

Chapter Four

Social Duties and the Divine

Family, Society, Country and the Divine

Family, society, country are a larger ego—they are not the Divine. One can work for them and say that one is working for the Divine only if one is conscious of the Divine Adesh to act for that purpose or of the Divine Force working within one. Otherwise it is only an idea of the mind identifying country etc. with the Divine.

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I suppose each man makes or tries to make his own organisation of life out of the mass of possibilities the forces present to him. Self (physical self) and family are the building most make—to earn, to create a family and maintain it, perhaps to get some position in the present means of life one chooses, in business, the profession etc., etc. Country or humanity are usually added to that by a minority. A few take up some ideal and follow it as the mainstay of their life. It is only the very religious who try to make God the centre of their life—that too rather imperfectly, except for a few. None of these things are secure or certain, even the last being certain only if it is followed with an absoluteness which only a few are willing to give. The life of the Ignorance is a play of forces through which man seeks his way and all depends on his growth through experience to the point at which he can grow out of it into something else. That something else is in fact a new consciousness—whether a new consciousness beyond the earthly life or a new consciousness within it.

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I don't remember the context; but I suppose he [*the writer of Yogic Sadhan*] means that when one has to escape from the lower dharma, one has often to break it so as to arrive at a

larger one. E.g. social duties, paying debts, looking after family, helping to serve your country, etc. etc. The man who turns to the spiritual life, has to leave all that behind him often and he is reproached by lots of people for his Adharma. But if he does not do this Adharma, he is bound for ever to the lower life — for there is always some duty there to be done — and cannot take up the spiritual dharma or can do it only when he is old and his faculties impaired.

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Idealising is a pastime of the mind — except for the few who are passionately determined to make the ideal real. Buddha is in Nirvana and his wife and child are there too perhaps, so it is easy to praise his spiritual greatness and courage — but for living people with living relatives a similar action is monstrous. They ought to be satisfied with praising Buddha and take care not to follow his example.

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The tendency you speak of, to leave the family and social life for the spiritual life, has been traditional in India for the last 2000 years and more — chiefly among men, it touches only a very small number of women. It must be remembered that Indian social life has subordinated almost entirely the individual to the family. Men and women do not marry according to their free will; their marriages are mostly arranged for them while they are still children. Not only so, but the mould of society has been long of an almost iron fixity putting each individual in his place and expecting him to conform to it. You speak of issues and a courageous solution, but in this life there are no problems and issues and no call for a solution — a courageous solution is only possible where there is freedom of the personal will; but where the only solution (if one remains in this life) is submission to the family will, there can be nothing of that kind. It is a secure life and can be happy if one accommodates oneself to it and has no unusual aspirations beyond it or is fortunate in one's environment; but it has no remedy for or escape from

incompatibilities or any kind of individual frustration; it leaves little room for initiative or free movement or any individualism. The only outlet for the individual is his inner spiritual or religious life and the recognised escape is the abandonment of the *samsāra*, the family life, by some kind of Sannyasa. The Sannyasi, the Vaishnava Vairagi or the Brahmachari are free; they are dead to the family and can live according to the dictates of the inner spirit. Only if they enter into an order or asram, they have to abide by the rules of the order, but that is their own choice, not a responsibility which has been laid on them without their choice. Society recognised this door of escape from itself; religion sanctioned the idea that distaste for the social or worldly life was a legitimate ground for taking up that of the recluse or religious wanderer. But this was mainly for men; women, except in old times among the Buddhists who had their convents and in later times among the Vaishnavas, had little chance of such an escape unless a very strong spiritual impulse drove them which would take no denial. As for the wife and children left behind by the Sannyasi, there was little difficulty, for the joint family was there to take up or rather to continue their maintenance.

At present what has happened is that the old framework remains, but modern ideas have brought a condition of inadaptation, of unrest, the old family system is breaking up and women are seeking in more numbers the same freedom of escape as men have always had in the past. That would account for the cases you have come across — but I don't think the number of such cases can be as yet at all considerable, it is quite a new phenomenon; the admission of women to Asrams is itself a novelty. The extreme unhappiness of a mental and vital growth which does not fit in with the surroundings, of marriages imposed that are unsuitable and where there is no meeting-point between husband and wife, of an environment hostile and intolerant of one's inner life and on the other hand the innate tendency of the Indian mind to seek a refuge in the spiritual or religious escape will sufficiently account for the new development. If society wants to prevent it, it must itself change. As to individuals, each case must be judged on its own merits; there is too much

complexity in the problem and too much variation of nature, position, motives for a general rule.

Philanthropy

Whatever one does must be from the highest spontaneous inner urge in oneself. So long as the urge is towards philanthropy, Gandhism etc., he has to follow that—to follow the way of spiritual endeavour he must have the need, the distinct call in himself—not merely a mental recognition but the soul's call.

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Perhaps you could write (in Bengali)¹ something to him about the true object of the Yoga—especially on two points:

(1) The object is not philanthropy but to find the Divine, to enter into the Divine Consciousness and find one's true being (which is not the ego) in the Divine. (2) The *ripus* cannot be conquered by *damana*; even if it succeeds to some extent, it only keeps them down but does not destroy them, often compression only increases their force. It is by purification through the Divine Consciousness entering into the egoistic nature and changing it that the thing can be done.

As for accepting him, it depends on his capacity to open himself to the Influence and receive it. If he likes to try, he can, but he will not succeed unless he is entirely in earnest. There is something in him that can turn to the Divine, but there is also much in his nature that may resist. It is only if he gives himself from deep within and is absolutely persevering in the Way that he can succeed.

Give him some idea of the central process of the Yoga, especially opening to the working of the Divine Power and rejection of all that is of the lower nature.

Humanitarianism

The idea of usefulness to humanity is the old confusion due

¹ Sri Aurobindo wrote this reply to his secretary, Nolini Kanta Gupta, who replied to the correspondent.—Ed.

to secondhand ideas imported from the West. Obviously, to be “useful” to humanity there is no need of Yoga; everyone who leads the human life is useful to humanity in one way or another.

Yoga is directed towards God, not towards man. If a divine supramental consciousness and power can be brought down and established in the material world, that obviously would mean an immense change for the earth including humanity and its life. But the effect on humanity would only be one result of the change; it cannot be the object of the sadhana. The object of the sadhana can only be to live in the divine consciousness and to manifest it in life.

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As to the extract about Vivekananda, the point I make there² does not seem to me humanitarian. You will see that I emphasise there the last sentences of the passage quoted from Vivekananda, not the words about God the poor and sinner and criminal. The point is about the Divine in the World, the All, *sarva-bhūtāni* of the Gita. That is not merely humanity, still less only the poor or the wicked; surely even the rich or the good are part of the All and those also who are neither good nor bad nor rich nor poor. Nor is there any question (I mean in my own remarks) of philanthropic service; so neither *daridra* nor *sevā* is the point. I had formerly not the humanitarian but the humanity view — and something of it may have stuck to my expressions in the *Arya*. But I had already altered my viewpoint from the “Our Yoga for the sake of humanity” to “Our Yoga for the sake of the Divine”. The Divine includes not only the supracosmic but the cosmic and the individual — not only Nirvana or the Beyond but Life and the All. It is that I stress everywhere. But I shall keep the extracts for a day or two and see what there is, if anything, that smacks too much of a too narrow humanistic standpoint. I stop here for today.

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² In *The Synthesis of Yoga* Sri Aurobindo wrote: “Often, we see this desire of personal salvation overcome by another attraction which also belongs to the higher turn of our nature and which indicates the essential character of the action the liberated soul

Today a Kanchenjunga of correspondence has fallen on my head, so I could not write about humanity and its progress. Were not the later views of Lowes Dickinson greyed over by the sickly cast of a disappointed idealism? I have not myself an exaggerated respect for humanity and what it is — but to say that there has been no progress is as much an exaggerated pessimism as the rapturous hallelujahs of the nineteenth century to a progressive humanity were an exaggerated optimism.

I shall manage to read through the chapter you sent me, though how I manage to find time for these things is a standing miracle and a signal proof of a Divine Providence.

Yes, the “progress” you are making is of the genuine kind — the signs are recognisable. And after all the best way to make humanity progress is to move on oneself — that may sound either individualistic or egoistic, but it isn’t; it is only common sense.

*Yad yad ācarati śreṣṭhas tat tad evetaro janah.*³

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It is no use entertaining these feelings. One has to see what the world is without becoming bitter — for the bitterness comes from one’s own ego and its disappointed expectations. If one wants the victory of the Divine, one must achieve it in oneself first.

must pursue. . . . It is that which inspires a remarkable passage in a letter of Swami Vivekananda. ‘I have lost all wish for my salvation,’ wrote the great Vedantin, ‘may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum-total of all souls, — and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species is the special object of my worship. He who is the high and low, the saint and the sinner, the god and the worm, Him worship, the visible, the knowable, the real, the omnipresent; break all other idols. In whom there is neither past life nor future birth, nor death nor going nor coming, in whom we always have been and always will be one, Him worship; break all other idols.’

“The last two sentences contain indeed the whole gist of the matter.” The Synthesis of Yoga, volume 23 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, pp. 269–70.

³ “Whatsoever the Best doeth, that the lower kind of man puts into practice.” Gita 3.21. Sri Aurobindo’s translation. Essays on the Gita, volume 19 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 135.

Social and Political Activism

All this insistence upon action is absurd if one has not the light by which to act. Yoga must include life and not exclude it does not mean that we are bound to accept life as it is with all its stumbling ignorance and misery and the obscure confusion of human will and reason and impulse and instinct which it expresses. The advocates of action think that by human intellect and energy making an always new rush everything can be put right; the present state of the world after a development of the intellect and a stupendous output of energy for which there is no historical parallel is a signal proof of the illusion under which they labour. Yoga takes the stand that it is only by a change of consciousness that the true basis of life can be discovered; from within outward is indeed the rule. But within does not mean some quarter inch behind the surface. One must go deep and find the soul, the self, the Divine Reality within us and only then can life become a true expression of what we can be instead of a blind and always repeated confused blur of the inadequate and imperfect thing we were. The choice is between remaining in the old jumble and groping about in the hope of stumbling on some discovery or standing back and seeking the Light within till we discover and can build the godhead within and without us.

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I had never a very great confidence in X's yoga-turn getting the better of his activism — he has two strong ties that prevent it, ambition and need to act and lead in the vital and in the mind a mental idealism — these two things are the great fosterers of illusion. The spiritual path needs a certain amount of realism — one has to see the real value of the things that are — which is very little, except as steps in evolution. Then one can either follow the spiritual static path of rest and release or the spiritual dynamic path of a greater truth to be brought down into life. But otherwise —