years, except in information and material
equipment. A little less cruelty and brutality perhaps, more plasticity of the intellect in the elite, a quicker habit of change in forms, that is all.

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A vital life, “a little higher than the animals” because of some play of mind, with death as its answer is all that human existence is as it is ordinarily envisaged. And yet there is an aspiration for something more; but the religions take hold of it and canalise it into something pointless for life and things remain as they are. Only a few indeed get beyond this limit.

The “after all” is indeed only an excuse. Nobody can become more than human if he refuses to make a sacrifice of his ego — for “human” means a vital animal ego mentalised by a little outward thought and knowledge. So long as one is satisfied with remaining that, one will remain human “even here” or anywhere.

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People are living now so much in the vital when they do not live in the intellect, and so unguardedly and without restraint, the old mental conventions and restraints being in a state of deliquescence, that catastrophes are likely to be common. The disappearance of conventions and the urge to a larger life are in themselves good things, but on condition that a greater control and a truer harmony are discovered. At present people are going about it in the wrong way — hence the perilous condition of Europe and of the world. Nor are these convulsed and insecure conditions a very favourable environment for the development of a spiritual life either. But it seems that it is in the midst of difficulties that it is destined to come.

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The times now are both worse and better than in Wordsworth’s — on one side there is a collapse into the worst parts of human

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1 *The correspondent wrote, “When people say — even here — ‘After all we are human, we have not become gods’, it seems to me only an excuse.” — Ed.*
nature and a riot of the vital forces, on the other there is in compensation a greater seeking for something beyond and a seeking with more light and knowledge in it.

The Irrationality of the Vital

The vital started in its evolution with obedience to impulse and not reason — as for strategy, the only strategy it understands is some tactics by which it can compass its desires. It does not like the voice of knowledge and wisdom — but curiously enough by the necessity which has grown up in man of justifying action by reason, the vital mind has developed a strategy of its own which is to get the reason to find out reasons for justifying its own feelings and impulses. When the reason is too clear to lend itself to this game, the vital falls back on its native habit of shutting its ears and going on its course. In these attacks, the plea of unfitness, “Since you are not pleased with my impulses and I can’t change them, that shows I am unfit, so I had better go”, is the counter-strategy it adopts. But even if one counters that, the impulse itself is sufficient, coming strongly as it does from universal Nature, to restore to the vital for a short time its old blind irrational instinct to obey the push that has come.

The doubts of the sadhaks more often rise from the vital than from the true mental — when the vital goes wrong or is in trouble or depression, the doubts rise and repeat themselves in the same form and the same language, no matter how much the mind had been convinced by either patent proofs or intellectual answers. I have noticed that always. The vital is irrational (even when it uses the reason to justify itself) and it believes or disbelieves according to its feeling, not according to reason.

The opposition of the vital is never reasonable, even when it puts forward reasons. It acts from its nature and habit of desire, not from reason.
The Deceptiveness of the Vital

The vital always prefers to cover its movements from the Light.

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The whole significance of your sentences was that you had made all the necessary resolutions, but you could not carry them out because the Force refused to support you. That is the usual trick of the vital mind when it wants to rid itself of the blame for difficulties or want of progress in the sadhana: “I am doing all I can, but the Force is not supporting me.” It is no use your quoting other sentences, because you write now one thing, now another, shifting your ground for the sake of your argument. If logic could help you to get rid of this trickery of the vital mind, it would be worth while learning Logic.

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As to what you ask about anything else being behind than what your mind was conscious of in its surface intention, there is more often than not something behind when the vital meddles in the matter — and it is a part of self-knowledge not to be misled by the mind’s surface movements but to detect this something behind. For it is the habit of the vital to make a mask of the mind’s arrangements about feelings and actions in order to conceal even from the self-observation of the doer the secret underlying motive or forces behind the speech, act or feelings.

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It is indeed amazing that you should have lost yourself to an extravagant deception such as X has set on foot. It is simply the spirit of vital falsehood, dramatic and romantic, obscuring the reason and shutting out common sense and simple truth. To clear the vital, you must get out of it all compromise with falsehood — no matter how specious the reason it advances — and get the habit of simple straightforward psychic truth engraved in it so that nothing may have a chance to enter. If this lesson can be imprinted in that part of the vital which is capable
of such compromises, some good will come out of this wrong movement. Put the Mother’s notice henceforth at the door of your vital being, “No falsehood hereafter shall ever enter here”, and station a sentry there to see that it is put into execution.

* You have to develop discrimination so that it becomes impossible for the vital to deceive you.

* If there is this unconsciousness, you have to learn to be conscious in all your actions, so that the vital movements will no longer be able to deceive you or take any cover. You must make a point of being perfectly sincere in looking at these vital movements and seeing them as they are.

If once you can open in the psychic being and keep it open, then from within yourself will come constantly a perception that will show you at each step the actual truth and keep you on your guard against any kind of deception. If you aspire constantly and allow the peace to grow and the Force to work in you, this opening will come.

A Good Instrument But a Bad Master

The human vital is almost always of that nature [full of desires and fancies], but that is no reason why one should accept it as an unchangeable fact and allow a restless vital to drive one as it likes. Even apart from Yoga, in ordinary life, only those are considered to have full manhood or are likely to succeed in their life, their ideals or their undertakings who take in hand this restless vital, concentrate and control it and subject it to discipline. It is by the use of the mental will that they discipline it, compelling it to do not what it wants but what the reason or the will sees to be right or desirable. In Yoga one uses the inner will and compels the vital to submit itself to tapasya so that it may become calm, strong, obedient — or else one calls down the calm from above obliging the vital to renounce desire
and become quiet and receptive. The vital is a good instrument but a bad master. If you allow it to follow its likes and dislikes, its fancies, its desires, its bad habits, it becomes your master and peace and happiness are no longer possible. It becomes not your instrument or the instrument of the Divine Shakti, but of any force of the Ignorance or even any hostile force that is able to seize and use it.

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Yes, that is the nature of the vital. It can make the absolute and enthusiastic surrender as well as cause all the trouble possible. Without the vital there is no life or force of action or manifestation; it is a necessary instrument of the spirit for life.

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Vitality means life-force — wherever there is life, in plant or animal or man, there is life-force — without the vital there can be no life in matter and no living action. The vital is a necessary force and nothing can be done or created in the bodily existence, if the vital is not there as an instrument. Even sadhana needs that vital force.

But if the vital is unregenerate and enslaved to desire, passion and ego, then it is as harmful as it can otherwise be helpful. Even in ordinary life the vital has to be controlled by the mind and mental will, otherwise it brings disorder or disaster. When people speak of a vital man, they mean one under the domination of vital force not controlled by the mind or the spirit. The vital can be a good instrument, but it is a bad master.

The vital has not to be killed or destroyed, but purified and transformed by the psychic and spiritual control.

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What has been put into the vital receptacle by life can be got out by reversing it, turning it towards the Divine and not towards yourself. You will then find that the vital is as excellent an instrument as it is a bad master.

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If your will is strong and stiff, always, the vital however obstinate is bound to yield in the end and become your instrument and not your master.

**Purification of the Vital**

Purification of the vital is usually considered to be a condition for successful sadhana. One may have some experiences without it, but at least a complete detachment from the vital movements is necessary for a sustained realisation.

**Discipline of the Vital**

It is true that for the external vital an outer discipline is necessary for the purification, otherwise it remains restless and fanciful and at the mercy of its own impulses — so that no basis can be built there for a quiet and abiding higher consciousness to remain firmly. The attitude you have taken for the work is of course the best one and, applying it steadily, the progress you feel was bound to come and is sure to increase.

* To live and act under control or according to a standard of what is right — not to allow the vital or the physical to do whatever they like and not to let the mind run about according to its fancy without truth or order [is the meaning of discipline]. Also to obey those who ought to be obeyed.

* An overmastering impulse is not necessarily an inspiration of true guidance; in following always such impulses one is more likely to become a creature of random caprices. Inexhaustible energy is an excellent thing, but not an energy without discipline.

* The will ought to have the same mastery over impulses as over the thoughts. Many people find it easier to control an impulse
than to prevent a thought.

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The vital is good when it is properly used — it is a necessary instrument for action. But ordinarily it is in its lower action an instrument of ego and desire — that is why it has not to be indulged, but rather put under strong discipline.

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The vital has to be controlled and not allowed to do what it likes. It is not the vital that has to control you, it is you who have to control the vital.

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Be careful about vital movements and formations — when you allow them, you are on a dangerous slope.

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If you want the Divine and the inner life, the old vital moorings must be cut.

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It is certainly the abrupt and decisive breaking that is the easiest and best way for these things — vital habits.

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People are here to change what is wrong in their nature so that they may do an effective sadhana.

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If you want to change, you must first resolutely get rid of the defects of your vital being, persevering steadily, however difficult it may be or however long it may take, calling in always the divine help and compelling yourself always to be entirely sincere.

As for fitness and unfitness, nobody is entirely fit for this Yoga; one has to become fit by aspiration, by abhyāsa, by sincerity and surrender. If you have always desired the spiritual
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life, it is the psychic part of you that desired it, but your vital has always come in the way. Establish a sincere will in the vital; do not allow personal desires and demands and selfishness and falsehood to mix in your sadhana; then alone the vital in you will become fit for the sadhana. Lately you seem to have made a more sincere endeavour; if you want it to succeed, the endeavour must become always purer and more steady and persistent. If you practise sincerely, you will get the help needed by you.

If you take the right attitude in your work, that itself will bring the help. The right attitude is to work for the sake of the Divine, as an offering, without demand for any reward, without selfish claims and desires, without self-assertion and arrogance, not quarrelling with your fellow workers, thinking it to be the Mother’s work and not your own, and trying to feel her power behind the work. If you can do that, your nature will progress and change.

I write this much in answer to your letter because I find in it a beginning of vital sincerity which was not there before. The rest depends upon you. If you become vitally sincere, the help will be with you.

Surrender of the Vital

There is nothing definite that I can tell you. Mother finds no conscious opposition in your mind or will to surrender and transformation. But probably the difficulty lies in the vital (not mind) of the artist (the poet, painter etc. in you), because the vital of the artist is always accustomed to its independence, to follow its own way, to make and live in its own world and pursue the impulses of its nature. If that element changes, then probably surrender and transformation could be more rapid, but it is not always easy for it to change at once, it usually goes by a gradual and almost unobserved change.

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It is not at all a fact that your nature is incapable of love and bhakti; on the contrary that is the right way for you. Meditation
is all right, but it will be most profitable for you if it is directed towards the increase of love and devotion; the rest will come of itself afterwards.

Also, it is not true that your nature is incapable of surrender; you made a great progress in that direction. But the complete surrender of all parts, especially of the whole vital, is certainly difficult. It can only come with the development of the consciousness. Meanwhile, that it has not fully come, is no reason for despair or giving up.

You are taking too bleak a view of things, the usual result of your giving way to depression. You used to have this before and you got over it by persistence. Now also by persistence it will go. To make radical decisions under the influence of depression is not good. To brace yourself up and, however persistent the difficulties are, to stick it out, is always the best.

Be faithful and persevering, then, however long the way, you cannot fail to reach the goal.

Conversion of the Vital

It is not easy to compel the vital, though it can be done. It is easier by the constant pressure of the mind to persuade and convert it; but it is true that in this mental way of doing it the vital does often attach itself to the spiritual ideal for some gain of its own. The one effective way is to bring the light down always in the vital, exposing it to itself, so that it is obliged to see what is wrong with itself and in the end to wish sincerely for a change. The light can be brought upon it either from within from the psychic or from above through the mind into the vital nature. To call down this light and force from above the mind is one of the chief methods of the Yoga. But whatever way is used, it is always a work of persistent and patient spiritual labour. The vital can be converted suddenly, but even after a sudden conversion the effects of it have to be worked out, applied to every part of the vital until the effect is complete and that takes often a long time. As for the physical consciousness, that can only be converted by long spade work, as it were, — rapid changes in this or that
point can be made; but the whole change means a long and persistent endeavour.

Liberation of the Vital

The liberation you are aspiring for is indeed extremely necessary for the sadhak, but it means the liberation of the whole vital part of the nature — not a thing that can be done easily or at once. The mūla jalada is not in you or in anyone, it is in the universal vital Nature. The aspiration must be constant, patient and persistent, in the end it will prevail. To call the higher calm and peace down into the system from above is the main thing — if you feel that coming down, it will be the beginning of the liberation.

* You were getting the true consciousness down into the vital, but as the old difficulty rose again in the physical, there is again the vital attack. The sign of complete liberation will be when your vital can face this attack always without being upset or crying out, repelling its force by a calm rejecting force from within.

The Higher Vital Movement

The higher vital movement is more refined and large in motion than that of the ordinary vital. It stresses emotion rather than sensation and desire, but it is not free from demand and the desire of possession.

The Emergence of the True Vital

It is through a change in the vital that the deliverance from the blind vital energy must come — by the emergence of the true vital which is strong, wide, at peace, a willing instrument of the Divine and of the Divine alone.
The vital is an indispensable instrument — no creation or strong action is possible without it. It is simply a question of mastering it and of converting it into the true vital which is at once strong and calm and capable of great intensity and free from ego.

* It is the nature of the unregenerated vital part on the surface to do like that [express dissatisfaction, resist change]. The true vital is different, calm and strong and a powerful instrument submitted to the Divine. But for that to come forward, it is necessary first to get this fixed poise above in the mind — when the consciousness is there and the mind calm, free and wide, then the true vital can come forward.

* Why the Apollyon do you suppose that all vital things are impure? The vital has strength, ardour, enthusiasm, self-confidence, generosity, the victor spirit — a host of other very necessary things. The only difficulty is that they get mixed up with others that are impure. All the same they are there and much needed.

* It [the psychic life-energy] means the life-energy which comes from within and is in consonance with the psychic being — it is the energy of the true vital being, but in the ordinary ignorant vital it is deformed into desire.

You have to quiet and purify the vital and let the true vital emerge.

Or you have to bring the psychic in front, and the psychic will purify and psychicise the vital and then you will have the true vital energy.

* Certainly it is better if the vital is brought to the true movement — renouncing its wrong movements and asking only for growth of the self-realisation, psychic love and psychicisation of the nature. But it is possible to get rid from above of the more active
forms of obstruction even with a neutral vital.

**Vital Sincerity, Aspiration, Consecration**

It *vital sincerity* is the one-pointed will in the vital to be transformed.

* The vital can rise to the head in two ways — one to cloud the mind with the vital impulses, the other to aspire and join with the higher Consciousness. If you noticed the aspiration, it was evidently the latter movement.

* It *vital consecration* is to offer all the vital nature and its movements to the Divine so that it may be purified and only the true movements in consonance with the Divine Will may be there and all egoistic desires and impulses disappear.

* Consecration means offering and making sacred to the Mother so that the whole vital nature may belong to her and not to the lower nature.2

* As for the offering of the actions to the Divine and the vital difficulty it raises, it is not possible to avoid the difficulty, — you have to go through and conquer it. For the moment you make this attempt, the vital arises with all its restless imperfections to oppose the change. However, there are three things you can do to alleviate and shorten the difficulty:

1. Detach yourself from this vital-physical — observe it as something not yourself; reject it, refuse your consent to its claims and impulses, but quietly as the witness Purusha whose refusal

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2 *The correspondent asked the meaning of “vital consecration” and how one may offer the vital to the Mother. — Ed.*
of sanction must ultimately prevail. This ought not to be difficult for you, if you have already learned to live more and more in the impersonal Self.

2. When you are not in this impersonality, still use your mental will and its power of assent or refusal, — not with a painful struggle, but in the same way, quietly, denying the claims of desire, till these claims by loss of sanction and assent lose their force of return and become more and more faint and external.

3. If you become aware of the Divine above you or in your heart, call for help, for light and power from there to change the vital itself, and at the same time insist upon this vital till it itself learns to pray for the change.

Finally, the difficulty will be reduced to its smallest proportions the moment you can by the sincerity of your aspiration to the Divine and your surrender awaken the psychic being in you (the Purusha in the secret heart) so that it will come forward and remain in front and pour its influence on all the movements of the mind, the vital and the physical consciousness. The work of transformation will still have to be done, but from that moment it will no longer be so hard and painful.

**Peace and Quiet in the Vital**

What you have to aspire for and bring down in you is the peace of the Mother’s consciousness. Peace, calm, equanimity in the emotional being and the rest of the vital especially — it is that which will purify the emotions and deliver the vital.

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If you bring down the peace into your vital, it will be liberated — for even if wrong movements come, it will be able to reject them.

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A quiet and even basis [*for sadhana*] means a condition of the sadhana in which there is no tossing about between eager bursts of experience and a depressed inert or half inert condition, but
whether in progress or in difficulty there is always a quiet consciousness behind turned in confidence and faith towards the Divine.

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This quietude is not tamas at all—it is a quiescence of the ordinary rajasic movements of the nature (desire, grief, attachment and other reactions), which is very necessary in order that peace may come. It is what we may call the quiet vital—and it is in the quiet mind and the quiet vital that the true spiritual consciousness can most easily come.