

## Chapter Three

# Depression and Despondency

### Discouragement

Not to get discouraged when there is no immediate result is very important — for then the force within sinks and when the force within sinks there is the *tapo-bhanga* of which the old Rishis were always complaining, for each time the tapas broke they had to start afresh till it was reconstructed.

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Tell him that discouragement is the one thing that the sadhak should never indulge. One should go on steadily whether the pace is slow or hampered or swift and easy — one will always get to the goal in time. Difficulties and periods of darkness cannot be avoided — they have to be gone through with quietness and courage.

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There is no reason to be discouraged. Three years is not too much for the preparation of the nature and it is usually through fluctuations that it gradually grows nearer to the point where a continuous progress becomes possible. One has to cleave firmly to the faith in the Mother's working behind all appearances and you will find that that will carry you through.

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I do not quite know what is the drift of your questions. It sounds as if you had been allowing yourself to be influenced by a vague and confused atmosphere of discouragement and barren questioning which has caught many in the Asram. Otherwise there is no ground for any such feelings. Where you are? In the Mother's presence here and close to me. Where you are going? Towards union with the Divine through dedication and service. What

you are doing here? Service and self-giving to the Divine. The rest depends, as the Mother writes to you, on the simplicity and fullness with which you give yourself and serve. If there is anything more special in your thoughts that has disturbed you, it is better to say clearly what it is. But do not listen to the thoughts spoken or silently suggested that are moving about the Asram and of which I have spoken, for these are a poison that will only bring discontent and depression.

### Depression

The outer being does not care for the sadhana unless it gets something by it which is to it pleasant or gratifying or satisfying — depression therefore comes easy to it.

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That is how the depression works in everybody. It takes hold of this or that excuse but really it comes for its own satisfaction and not for any particular reason.

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All depression is bad as it lowers the consciousness, spends the energy, opens to adverse forces.

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After you went from here it seems that the vital difficulties which you were emerging from here came back with your return to the atmosphere and that was the cause of the violent depression and ill-health that fell upon you. The depression again was the cause why everything went wrong and the arrangements made fell through or took a wrong turn. For depression prevents the Force from flowing through and calls in the adverse forces and gives them a chance to destroy the helpful formations that are made. All the trouble and difficulty you have had will disappear or be minimised if you shake off this tendency to depression altogether.

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The vital may understand, but that is not enough, it must wholeheartedly call for the peace and transformation. There must be a large part of it unable to change its position and give up its moods or its way of receiving things; otherwise these depressions could not be so acute. There is no reason why you should not get the peace, but this must change.

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One should certainly not overestimate one's progress, but not underestimate it either. I don't know whether dwelling on the defects and weaknesses is very wholesome. To know that they are there is one thing, to keep them always before the eye may be depressing and retard the progress.

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There was nothing wrong in helping with the cooking. But if there were a wrong movement in that, it is not to be met by getting depression — for depression itself is a wrong or mistaken movement; and how can one mistake be corrected by another? The proper way to deal with a wrong movement is to look quietly at it and put the consciousness right at that point.

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It [*vital joy*] is much better than vital depression at any rate. What is wanted is an inner peace and upon that a constant cheerfulness and gladness.

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I am glad the cloud is lifting and hope to find it lifted altogether soon. It is the usual experience that if the humility and resignation are firmly founded in the heart, other things like trust come naturally afterwards. If once the psychic light and happiness which is born of these things is founded, it is not easy for other forces to cloud that state and not possible for them to destroy it. That is the common experience.

### Depression Often Comes from Outside

Often waves of depression come from the general Nature — the mind finds out inner or external reasons for them when there are none. That may be the reason why the reasons are not clear. On the other hand it may be due to some part of the being getting discouraged or fatigued or unwilling to follow the movement either of work or of sadhana. If it is something in the vital being, it may hide itself so as not to be exposed or cleared; if a part of the physical, it may be simply dumb and obscure, unable to express itself. Finally, it may come up from the subconscious. These are various cases in which there is what seems a causeless depression. One has to see for oneself which it is.

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Yes. The depression comes from without, not from within. But some part of the vital is too habituated to respond or at least passively accept or reflect and to take it as its own. If it were not for this, there would be little or no difficulty in throwing off the depression when it tries to come.

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You seem to rely very much on X and his experiences and ideas about them. X's experience proves nothing because he is quite ignorant. His depression comes from outside and has its causes, only his vital mind does not record or understand the causes, but there is a response to them all the same. Because the vital mind has in the past always associated depression with these causes and that impression remains in the vital stuff, so it responds to the touch with the usual reaction taught to it by the vital mind. An ignorant and untrained mind like X's cannot be expected to realise the secret machinery of the movements of his own consciousness.

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The vital mind is part of the mind. If mind (mental mind, vital mind, physical mind, subconscious mind) does not respond to

outer things, depression is impossible. The self at one end, the stone at the other never get into depression. In between them, the true mind, true vital, true physical consciousness never get depression because they do not give the responses to things that create depression.

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Naturally the deep depression and low vitality [*in another person*] try to get into you, or if the person pulls your vital force to restore hers or you yourself part with it for that purpose, you feel exhausted and empty afterwards. That is the natural result. One person may produce more of this result than another. Or if you are strong enough to resist in the mind and vital, the influence gets into the physical and produces some result there. According to the nature of the person approached, the result may be violent or intense or of a minor character. Also certain effects may not manifest at the time but only afterwards.

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These cloudings are not rare and not personal to yourself — all get them, — very often they are formations thrown *from outside*. The important thing is not to get upset or distressed or take them to yourself or as your own, and to remain quiet till they pass.

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Do not allow these depressing thoughts to find credit with you. If they come, look at them as not yours, as suggestions from outside. Remain as quiet as you can and let the Mother's Force work in you.

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However or from wheresoever it came, the only thing to do with a depression is to throw it out.

### Dealing With Depression

Naturally, if the vital is quiet and allows the mind to see things

rightly, there will not be this depression.

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Small desires and defects have not to be magnified or made a cause of worry or depression, but they have to be noted and quietly got rid of.

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Be careful to reject always movements (like vexation, discontent etc.) that bring back confusion or depression. One cannot always help these movements coming, but one can reject them when they come; the more they are rejected, the more difficult it becomes for them to recur — or, if they recur, they hold only for a moment and then drop away. To entertain them means to give them a chance to cover the true consciousness once more.

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It [*depression*] comes back if you give it a chance. Do not give it a chance. Do not give it a room to live in if it comes.

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Depression should not be indulged, for all who do the Yoga have difficulties with their ego; but the higher consciousness will always prevail with a true aspiration.

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Do not allow yourself to admit any movement of vital depression, still less a depressed condition. As for the external being, it is always, not only in you but in everyone, a difficult animal to handle. It has to be dealt with by patience and a quiet and cheerful perseverance; never get depressed by its resistance, for that only makes it sensitive and aggrieved and difficult, or else discouraged. Give it rather the encouragement of sunlight and a quiet pressure, and one day you will find it opening entirely to the Grace.

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It is indeed good that the psychic intervened and prevented the mind taking the wrong direction. It is not possible that there should not be occasional stumbles, failures etc. in the work of self-purification and change; but to feel upset or remorseful over them is harmful rather than helpful; it easily brings depression and depression brings clouding of the mind and weakness. To observe calmly the wrong movement and its nature (here it was the tongue that was at fault and the tongue is always an easily erring member) and to set it right inwardly is always the best way. Calm, especially when the true spiritual calm of the self is there, is the thing that must always be preserved; for with that everything else can be done in time and with the least trouble.

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*Anutāp* — remorse, repentance, is the natural movement of the vital mind when it sees it has done a mistake. It is certainly better than indifference. Its disadvantage is that it disturbs the vital stuff and sometimes leads to depression or discouragement. For that reason what is usually recommended to the sadhak is a quiet recognition of the mistake with a sincere aspiration and will that it should not be repeated or at least that the habit of making such mistakes should soon be eliminated. At a higher stage of development when the inner calm is established, one simply observes the defects of the nature as defects of a machinery that one has to put right and calls down the Light and Force for its rectification. In the beginning however the movement of repentance even helps provided it does not bring discouragement or depression.

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This kind of dejection [*feeling that life is meaningless*] must be cast aside. Life always has a meaning whether in success or in difficulty so long as it is turned towards the Divine. Protection will be given, but depression must be put aside so that you may be able to receive and use the help and the force.

### Depression and the Gospel of Sorrow<sup>1</sup>

I think the best thing I can write to you in the circumstances is to recommend to you X's aphorism, "Depression need not be depressing; rather it should be made a jumping-board for the leap to a higher and happier poise."

The rule in Yoga is not to let the depression depress you, to stand back from it, observe its cause and remove the cause; for the cause is always in oneself, perhaps a vital defect somewhere, a wrong movement indulged or a petty desire causing a recoil, sometimes by its satisfaction, sometimes by its disappointment. In Yoga a desire satisfied, a false movement given its head produces very often a worse recoil than disappointed desire.

What is needed for you is to live more deeply within, less in the outer vital and mental which is exposed to these touches. The inmost psychic being is not oppressed by them; it stands in its own closeness to the Divine and sees the small surface movements as surface things foreign to the true being.

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It is regrettable that this attack [*of depression*] should recur. Perhaps it was a little my fault—you were or seemed to me going on so well that I was not on my guard against its possible recurrence. During the last two or three days the suggestion did come to me that there might be a turn of that kind, but I was so much in the joy of your music that I did not give it credence.

It is certainly not the answering of questions that will remove the underlying cause of this recurrence. Even if the answers satisfy, it could only be for a time. The same questionings would arise either in a mechanical reiteration—for it is not truly the reason from which they arise, it is a certain part of the vital consciousness affected by the surrounding atmosphere—or else presented from a shifted ground or a somewhat changed angle of vision. The difficulty can only disappear if you remain resolute

<sup>1</sup> All the letters in this group were written to the same correspondent, a disciple who suffered from bouts of depression.

that it shall disappear,—if you refuse to attach any value to the justifications which the mind is *made* to put forward for your “sadness” under this atmospheric influence and, as you did in certain other matters, stick fast to the resolution to make the Yogic change, to awake the psychic fully, not to follow the voices of the mind but to do rather what the Mother asks of you, persisting *however difficult it may be* or seem to be. It is so that the psychic can fully awaken and establish its influence — not on your higher vital where it is already awake and growing through your poetry and music and certain experiences so that whenever your higher vital is active you are in good condition, full of delight and creativeness and open to experience; but it is the influence on the lower vital, for it is there as I have already told you that your difficulties are and that this vital depression recurs.

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It is quite unwarranted to say that you have been going in the wrong direction — going west when you thought you were going east. You were going towards the east, all right, but you were going as if with a chain on your ankles and the chain was a certain tension and stiffness in your endeavour. This is what was found to have been wrong in your way of meditation. Therefore there is no need to lament that you have been going in the wrong direction all the time — for that is not the case; what is needed is to profit by the discovery and get rid of the impediment.

The light which you saw seems to have got clouded by your indulging your vital more and more in the bitter pastime of sadness. That was quite natural, for that is the result sadness always does bring. It is the reason why I object to the gospel of sorrow and to any sadhana which makes sorrow one of its main planks (*abhimān*, revolt, *viraha*). For sorrow is not, as Spinoza pointed out, a passage to a greater perfection, a way to siddhi; it cannot be, for it confuses and weakens and distracts the mind, depresses the vital force, darkens the spirit. A relapse from joy and vital elasticity and Ananda to sorrow, self-distrust, despondency and weakness is a recoil from a greater to a lesser consciousness; —

the habit of these moods shows a clinging of something in the vital to the smaller, obscurer, dark and distressed movement out of which it is the very aim of Yoga to rise.

It is incorrect to say that the wrong key with which you were trying to open the faery palace has been taken away from you and you are left with none at all. The true key has been given to you in the right kind or condition of meditation — a state of inner rest, not of straining, of quiet opening, not of eager or desperate pulling, a harmonious giving of oneself to the Divine Force for its working, and in that quietude a sense of the Force working and a restful confidence allowing it to act without any unquiet interference. Now that condition is the beginning of the psychic opening; there is of course much more that afterwards comes to complete it but this is the fundamental condition into which all the rest can most easily come. In this condition there may and will be call, prayer, aspiration. Intensity, concentration will come of themselves, not by a hard effort or tense strain on the nature. Rejection of wrong movements, frank confession of defects are not only not incompatible, but helpful to it; but this attitude makes the rejection, the confession easy, spontaneous, entirely complete and sincere and effective. That is the experience of all who have consented to take this attitude.

Now as to the tension and stiffness. I may say in passing that consciousness and receptivity are not the same thing; one may be receptive, yet externally unaware of how things are being done and of what is being done. But for such an external unconsciousness there must be a reason, — and in you it was the stiffness created by a tension and a straining which made the consciousness thus rigid and closed it up. Not that it closed you to the Force or that it took away the inner receptivity, but it did close you to the surface consciousness of what is being done. When that happens, the Force works, as I have repeatedly written, behind the veil; the results remain packed behind and come out afterwards, often slowly, little by little, until there is so much pressure that it breaks through somehow and forces open the external nature. There lies the difference between a mental and vital straining and pulling and a spontaneous psychic

openness, and it is not at all the first time that we have spoken of the difference. It is not really a question of the right or the wrong key, but of putting the key in the lock in the right or the wrong way, whether because of some difficulty you try to force the lock turning the key this way and that with violence or confidently and quietly give it the right turn — and the door opens.

It is not that this pulling and straining and tension can do nothing; in the end they prevail for some result or another, but with difficulty, delay, struggle, strong upheavals of the Force breaking through in spite of all. Ramakrishna himself began by pulling and straining and got his result but at the cost of a tremendous and perilous upsetting; afterwards he took the quiet psychic way whenever he wanted a result and got it with ease and in a minimum time. You say that this way is too difficult for you but it is on the contrary the easiest and simplest and most direct way and anyone can do it, if he makes his mind and vital quiet. It is the other way of tension and strain and hard endeavour that is difficult and needs a great force of Tapasya. Take the psychic attitude; follow the straight sunlit path, with the Divine openly or secretly upbearing you — if secretly, he will yet show himself in good time, — do not insist on the hard, hampered, roundabout and difficult journey.

All this has been pointed out before: but you were not inclined to regard it as feasible or at least not ready to apply it in the field of meditation because your consciousness by tradition, owing to past lives and for other reasons, was clinging to former contrary conceptions. Something in you was harking back to one kind of Vaishnava sadhana, and that tended to bring in it its pain-giving feeling-elements of *abhimāna*, revolt, suffering, the Divine hiding himself (“always I seek, but never does he show himself”) — the rarity of the unfolding and the *milana*. Something else in you was inclined to see as the only alternative some harsh, grim ascetic ideal, the blank featureless Brahman (and imagined that the supramental was that), something in the vital looked on the conquest of wrong movements as a hard desperate tapasya, not as a passage into the purity and joy of the Divine — even now some element in you seems to insist

on regarding the psychic attitude as something extraordinary, difficult, inhuman and impossible! There were these and other old lingerings of the mind and the vital; you have to clear them out and look at the simplicity of the Truth with a straight and simple gaze.

The remedy we propose, the key we offer to you ought not to be so difficult to apply as you imagine. After all, it is only applying in “meditation” the way that has been so successful with you in your creative work. There is a way of creation by strain and tension, by beating of the brain, by hard and painful labour — often the passage clogged and nothing coming or else coming only in return for a sort of intellectual tapasya. There is the other way in which one remains quiet and opens oneself to a power that is there behind and waits for inspiration; the force pours in and with it the inspiration, the illumination, the Ananda, — all is done by an inner Power. The flood passes, but one remains quiet for the next flood and at its time surely it comes. Here too all is not perfect at once; but progress comes by ever new waves of the same Power. Not then a strain of mental activity, but a restful opening to the Force that is there all the time above and around you, so that it may flow freely and do its work in peace and illumination and Ananda. The way has been shown to you, you yourself have had from time to time the true condition; only you must learn how to continue in it or recover it and you must allow the Force to do its work in its own way. It may take some time to take entire hold of it, get the other habit out and make this normal; but you must not start by deciding that it is impossible! It is eminently possible and it is the door of definitive entrance. The difficulty, the struggle were only the period of preparation necessary to get rid of or to exhaust the obstruction in the consciousness which was a thorn-hedge round the faery palace.

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I find it rather surprising that you should regard what the Mother said to you or what I wrote as a recommendation to relax aspiration or postpone the idea of any kind of siddhi till the Greek

Kalends! It was not so intended in the least — nor do I think either of us said or wrote anything which could justly bear such an interpretation. I said expressly that in the way of meditating of which we spoke, aspiration, prayer, concentration, intensity were a natural part of it; this way was put before you because our experience has been that those who take it go quicker and develop their sadhana, once they get fixed in it, much more easily as well as smoothly than by a distressed, doubtful and anxious straining with revulsions of despondency and turning away from hope and endeavour. We spoke of a steady opening to the Divine with a flow of the force doing its work in the adhar, a poised opening with a quiet mind and heart full of trust and the sunlight of confidence; where do you find that we said a helpless waiting must be your programme?

As for light-heartedness and insouciance, the Mother never spoke of insouciance — a light don't-care attitude is the last thing she would recommend to anybody. She spoke of cheerfulness, and if she used the word light-hearted it was not in the sense of anything lightly or frivolously gay and careless — although a deeper and finer gaiety can have its place as one element of the Yogic character. What she meant was a glad equanimity even in the face of difficulties and there is nothing in that contrary to Yogic teaching or to her own practice. The vital nature on the surface (the depths of the true vital are different) is attached on the one side to a superficial mirth and enjoyment, on the other to sorrow and despair and gloom and tragedy, — for these are for it the cherished lights and shades of life; but a bright or wide and free peace or an *ānandamaya* intensity or, best, a fusing of both in one is the true poise of both the soul and the mind — and of the true vital also — in Yoga. It is perfectly possible for a quite human sadhak to get to such a poise, it is not necessary to be divine before one can attain it. All this is nothing new and original; I have been saying it ever since I began speaking at all about Yoga and I cannot see anything in it resembling a gospel of helpless waiting or of light careless insouciance or anything contrary to our own practice. I do not think that we have either of us become relentlessly grim and solemn or lacking in humour

or that the Mother has lost her smile! I am afraid you are looking at her and things as through a glass darkly and seeing them in too sombre colours. As for instance what you say about the music, — she came up straight to me from it and spoke at once about your music and the presence of Krishna there, and she was in a very different mood from what you describe.

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Do not allow yourself to be overborne by the dejection; it can only be an incident in the ups and downs of the sadhana, and, as an incident, it should be made as short as possible. Remember that you have chosen a method of proceeding in the sadhana in which dejection ought to have no place. If you have a growing faith that all that is happening has somehow to happen and that God knows what is best for you, — that is already a great thing; if you add to it the will to keep your face always turned towards the goal and the confidence that you are being led towards it even through difficulties and apparent denials, there could be no better mental foundation for sadhana. And if not only the mind, but the vital and physical consciousness can be imbued with this faith, dejection will become either impossible or so evidently an outer thing thrown from outside and not belonging to the consciousness that it will not be able to keep its hold at all. A faith of that kind is a very helpful first step towards the reversal of consciousness which makes one see the inner truth of things rather than their outward phenomenal appearance.

As for the causes of the dejection, there were causes, partly general in the shape of a resistance to a great descending force which was not personal to you at all, and, so far as there was a response to it in you, it was not from your conscious being, otherwise you would not have had it in this way, but from the part in us which keeps things for a long time that have been suppressed or rejected by the conscious will. It is the conscious will that matters, for it is that that prevails in the end, the will of the Purusha and not the more blind and obstinate parts of Prakriti. Keep the conscious will all right and it will carry on to the goal, — just as the resistance in universal Nature will yield

in the end before the Divine Descent.

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The depression of the vital you feel is a continuation of the old feeling in the struggle, but you must reject it and make of it a diminishing movement. The past in Yoga is no guide to the future. For what happened in the past was due to temporary and not permanent causes and to eliminate them is the very purpose of the sadhana.

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There is no doubt about the beauty of the poems you have written but if sometimes — not by any means always — our sweetest songs spring from saddest feelings, there is a quite different rule both for life and for Yoga. For the life in its progress, for the soul in its ascendance, grief and suffering should be only an incident on the way and the vision look always and steadily to a joy and a glory beyond it — let the gloom pass and look beyond it towards Light.

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The difficulty you feel or any sadhak feels about sadhana is not really a question of meditation versus bhakti versus works, it is a difficulty of the attitude to be taken, the approach or whatever you like to call it. Yours seems to be characterised on one side by a tremendous effort in the mind, on the other by a gloomy certitude in the vital which seems to watch and mutter under its breath if not aloud, “Yes, yes, go ahead, my fine fellow, but — কিছুই কখনও হয়নি, কিছুই হচ্ছেনা, কিছুই হবেনা”,<sup>2</sup> and at the end of the meditation, “What did I tell you, কিছুই হলনা”.<sup>3</sup> A vital so ready to despair that even after a “glorious” flood of poetry, it uses the occasion to preach the gospel of despair. I have passed through most of the difficulties of the sadhak, but I cannot recollect to have looked on delight of poetical creation or concentration in

<sup>2</sup> *Nothing has ever happened, nothing is happening, nothing will happen.* — Ed.

<sup>3</sup> *Nothing happened.* — Ed.

it as something undivine and a cause for despair. This seems to me excessive.

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I have always told you that you ought not to stop your poetry and similar activities. It is a mistake to do so out of asceticism or with the idea of tapasya. One can stop these things when they drop of themselves, because one is in full experience and so interested in one's inner life that one has no energy to spare for the rest. Even then, there is no rule for giving up; for there is no reason why the poetry etc. should not be a part of sadhana. The love of applause, of fame, the ego feeling have to be given up, but that can be done without giving up the activity itself. Your vital needs some activity, most vitals do, and to deprive it of its outlet, an outlet that can be helpful and is not harmful, makes it sulking, indifferent and despondent or else inclined to revolt at any moment and throw up the sponge. Without the assent of the vital it is difficult to do sadhana — it non-cooperates, or it watches with a grim even if silent dissatisfaction ready to express at any moment doubt and denial; or it makes a furious effort and then falls back saying, "I have got nothing." The mind by itself cannot do much; it must have support from the vital; for that the vital must be in a cheerful and acquiescent state. It has the joy of creation and there is nothing spiritually wrong in creative action. Why deny your vital this joy of outflow?

I had already hinted to you that to be able to wait for the Divine Grace (not in a tamasic spirit, but with a sattwic reliance) was the best course for you. Prayer, yes — but not prayer insisting on immediate fulfilment — but prayer that is itself a communion of the mind and the heart with the Divine and can have the joy and satisfaction of itself, trusting for fulfilment by the Divine in His own time. Meditation? Yes, but your meditation has got into a wrong Asana, that of an eager and vehement wrestling followed by a bitter despair. It is no use getting on with it like that; it is better to drop it till you get a new Asana. (I am referring to the old Rishis who established an Asana, a place and a fixed position, where they would sit till

they got siddhi — but if the Asana got successfully disturbed by wrong forces (Asuras, Apsaras etc.), they left it and sought for a new one.) Moreover, your meditation is lacking in quietude, you meditate with a striving mind — but it is in the quiet mind that the experience comes, as all Yogis agree — the still water that reflects rightly the sun. Your vital besides is afraid of quietude and emptiness, and that is because, probably, the strife and effort in you make what comes of them something neutral or desert, while they should be a restful quietude and an emptiness giving the sense of peace, purity or release, the cup made empty so that the soma-rasa of the spirit may be poured in it. That is why I would like you to desist from these too strenuous efforts and go on quietly, praying and meditating if you like but tranquilly without strain and too vehement striving, letting the prayer and meditation (not too much of the latter) prepare the mind and heart till things begin to flow into them in a spontaneous current when all is ready.

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Accustomed as I am to the misunderstanding or misreporting of the Mother's statements, I found that this about her having said that transformation is easy carries the habit to the extreme limit. Needless to say, she did not and could not say anything of the kind and it is astonishing that you should believe she could say anything so absurd and false. I must remind you that I have always insisted on the difficulty of the sadhana. I have never said that to overcome doubt is easy; I have said on the contrary that it was difficult because it was the nature of something in the human physical mind to cling to doubt for its own sake. I have never said that to overcome grief, depression, gloom and suffering was easy; I have said that it was difficult because something in the human vital clings to it and almost needs it as part of the drama of life. So also I have never said that sex, anger, jealousy etc. were easy to overcome; I have said it was difficult because they were ingrained in the human vital, and even if thrown out were always being brought back into it either by its own habit or by the invasion of the general Nature

and the resurgence of its own old response. These things I have repeated hundreds of times. Your idea that my difficulties were different from those of human nature is a mental construction or inference without any real basis. If I am ignorant of human difficulties and therefore intolerant of them, how is it that I am so patient with them as you cannot deny that I am? Why for years and years do I go on patiently arguing about your doubts, spending so much of my time, always trying to throw light on your difficulties, to show how things stand, to give reasons for a knowledge gained by living and *indiscutable* experience? Am I writing these letters every night because I have no understanding and no sympathy with you in your doubts and difficulties? Why do I wait patiently for years for sadhaks to get over their sex difficulties? Why do I tolerate and help and write soothing and encouraging letters to these women who break out and hunger-strike and threaten suicide once a fortnight? Why do we bear all this trouble and *tracas* and *fracas* and resistance and obloquy and harsh criticism from the sadhaks, why were we so patient with men like X and Y and others, if we had no understanding and no sympathy with the difficulties of human nature? It is because I press always on faith and discourage doubt as a means of approach to the spiritual realisation. What spiritual guide with a respect for truth can do otherwise? And if I encourage and support doubt, the only result will be that doubt will last for ever and no assured realisation be possible — just as if I encourage and support sex or any other contrary movement, it will last for ever — even without that they last quite long enough by their own force and motion. All that I can do for them is to tolerate and be patient and give time enough for their transformation or removal. Surely when you look at all this fairly, you will see that you have made a very incorrect inference.

As to the statement about drama and something liking to suffer, nobody doubts that your external consciousness dislikes its suffering. The physical mind and consciousness of man hates its own suffering and if left to itself dislikes also to see others suffer. But if you will try to fathom the significance of your

own admission of liking drama or of the turn towards drama — from which very few human beings escape — and if you go deep enough, you will find that there is something in the vital which likes suffering and clings to it for the sake of the drama; it is something below the surface, not on the surface, but it is strong, almost universal in human nature and difficult to eradicate unless one recognises it and gets inwardly away from it. The mind and the physical of man do not like suffering for if they did it would not be suffering any longer, but this thing in the vital wants it in order to give a spice to life. It is the reason why constant depressions can go on returning and returning even though the mind longs to get rid of them, because this in the vital responds, goes on repeating the same movement like a gramophone as soon as it is set going and insists on turning the whole round of the often repeated record. It does not really depend on the reasons which the vital gives for starting off the round, these are often of the most trivial character and wholly insufficient to justify it. It is only by a strong will to detach oneself, not to justify, to reject root and branch that one can in the end get rid of this most troublesome and dangerous streak in human nature. When therefore we speak of the vital comedy, the vital drama, we are speaking from a psychological knowledge which does not end with the surface of things and looks at these hidden movements. It is impossible to deal with things for the purposes of Yoga if we confine ourselves to the surface consciousness only.

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I cannot candidly say that the Mother and I approve of the idea of your going to Calcutta for a fortnight for relief from your sufferings: if we ever sanction such a movement, it is against our own seeing of things because no choice is left to us owing to circumstances or the state of mind of the sadhak. We have never found that such absences do any spiritual good: they usually relax or lower the consciousness or renew old movements that must go. It is much better to face the difficulty however sticky it is till the conquest is there.

It is a pity that this movement of depression has come back with its painful and irrational circle. It must be thrown away for good: these movements go round in a circular repetitionary way characteristic of these things. It is lent force by the reasonings of the physical mind which are specious but of no value. It is not true of spiritual things that experience must come within a certain number of years or not at all. There are some who begin to succeed after a few years, some who take longer, succeeding only in work but not in meditation or activity of the inner consciousness, but finally the veiled inner preparation of so many years has prevailed and they begin to get the psychic change, the inner opening of head and heart, the descents, the growth through frequent though not uninterrupted experience. This has happened even to those who are troubled by these circular movements and have been again and again on the point of rushing away in despair. There is nothing more futile than to despair in the spiritual path and throw up the game: it is to break a working which would have led one to the realisation asked for if one had persevered.

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Thirst for the Divine is one thing and depression is quite another, nor is depression a necessary consequence of the thirst being unsatisfied; that may lead to a more ardent thirst or to a fixed resolution and persistent effort or to a more and more yearning call or to a psychic sorrow which is not at all identical with depression and despair. Depression is a clouded grey state in its nature and it is more difficult for light to come through clouds and greyness than through a clear atmosphere. That depression obstructs the inner light is a matter of general experience. The Gita says expressly, "Yoga should be practised persistently with a heart free from depression" — *anirvinṇacetasā*. Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress* symbolises it as the Slough of Despond, one of the perils of the way that has to be overcome. It is no doubt impossible to escape from attacks of depression, almost all sadhaks go through these attacks, but the principle is that one should react against them and not allow them by any kind

of mental encouragement or acceptance of their suggestions to persist or grow chronic.

It is hardly a fact that sorrow is *necessary* in order to make the soul seek the Divine. It is the call of the soul within for the Divine that makes it turn, and that may come under any circumstances — in full prosperity and enjoyment, at the height of outward conquest and victory without any sorrow or disappointment but by a sudden or growing enlightenment, by a flash of light in the midst of sensuous passion as in Bilwamangal, by the perception that there is something greater and truer than this outward life lived in ego and ignorance. None of these turns need be accompanied by sorrow and depression. Often one turns saying, “Life is all very well and interesting enough as a game, but it is only a game, the spiritual reality is greater than the life of the mind and senses.” In whatever way it comes, it is the call of the Divine or the soul’s call to the Divine that matters, the attraction of it as something far greater than the things that usually hold the nature. Certainly if one is satisfied with life, entranced by it so that it shuts out the sense of the soul within or hampers the attraction to the Divine, then a period of vairagya, sorrow, depression, a painful breaking of the vital ties may be necessary and many go through that. But once the turn made, it should be to the one direction and a perpetual vairagya is not needed. Nor when we speak of cheerfulness as the best condition, do we mean a cheerful following of the vital life, but a cheerful following of the path to the Divine which is not impossible if the mind and heart take the right view and posture. At any rate if positive cheerfulness is not possible in one’s case, still one should not acquiesce in or mentally support a constant depression and sadness. That is not at all indispensable for keeping turned to the Divine.

In speaking of the Buddhist and his nine years of the wall and other instances the Mother was only disproving the view that not having succeeded in seven or eight years meant unfitness and debarred all hope for the future. The man of the wall stands among the greatest names in Japanese Buddhism and his long sterility did not mean incapacity or spiritual unfitness. But apart

from that there are many who have gone on persisting for long periods and finally prevailed. It is a common, not an uncommon experience.

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This movement [*of restlessness, sadness, gloom*] is one that always tries to come when you have a birthday or a darshan and is obviously a suggestion of forces that want to disturb you and give you a bad birthday or bad darshan. You must get rid of the idea that it is in any way helpful for sadhana, e.g. makes you remember the Divine etc. — if it does it makes you remember the Divine in the wrong way and in addition brings up the weakness, also depression, self-distrust etc. etc. *À quoi bon* cheerfulness? It puts you in the right condition for the psychic to work and without knowing it you grow in just the right perceptions and right feelings for the spiritual attitude. This growth I have been observing in you for a fairly long time now and it is in the cheerful states that it is the most active. Japa, thinking of the Divine is all right, but it must be on this basis and in company with work and mental activity, for then the instrument is in a healthy condition. But if you become restlessly eager to do nothing but japa and think of nothing but the Divine and of the “progress” you have or have not made (Ramana Maharshi says you should never think of “progress”, it is according to him a movement of the ego), then all the fat is in the fire — because the system is not yet ready for a Herculean effort and it begins to get upset and think it is unfit and will never be fit. So be a good cheerful worker and offer your bhakti to the Divine in all ways you can but rely on him to work out things in you.

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I don't remember saying anything on this subject [*of pain and suffering*],<sup>4</sup> except that disappointed vital desire must bring

<sup>4</sup> *The correspondent suggested that pain and suffering are sometimes necessary in spiritual life and may even enrich it. After the “deep suffering” experienced in the process of mental doubt and questioning, he had felt a sense of gain. “Through deep pain,” he wrote, “one often feels a sense of fulfilment.” — Ed.*

about suffering. Pain and suffering are necessary results of the Ignorance in which we live; men grow by all kinds of experience, pain and suffering as well as their opposites, joy and happiness and ecstasy. One can get strength from them if one meets them in the right way. Many take a joy in pain and suffering when associated with struggle or endeavour or adventure, but that is more because of the exhilaration and excitement of the struggle than because of suffering for its own sake. There is, however, something in the vital which takes joy in the whole of life, its dark as well as its bright sides. There is also something perverse in the vital which takes a kind of dramatic pleasure in its own misery and tragedy, even in degradation or in illness. I don't think mere doubt can bring any gain; mental questioning can bring gains if it is in pursuit of truth, but questioning just for the sake of sceptical questioning or in a pure spirit of contradiction can only bring, when it is directed against the truths of the spirit, either error or a lasting incertitude. If I am always questioning the Light when it comes and refusing its offer of truth, the Light cannot stay in me, cannot settle; eventually, finding no welcome and no foundation in the mind, it will retire. One has to push forward into the Light, not be always falling back into the darkness and hugging the darkness in the delusion that that is the real light. Whatever fulfilment one may feel in pain or in doubt belongs to the Ignorance; the real fulfilment is in the divine joy and the divine Truth and its certitude and it is that for which the Yogin strives. In the strife he may have to pass through doubt, not by his own choice or will, but because there is still imperfection in his knowledge.

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If you accept Krishnaprem's insistence that this and no other must be your path, it is this that you have to attain and realise; any exclusive other-worldliness cannot be your way. I believe that you are quite capable of attaining this and realising the Divine and I have never been able to share your constantly recurring doubts about your capacity or the despair that arises

in you so violently when there are these attacks, nor is their persistent recurrence a valid ground for believing that they can never be overcome. Such a persistent recurrence has been a feature in the sadhana of many who have finally emerged and reached the goal; even the sadhana of very great Yogis has not been exempt from such violent and constant recurrences; they have sometimes been special objects of such persistent assaults, as I have indeed indicated in *Savitri* in more places than one — and that was indeed founded on my own experience. In the nature of these recurrences there is usually a constant return of the same adverse experiences, the same adverse resistance, thoughts destructive of all belief and faith and confidence in the future of the sadhana, frustrating doubts of what one has known as the truth, voices of despondency and despair, urgings to abandonment of the Yoga or to suicide or else other disastrous counsels of *déchéance*. The course taken by the attacks is not indeed the same for all, but still they have strong family resemblance. One can eventually overcome if one begins to realise the nature and source of these assaults and acquires the faculty of observing them, bearing, without being involved or absorbed into their gulf, finally becoming the witness of their phenomena and understanding them and refusing the mind's sanction even when the vital is still tossed in the whirl or the most outward physical mind still reflects the adverse suggestions. In the end these attacks lose their power and fall away from the nature; the recurrence becomes feeble or has no power to last: even, if the detachment is strong enough, they can be cut out very soon or at once. The strongest attitude to take is to regard these things as what they really are, incursions of dark forces from outside taking advantage of certain openings in the physical mind or the vital part, but not a real part of oneself or spontaneous creation in one's own nature. To create a confusion and darkness in the physical mind and throw into it or awake in it mistaken ideas, dark thoughts, false impressions is a favourite method of these assailants, and if they can get the support of this mind from over-confidence in its own correctness or the natural rightness of its impressions and inferences, then they can have

a field day until the true mind reasserts itself and blows the clouds away. Another device of theirs is to awake some hurt or rankling sense of grievance in the lower vital parts and keep them hurt or rankling as long as possible. In that case one has to discover these openings in one's nature and learn to close them permanently to such attacks or else to throw out intruders at once or as soon as possible. The recurrence is no proof of a fundamental incapacity; if one takes the right inner attitude, it can and will be overcome. The idea of suicide ought never to be accepted; there is no real ground for it and in any case it cannot be a remedy or a real escape: at most it can only be postponement of difficulties and the necessity for their solution under no better circumstances in another life. One must have faith in the Master of our life and works, even if for a long time he conceals himself, and then in his own right time he will reveal his Presence.

I have tried to dispel all the misconceptions, explain things as they are and meet all the points at issue. It is not that you really cannot make progress or have not made any progress; on the contrary, you yourself have admitted that you have made a good advance in many directions and there is no reason why, if you persevere, the rest should not come. You have always believed in the Guruvada: I would ask you then to put your faith in the Guru and the guidance and rely on the Ishwara for the fulfilment, to have faith in my abiding love and affection, in the affection and divine goodwill and loving kindness of the Mother, stand firm against all attacks and go forward perseveringly towards the spiritual goal and the all-fulfilling and all-satisfying touch of the All-Blissful, the Ishwara.

### **Despair and Despondency**

Despair and despondency are always wrong. If you make a mistake, quietly observe it and correct the tendency next time. Even if the mistake recurs often, you have only to persevere quietly — remembering that nature cannot be changed in a day.

These feelings of despair and exaggerated sense of self-depreciation and helplessness are suggestions of a hostile Force and should never be admitted. The defects of which you speak are common to all human nature and the external being of every sadhak is full of them; to become aware of them is necessary for the transformation, but it must be done with a quiet mind and with the faith and surrender to the Divine and assured aspiration to the higher consciousness which are proper to the psychic being. The transformation of the external being is the most difficult part of the Yoga and it demands faith, patience, quietude and firm determination. It is in that spirit that you have to throw these depressions aside and go steadily on with the Yoga.

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You are “alternately getting” these things [*the impulse to aspire and then to despair*], because you allow the vital despondency to lay hold on you. If you consistently rejected it, it would not be able to recur like this. When the difficulties come, you should call back the faith; that is the use of faith, to carry you through the difficulties and help to dissipate them.

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Why allow yourself to be overpowered like that? These fits of despair are quite irrational — there is no true reason why you should feel so despondent. Our solicitude and help are there always — in spite of these attacks your spiritual capacity is constantly increasing — only remain firm, the victory of the Truth in you is then inevitable. I will do all to change your consciousness — only open yourself. Keep yourself open as much as you can in quietude — that is the *only* condition I ask of you.

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I did not receive any letter from you so recently as a fortnight or three weeks ago. If you feel in a pitiable condition, it is certainly not because you have incurred our displeasure. I have said that we are always with you and it is true, but to feel it you must

draw back from your vital and be able to concentrate in your inner being. If you do that faithfully and sincerely, after a time you will feel the connection and the support.

The meaning of the phrase you speak of is this, that usually the vital tries to resist the call to change. That is what is meant by revolt or opposition. If the inner will insists and forbids revolt or opposition, the vital unwillingness may often take the form of depression and dejection, accompanied by a resistance in the physical mind which supports the repetition of old ideas, habits, movements or actions while the body consciousness suffers from an apprehension or fear of the called-for change, a drawing back from it or a dullness which does not receive the call.

It is these things you have to get rid of. But a sorrowful or despondent mood is not the proper condition for doing that. You have to stand back from the feeling of suffering, anguish and apprehension, reject it and look quietly at the resistance, affirming always to yourself your will to change and insisting that it shall be done and cannot fail to be done now or later with the divine help, because the divine help is there. It is then that the strength can come to you that will overcome the difficulties.

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The weakness in yourself of which you speak is there, as the persistency of these movements [*of despondency*] shows, but it is not in the heart — your heart is all right — but in the lower vital nature. All your weaknesses are there; the rest of your being is quite strong enough for the spiritual life. But this inadequacy of the lower vital is not peculiar to you, it is present in almost every human being. This tendency to irrational sadness and despondency and these imaginations, fears and perverse reasonings — always repeating, if you will take careful notice, the same movements, ideas and feelings and even the same language and phrases like a machine — is a characteristic working of the lower vital nature. The only way to get rid of it is to meet it with a fixed resolution of the higher vital and the mind and psychic being to combat, reject and master it. As you were determined to master the sex impulse and the desire of the palate, so you

must determine to master this “irrational knot” of despondency in the lower vital nature. If you indulge it and regard it as a natural part of yourself with good causes for existence or if you busy yourself finding this or that justification for it when it comes, there is no reason why it should let go its unpleasant grip upon you. Be firm and courageous here, as you have learnt to be with other movements of your lower vital; you will then, I think, find less difficulty in your meditation and your general sadhana.

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It is surely better to seek to right yourself than to let yourself float in the stream of vital despondency and weakness. What do you expect the Mother to answer to such prayers [*for death*]? It is not the soul’s demand or need, but an outcry of vital weakness. X did not pray for death, but for light and progress out of his lower consciousness towards the Truth. Ramana Maharshi, whatever his objections to birth in this world, did not pray or seek for death, but for elevation to a height of consciousness for which there is neither birth nor death: he is certainly not so ignorant as to believe that the mere death of the body brings by itself a release; if he were, he would not have taken the trouble to go through so prolonged and intense a tapasya. If a way out is wanted, that is the only way out and there is no other.

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The outer reasons [*for despondency*] are created by the mind and it is the mind that responds or does not respond to them. Nothing outward can affect unless the mind (vital mind usually) represents them to itself in a particular way and makes its own response.

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If the mind does not respond to any suggested reasons for despondency, that is indeed a great liberation.