Chapter Two

Sleep

The Yogic Attitude towards Sleep and Food

This is not a Yoga in which physical austerities have to be done for their own sake. Sleep is necessary for the body just as food is. Sufficient sleep must be taken, but not excessive sleep. What sufficient sleep is depends on the need of the body.

* The loss of sleep must not be there. In this Yoga we insist on regular sleep, rest, food, because then the balance can be kept between the strength of the body and the force of all that comes into it from above. Otherwise the body is not able to keep and hold what comes — there is disturbance and loss of the right poise and balance.

* The first thing I tell people when they want not to eat or sleep is that no Yoga can be done without sufficient food and sleep (see the Gita on this point). This is not Gandhi’s asram or a miracle-shop. Fasting and sleeplessness make the nerves morbid and excited and weaken the brain and lead to delusions and fantasies. The Gita says Yoga is not for one who eats too much or sleeps too much, neither is it for one who does not eat or does not sleep, but if one eats and sleeps suitably — yuktāhāri yuktanidrah — then one can do it best. It is the same with everything else. How often have I said that excessive retirement was suspect to me and that to do nothing but meditate was a lopsided and therefore unsound sadhana.

* I must ask you to remember what I told you about sadhana. If
you want to do the sadhana here, you must sleep well and eat well. If you try to stop sleeping or eating or unduly diminish sleep and food, you will weaken the body and excite the vital and wrong and excited and exaggerated movements will come into you. Remember this in future.

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There are stories told of people living without sleep or food — living without sleep has happened, but it came by an abnormal condition in the person which cannot be brought at will. There is no instance of anyone living without food, — none that is to say which is beyond doubt — but that also may be possible — but here also it must depend on some abnormal condition which cannot be brought at will.

The Need of Sleep and Rest

It is not a right method to try to keep awake at night; the suppression of the needed sleep makes the body tamasic and unfit for the necessary concentration during the waking hours. The right way is to transform the sleep and not suppress it, and especially to learn how to become more and more conscious in sleep itself. If that is done, sleep changes into an inner mode of consciousness in which the sadhana can continue as much as in the waking state, and at the same time one is able to enter into other planes of consciousness than the physical and command an immense range of informative and utilisable experience.

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By not sleeping enough you weaken the forces of the physical consciousness and so the physical basis of the sadhana is less strong than it should be. It gets more open to the forces of inertia.

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Is that all your sleep [three-and-a-half hours]? If so, it is far too little. If you do not sleep enough, the body and the nervous
envelope will be weakened and the body and the nervous envelope are the basis of the sadhana.

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I am glad the peace is coming back at last and I trust it will increase and push out these other things. But how is it,— you have not been taking proper rest? Rest is absolutely necessary for the body and still more for the nervous system; not only for working but for sadhana rest to the body and the nerves is essential. If you allow them to be strained and tired, they will not be able to adapt themselves readily for the required change, all sorts of things, confusion, suggestions etc. are likely to come into a tired nervous system. They too must be strong and at peace.

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It is the want of sleep itself that brings the symptoms of uneasiness. The action of the Sadhana cannot of itself bring this kind of reaction, it is only if the body gets strained by want of sleep, insufficient food, overwork or nervous excitement that there are these things. It is probably because the nerves are strung in the daytime and you do not relax into ease that it is difficult to sleep.

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One can assimilate [spiritual experience] in sleep also. Remaining awake like that is not good, as in the end it strains the nerves and the system receives wrongly in an excited way or else gets too tired to receive.

* 

You should have continuous sleep at night and sufficient— otherwise you will feel sleepy in the day which will be a hindrance to work.

* 

Sleep is necessary; this kind of broken rest is not good. It is the consciousness in sleep itself that has to change.

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Such pressure [to sleep] only comes (1) when the body needs sleep, not having had enough or because enough rest is not given, (2) when it wants to recuperate after illness or strong fatigue, (3) when there is a pressure from above which the physical consciousness or part of it replies to by trying to go inside.

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Take care to rest enough. You must guard against fatigue as it may bring relaxation and tamas. To rest well is not tamas, as some people suppose; it can be done in the right consciousness to maintain the bodily energy — like the ōśavāsana of the strenuous Hathayogin.

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Both for fevers and for mental trouble sleep is a great help and its absence very undesirable — it is the loss of a curative agency.

The Amount of Sleep Needed

The ordinary period of sleep most people give themselves is 8 hours. In bad health (I am not speaking of acute illness) it can extend to 9. 12 hours is excessive unless one is seriously ill or recovering from illness or else has underslept for a long time and the body is making up arrears of needed sleep.

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8 hours [of sleep] at night is all right, the additional 2 hours is probably necessitated by the bad sleep you were having before. The body recoups itself in this way. That is why it is a mistake to take too little sleep — the body gets strained and has to recoup itself by abnormal sleep afterwards.

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The normal allowance of sleep is said to be 7 to 8 hours except in advanced age when it is said to be less. If one takes less (5 to 6 for instance) the body accommodates itself somehow, but if the control is taken off it immediately wants to make up for
Sleep

its lost arrears of the normal 8 hours. So often when one has tried to live on too little food, if one relaxes, the body becomes enormously rapacious for food until it has set right the credit and loss account. At least it often happens like that.

It must be the want of sleep that keeps your nervous system exposed to weakness — it is a great mistake not to take sufficient sleep. 7 hours is the minimum needed. When one has a very strong nervous system, one can reduce it to 6, sometimes even 5 — but it is rare and ought not to be attempted without necessity.

The feeling that you have in the morning proves that you need more sleep, so it is not wise to cut it short to the minimum as that in the end tells on the body. It is better to continue the sleep when you feel sleepy. 7 hours is not too much for sleep.

$5\frac{1}{2}$ hours [of sleep] is quite insufficient. Six is the absolute minimum, it can go up to seven hours.

It is not possible to do at once what you like with the body. If the body is told to sleep only 2 or 3 hours, it may follow if the will is strong enough — but afterwards it may get exceedingly strained and even break down for want of needed rest. The Yogis who minimise their sleep, succeed only after a long tapasya in which they learn how to control the forces of Nature governing the body.

The Real Rest which Restores

In sleep one very commonly passes from consciousness to deeper consciousness in a long succession until one reaches the psychic and rests there or else from higher to higher consciousness until one reaches rest in some silence and peace. The few minutes one
passes in this rest are the real sleep which restores — if one does not get it, there is only a half rest. It is when you come near to either of these domains of rest, that you begin to see these higher kind of dreams.

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A long unbroken sleep is necessary because there are just ten minutes of the whole into which one enters into a true rest — a sort of Sachchidananda immobility of the consciousness — and that it is which really restores the system. The rest of the time is spent first in travelling through various states of consciousness towards that and then coming out of it back towards the waking state. This fact of the ten minutes true rest has been noted by medical men, but of course they know nothing about Sachchidananda!

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This feeling of having enough sleep [when one wakes at night] and after sleeping again of not having had enough is not unusual. It might be inferred that the first sleep is really enough and the second is a tamasic sleep which leaves the body unrested. Some doctors say that there are about ten minutes of rest which are the true sleep and all the rest is only a process of getting into the ten minutes and getting out again — for these ten minutes are difficult to arrive at. Perhaps you get your ten minutes before the first waking. The difficulty is that the length of sleep seems important and that by the habit of less the nerves continually seem to get strained — at least I have seen that with many. If that can be overcome then so much sleep might not be requisite.

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According to a recent medical theory one passes in sleep through many phases until one arrives at a state in which there is absolute rest and silence — it lasts only for ten minutes, the rest of the time is taken up by travelling to that and travelling back again to the waking state. I suppose the ten minutes sleep can be called suṣupti in the Brahman or Brahmaloka, the rest is svapna
or passage through other worlds (planes or states of conscious existence). It is these ten minutes that restore the energies of the being, and without it sleep is not refreshing.

According to the Mother’s experience and knowledge one passes from waking through a succession of states of sleep consciousness which are in fact an entry and passage into so many worlds and arrives at a pure Sachchidananda state of complete rest, light and silence; afterwards one retraces one’s way till one reaches the waking physical state. It is this Sachchidananda period that gives sleep all its restorative value. These two accounts, the scientific and the occult-spiritual, are practically identical with each other. But the former is only a recent discovery of what the occult-spiritual knowledge knew long ago.

People’s ideas of sound sleep are absolutely erroneous. What they call sound sleep is merely a plunge of the outer consciousness into a complete subconscience. They call that a dreamless sleep; but it is only a state in which the surface sleep consciousness which is a subtle prolongation of the outer still left active in sleep itself is unable to record the dreams and transmit them to the physical mind. As a matter of fact the whole sleep is full of dreams. It is only during the brief time in which one is in the Brahmloka that the dreams cease.

**Getting Good Sleep**

The sleep before 12 is supposed to be the best.

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To sleep without a burdened stomach is obviously more healthy, both psychologically and physically.

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I don’t think the lack of sleep when it comes is due to want of work; for even those who do no work at all, get good sleep. It is something else; but it must be got over.

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It is restlessness in you which prevents you from keeping still inwardly or outwardly. To sleep well the vital and physical and mind also must learn how to relax themselves and be quiet.

Obviously — it [reading a novel before going to bed] threw you into a tamasic consciousness and consequently the sleep was heavy in a gross subconsciousness and the fatigue was the result.

You should not jump up from sleep. Rise quietly and take a little time. You must give time for the consciousness to come back fully into the body.

**Sleep during the Day**

Many people can’t stand afternoon sleep. But when it is more refreshing, it is because it is lighter than the night sleep — one does not go so deep down to the subconscient.

According to the old Ayurvedic shastra “sleep by day impairs the vitality”; but there are conditions in which the rule may not apply. It is however true that these [sexual] dreams do easily occur during sleep by day and the dreams themselves come in a state of deep subconscious relaxation, tamasic inertia when the system can be touched by any subconscious suggestion or influence.

**Sleep and Sadhana**

Sadhana can go on in the dream or sleep state as well as in the waking.

Once one is in full sadhana, sleep becomes as much a part of it as waking.
If the sleep becomes conscious even for a time, then experience and sadhana of itself can go on in the sleep state and not only in the waking condition.

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It is usually only if there is much activity of sadhana in the day that it extends also into the sleep state.

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There is no reason at all why intensity of sadhana should bring insufficient sleep.

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If you feel the need of sleep you ought to sleep. The pressure of sadhana should not be allowed to become excessive.

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It [sleepiness during the day] may possibly be due to the attempt of the higher consciousness to descend then. It sometimes produces this effect of sleepiness on the body, for the physical attempts to go inside to meet the descending consciousness and if it is not accustomed to enter into one of the higher samadhis on such occasions, the going inside translates itself to the physical as sleep. The exercise may have contributed, of course, by its reaction on the body.

Loss of Consciousness during Sleep

In sleep one easily loses the consciousness of the day, because of the lapse of the physical being into the subconscient. You have to get the power to reestablish it when you wake.

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Sleep, because of its subconscient basis, usually brings a falling down to a lower level, unless it is a conscious sleep; to make it more and more conscious is the one permanent remedy: but also until that is done, one should always react against this sinking
tendency when one wakes and not allow the effect of dull nights to accumulate. But these things need always a settled endeavour and discipline and must take time, sometimes a long time. It will not do to refrain from the effort because immediate results do not appear.

*It often, even usually happens that after sleep — not the sleep of meditation, but the ordinary sleep — one finds one's consciousness has gone down. It is no use getting distressed by that; one has to remain quiet and call back the higher consciousness.*

*The consciousness in the night almost always descends below the level of what one has gained by sadhana in the waking consciousness — unless there are special experiences of an uplifting character in the time of sleep or unless the Yogic consciousness acquired is so strong in the physical itself as to counteract the pull of the subconscient inertia. In ordinary sleep the consciousness in the body is that of the subconscient physical, which is a diminished consciousness, not awake and alive like the rest of the being. The rest of the being stands back and part of its consciousness goes out into other planes and regions and has experiences which are recorded in dreams such as that you have related. You say you go to very bad places and have experiences like the one you narrate; but that is not a sign, necessarily, of anything wrong in you. It merely means that you go into the vital world, as everybody does, and the vital world is full of such places and such experiences. What you have to do is not so much to avoid at all going there, for it cannot be avoided altogether, but to go with full protection until you get mastery in these regions of supraphysical Nature. That is one reason why you should remember us and open to the Force before sleeping; for the more you get that habit and can do it successfully, the more the protection will be with you.*
most—it is because the night is the time of sleep and relaxation and the subconscient comes up. The true consciousness comes at first in the waking state or in meditation, it takes possession of the mental, the vital, the conscious physical, but the subconscious vital and physical remain obscure and this obscurity comes up when there is sleep or an inert relaxation. When the subconscient is enlightened and penetrated by the true consciousness, this disparity disappears. The Pishachic woman that tried to enter [in a dream] is the false vital impure Shakti—and the voice that spoke was that of his psychic being. If he keeps his psychic being awake and in front, it will always protect him against these dark forces as it did this time.

* The sleep you describe in which there is a luminous silence or else the sleep in which there is Ananda in the cells, these are obviously the best states. The other hours, those of which you are unconscious, may be spells of a deep slumber in which you have gone out of the physical into the mental, vital or other planes. You say you were unconscious, but it may simply be that you do not remember what happened; for in coming back there is a sort of turning over of the consciousness, a transition or reversal, in which everything experienced in sleep except perhaps the last happening of all or else one that was very impressive, recedes from the physical awareness and all becomes as if a blank. There is another blank state, a state of inertia, not truly blank, but heavy and unremembering; but that is when one goes deeply and crassly into the subconscient; this subterranean plunge is very undesirable, obscuring, lowering, often fatiguing rather than restful, the reverse of the luminous silence.

* To get rid of the subconscient in sleep, the proper way is not to diminish sleep, for that only overstrains the body and helps the lower forces to trouble it. The right way is to change gradually (it cannot be done all of a sudden) the character of the sleep.
Conscious Sleep

At night when one sinks into the subconscious after being in a good state of consciousness, we find that state gone and we have to labour to get it back again. On the other hand, if the sleep is of the better kind, one may wake up in a good condition. Of course, it is better to be conscious in sleep, if one can.

* It is better to go to sleep and make it a discipline to become conscious in your sleep. Sleep may be only a habit, but it is a necessary habit at present and the thing to do is not to suppress, but to transform it into a conscious inner state.

* You must not try to avoid sleep at night—if you persist in doing that, the bad results may not appear immediately, but the body will get strained and there will be a breakdown which may destroy what you have gained in your sadhana.

If you want to remain conscious at night, train yourself to make your sleep conscious—not to eliminate sleep altogether, but to transform it.

* Sleep cannot be replaced, but it can be changed; for you can become conscious in sleep. If you are thus conscious, then the night can be utilised for a higher working—provided the body gets its due rest; for the object of sleep is the body’s rest and the renewal of the vital-physical force. It is a mistake to deny to the body food and sleep, as some from an ascetic idea or impulse want to do—that only wears out the physical support and, although either the Yogic or the vital energy can long keep at work an overstrained or declining physical system, a time comes when this drawing is no longer so easy nor perhaps possible. The body should be given what it needs for its own efficient working. Moderate but sufficient food (without greed or desire), sufficient sleep, but not of the heavy tamasic kind, this should be the rule.
To keep yourself awake is not permissible—it depresses the body in the end and excites the brain and leads to an unquiet and unbalanced consciousness. The body needs sufficient rest in order to be able to bear the pressure of sadhana.

You can pray or will before sleeping to be conscious in sleep, and you can get your waking mind full of the Mother. That is the best way. But you must not expect to be able to succeed all at once. First, the sleep-mind must become conscious of what it is doing in sleep; only afterwards can you determine what it is to do there.

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In the sleep what holds the body is the subconscient—and the subconscient acts according to the already formed present habits or else the impressions left by past thoughts, feelings, memories, activities. If the thought of the Mother and her force and working are fixed in the conscious hours, then it will be easier to bring it into the subconscient.

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As for asserting one’s will in sleep it is simply a matter of accustoming the subconscient to obey the will laid upon it by the waking mind before sleeping. It very often happens for instance that if you fix upon the subconscient your will to wake up at a particular hour in the morning, the subconscient will obey and you wake up automatically at that hour. This can be extended to other matters. Many have found that by putting a will against sexual dreams or emission on the subconscient before sleeping, there comes after a time (it does not always succeed at the beginning) an automatic action causing one to awaken before the dream concludes or before it begins or in some way preventing the thing forbidden from happening. Also one can develop a more conscious sleep in which there is a sort of inner consciousness which can intervene.

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This [unconsciousness in sleep] is quite usual. Consciousness in
sleep can only be gradually established with the growth of the true consciousness in the waking state.

* You cannot expect to be conscious at once in sleep: it takes a long time. If you can be always conscious in waking, then it will be easier to be conscious in sleep.

* The sleep consciousness can be effectively dealt with only when the waking mind has made a certain amount of progress.

* All dream or sleep consciousness cannot be converted at once into conscious sadhana. That has to be done progressively. But your power of conscious samadhi must increase before this can be done.

* That is all right [if the activity of sadhana goes on at night]. It shows that the sadhana is becoming continuous and that you are becoming conscious and using a conscious will in sleep as well as in waking. This is a very important step forward in the sadhana.

* You are more conscious in your sleep than in your waking condition. This is because of the physical consciousness which is not yet sufficiently open; it is only just beginning to open. In your sleep the inner being is active and the psychic there can influence more actively the mind and vital. When the physical consciousness is spiritually awake, you will no longer feel the trouble and obstruction you now have and will be as open in the waking consciousness as in sleep.

Concentration before and after Sleep

The gap made by the night and waking with the ordinary con-
consciousness is the case with everybody almost (of course, the “ordinary” consciousness differs according to the progress); but it is no use waiting to be conscious in sleep; you have to get the habit of getting back the thread of the progress as soon as may be and for that there must be some concentration after rising.

At night, you have to pass into sleep in the concentration — you must be able to concentrate with the eyes closed, lying down and the concentration must deepen into sleep — that is to say, sleep must become a concentrated going inside away from the outer waking state. If you find it necessary to sit for a time you may do so, but afterwards lie down, keeping the concentration till this happens.

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It [meditation before sleep] can certainly have an effect — though not perhaps through the whole sleep — for the sleep passes through many phases or planes and the effect is not likely to survive all these changes of consciousness and domain. It is possible however to get after a time a control and consciousness in the sleep itself. As for the subconscient, it can certainly have an effect, but most when there is a precise and positive will put upon the subconscient in the meditation.

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You have to start [becoming conscious in sleep] by concentrating before you sleep always with a specific will or aspiration. The will or aspiration may take time to reach the subconscient, but if it is sincere, strong and steady, it does reach after a time — so that an automatic consciousness and will are established in the sleep itself which will do what is necessary.

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You need not meditate at once [after waking in the morning] — but for a few minutes take a concentrated attitude calling the Mother’s presence for the day.
Hearing Music after Waking

The expression [of sweet melodious music] was of the psychic plane — and the music was of that domain. Very often coming out of a conscious sleep like that the inner consciousness (which heard the music) lasts for a few seconds even after waking, before it goes back and is entirely covered by the waking mind. In that case what was heard or seen in sleep would continue for those few seconds after waking.

The Waking Mind and Sleep

It is the waking mind which thinks and wills and controls more or less the life in the waking state. In the sleep that mind is not there and there is no control. It is not the thinking mind that sees dreams etc. and is conscious in a rather incoherent way in sleep. It is usually what is called the subconscient that comes up then. If the waking mind were active in the body, one would not be able to sleep.

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You are mixing up different things altogether — that is why you cannot understand [the previous reply]. I was simply explaining the difference between the ordinary waking consciousness and the ordinary sleep consciousness as they work in men whether sadhaks or not sadhaks — and it has nothing to do with the true self or psychic being. Sleep and waking are determined not by the true self or psychic being, but by the mind’s waking condition or activity or its cessation — when it ceases for a time, then it is the subconscious that is there on the surface and there is sleep.

Depression in Sleep

The depression coming on you in sleep must have been due to one of two causes. It might have been the trace left by an unpleasant experience in some disagreeable quarter of the vital world and there are places in plenty of that kind there. It can
hardly have been an attack, for that would surely have left a more distinct impression of something having happened, even if there was no actual memory of it; but merely to enter into certain places or meet their inhabitants or enter into contact with their atmosphere can have, unless one is a born fighter and takes an aggressive pleasure in facing and conquering these ordeals, a depressing and exhausting effect. If that is the cause, then it is a question of either avoiding these places, which can be done by an effort of will, once one knows that it is this which happens, or putting around you a special protection against the touch of that atmosphere. The other possible cause is a plunge into a too obscure and subconscious sleep— that has sometimes the effect you describe. In any case, do not allow yourself to be discouraged when these things happen; they are common phenomena one cannot fail to meet with as soon as one begins to penetrate behind the veil and touch the occult causes of the psychological happenings within us. One has to learn the causes, note and face the difficulty and always react— never accept the depression thrown on one, but react as you did the first time. If there are always forces around which are concerned to depress and discourage, there are always forces above and around us which we can draw upon, — draw into ourselves to restore, to fill up again with strength and faith and joy and the power that perseveres and conquers. It is really a habit that one has to get of opening to these helpful forces and either passively receiving them or actively drawing upon them — for one can do either. It is easier if you have the conception of them above and around you and the faith and the will to receive them — for that brings the experience and concrete sense of them and the capacity to receive at need or at will. It is a question of habituating your consciousness to get into touch and keep in touch with these helpful forces — and for that you must accustom yourself to reject the impressions forced on you by the others, depression, self-distrust, repining and all similar disturbance.

As for the actual mastery of a situation by occult powers, it can only come by use and experiment — as one develops strength by exercises or develops a process in the laboratory by finding
out through the actual use of a power how it can and ought to be
applied to the field in which it operates. It is of no use waiting
for the strength before one tries; the strength will come with
repeated trials. Neither must you fear failure or be discouraged
by failure — for these things do not always succeed at once.
These are things one has to learn by personal experiences, how
to get into touch with the cosmic forces, how to relate or equate
our individual action with theirs, how to become an instrument
of the Master Consciousness which we call the Divine.

There is something a little too personal in your attitude —
I mean the insistence on personal strength or weakness as the
determining factor. After all, for the greatest as for the smallest
of us our strength is not our own but given to us for the game
that has to be played, the work that we have to do. The strength
may be formed in us, but its present formation is not final, —
neither formation of power nor formation of weakness. At any
moment the formation may change — at any moment one sees,
especially under the pressure of Yoga, weakness changing into
power, the incapable becoming capable, suddenly or slowly the
instrumental consciousness rising to a new stature or developing
its latent powers. Above us, within us, around us is the All-
Strength and it is that that we have to rely on for our work, our
development, our transforming change. If we proceed with the
faith in the work, in our instrumentality for the work, in the
Power that missions us, then in the very act of trial, of facing
and surmounting difficulties and failures, the strength will come
and we shall find our capacity to contain as much as we need
of the All-Strength of which we grow more and more perfect
vessels.