Chapter One

Mental Development and Sadhana

The Development of the Mind

The development of the mind is a useful preliminary for the sadhak; it can also be pursued along with the sadhana on condition that it is not given too big a place and does not interfere with the one important thing, the sadhana itself.

* To have a developed intellect is always helpful if one can enlighten it from above and turn it to divine use.

* A well-developed intellect is one which is plastic, wide, free from rigidity and stiffness, — that can be of use.

* It [a developed mind] may or may not [help the sadhana] — if it is too intellectually developed on certain rationalistic lines, it may hinder.

* The tendency to inquire and know is in itself good, but it must be kept under control. What is needed for progress in sadhana is gained best by increase of consciousness and experience and of intuitive knowledge.

* To be interested in outward things is not wrong in itself — it depends on the way in which one is interested. If it is done as part of the sadhana, looking on them from the true consciousness, then they become a means for the growth of the being. It is that
that matters, to get the true consciousness — and it is this that comes in you when you have the sense of the Peace and the working of the Force in it. There is no real reason for discontent or dissatisfaction with yourself — since progress is being made in spite of the resistance of the lower forces. The pressure which is translated by the heaviness in the stomach has to be got rid of — it is there that there is the chief resistance still. Peace within and a cheerful confidence and gladness without is what is wanted — then this kind of nervous pressure and disorder would cease.

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It does not help for spiritual knowledge to be ignorant of the things of this world.

**Reading and Sadhana**

For one who wants to practise sadhana, sadhana must come first — reading and mental development can only be subordinate things.

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I don’t know that it [mental development] helps the sadhana and I don’t quite understand what is meant by the phrase. What is a fact is that mental like physical work can be made a part of the sadhana, — not as a rival to the sadhana or as another activity with equal rights and less selfish and egoistic than seeking the Divine.

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I have no objection to mental development. It is the idea that doing sadhana earnestly is egoistic and selfish, and reading is an unselfish noble pursuit that is absurd.

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Reading can be only a momentary help to prepare the mind. But the real knowledge does not come by reading. Some preparation for the inner knowledge may be helpful — but the mind should
not be too superficially active or seek to know only for curiosity’s sake.

* It [reading] does not take one inwards in any real sense — it only takes one from the more physical to the more mental part of the external consciousness.

* If the power to meditate long is there, a sadhak will naturally do it and care little for reading — unless he has reached the stage when everything is part of the Yogic consciousness because that is permanent. Sadhana is the aim of a sadhak, not mental development. But if he has spare time, those who have the mental turn will naturally spend it in reading or study of some kind.

* The attitude you describe is just what it should be — there is nothing wrong in it, — nor in your reading or letter-writing etc. There can be no objection to these activities in themselves, for the Yoga; only they must be done with the right attitude and spirit and as part of the sadhana — because the whole life has to become a sadhana, until it is able to become, the whole life, an embodiment of the siddhi.

* If by passivity of the mind you mean laziness and inability to use it, then what Yoga makes that its basis? The mind has to be quieted and transformed, not made indolent and useless. Is there any old Yoga that makes it a rule not to allow those who practise it to study Sanskrit or philosophy? Did that prevent the Yogis from attaining mental quietude? Do you think that the Mother and myself never read anything and have to sit all day inactive in order to make our minds quiet? Are you not aware that the principle of this Yoga is to arrive at an inner silence in which all activities can take place without disturbing the inner silence?
When the passion for reading or study seizes hold of the mind, it is like that; one wants to spend all the time doing it. It is a force that wants to satisfy itself — like other forces — and takes hold of the consciousness for its purpose. One has to utilise these forces without letting them take hold; for this there must be the central being always in control of the forces of Nature that come to it, deciding for itself the choice of what it shall accept, how use, how arrange their action. Otherwise each Force catches hold of some part of the personality (the student, the social man, the erotic man, the fighter) and uses and drives the being instead of being controlled and used by it.

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I do not think you should stop reading so long as the reading itself does not, as a passion, fall away from the mind; that happens when a higher order of consciousness and experiences begin within the being. Nor is it good to force yourself too much to do only the one work of painting. Such compulsion of the mind and vital tends usually either to be unsuccessful and make them more restless or else to create some kind of dullness and inertia.

For the work simply aspire for the Force to use you, put yourself inwardly in relation with the Mother when doing it and make it your aim to be the instrument for the expression of beauty without regard to personal fame or the praise and blame of others.

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I don’t think it would be advisable not to read at all. It is a relaxation of the tension of sadhana which can be at the same time useful to the mind. It is only when there is the spontaneous flow of sadhana all day without strain that reading is no longer needed.

Reading What Is Helpful to the Sadhana

Dhyana and work are both helpful for this Yoga to those who
can do both. Reading also can be made helpful.

* Dedication to the Divine [is the right attitude in reading]. To read what will help the Yoga or what will be useful for the work or what will develop the capacities for the divine purpose. Not to read worthless stuff or for mere entertainment or for a dilettante intellectual curiosity which is of the nature of a mental dram-drinking. When one is established in the highest consciousness, one can read nothing or everything: it makes no difference — but that is still far off.

* In the beginning of the sadhana you need nothing more than just what you say, “concentration with faith, devotion and sincerity” on a form of the Divine Being — you can add prayer or the name, if you like.

Reading good books can be of help in the early mental stage — they prepare the mind, put it in the right atmosphere — can even if one is very sensitive bring some glimpses of realisation on the mental plane. Afterwards the utility diminishes — you have to find the right knowledge and experience in yourself.

* This [inclination to meditate while reading books on spiritual life] is quite a normal movement. In reading these books you get into touch with the Force behind them and it is this that pushes you into meditation and a corresponding experience.

* It depends upon the nature of the things read, whether they are helpful to the growth of the being or not. No general rule can be made. It cannot be said that poetry or dramas ought or ought not to be read — it depends on the poem or the play — so with the rest.

* It is quite permissible to do so [read light literature at times for
a change] and may relieve. The one thing necessary is that you should be able to keep the consciousness behind free, as in this case.

* What you can do is to read not for pastime but with the clear intention of furnishing your mind with knowledge.

* Yes, reading can be done for the improvement of the mental instrument as part of the sadhana.

Reading and Detachment

You can remember at the beginning and offer your reading to the Divine and at the end again. There is a state of consciousness in which only a part of it is reading or doing the work and behind there is the consciousness of the Divine always.

* A time must come when the reading as well as any other outward occupation does not interfere with the presence or activity of the higher consciousness.

* The reading must learn to accommodate itself to the pressure [of sadhana] — that is, be done by the outer mind while the inner being remains in concentration.

* That is good. Reading ought not to absorb the consciousness — there ought to be the larger part behind detached and conscious in a larger way.

* The only way [to separate oneself from mental activities such as reading] is to separate the Prakriti and Purusha. When you feel
something within watching all the mental activities but separate from them, just as you can watch things going on outside in the street, then that is the separation of Purusha from mental Prakriti.

*That [inability to understand what is read] only means that you cannot separate yourself from your mental consciousness in its activity. Naturally, if you take your mental consciousness off the reading, you can’t understand what is being read, for it is with the mental consciousness that one understands. You have not to make the mental consciousness separate from the reading, but yourself separate from the mental consciousness. You have to be the Witness watching it reading or writing or talking, just as you watch the body acting or moving.*

*What happens in reading such books [as a book on zoology] is that one comes into a very external consciousness which looks outward and not inward. When the reading is over the mind runs for a time in this external groove and then one has to remain quiet and call back or get back into the inward state to which the higher thoughts naturally come. This may take a little time.*

*The only harm in reading these things [about procreation] is that the vital makes it an excuse for sexual excitement. Otherwise there is no harm in reading for knowledge — the facts of existence have to be known, and we should learn them with a free and dispassionate mind. But such reading has to be avoided, if there is any vital reaction.*

**Reading Novels and Newspapers**

Reading novels is always distracting if you are deep in sadhana. It is better to avoid it now.
If novels touch the lower vital or raise it, they ought not to be read by the sadhak. One can read them only if one can look at them from the literary point of view as a picture of human life and nature which one can observe, as the Yogi looks at life itself, without being involved in it or having any reaction.

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I don’t quite know about the novel. People bring in the relations of man and woman because it has been the habit for centuries to make every novel turn around that — except in the few which deal with history or adventure or similar things. In a novel based on spiritual philosophy should not the man and woman idea go into the background or disappear, the spiritual love not having anything based at all on sex, but on the relation between soul and soul?

*I*

It is not necessary to be in touch with the outside world in this way [by reading newspapers]; it may be useful under certain circumstances and for some purposes. It may act too as a hindrance. All depends upon the consciousness from which it is done.

The reading of books of a light character may act as a relaxation of the mental consciousness. In the early stages it is not always possible to keep the mind to an unbroken spiritual concentration and endeavour and it takes refuge in other occupations, feeling even instinctively drawn to those of a lighter character.

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Obviously there are many things that apply to all equally and cannot be avoided in that way [by saying that each one’s way is different]. The dictum that each has his own way is not true; each has his own way of following the common way and the “own way” may often be very defective. Of course it is true that natures are different and the approach whether to the sadhana or to other things. One can say generally that newspaper reading
or novel reading is not helpful to the sadhana and is at best a concession to the vital which is not yet ready to be absorbed in the sadhana — unless and until one is able to read in the right way with a higher consciousness which is not only not “disturbed” by the reading or distracted by it from the concentrated Yoga-consciousness but is able to make the right use of what is read from the point of view of the inner consciousness and the inner life.

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Merely following external rules cannot of course be sufficient. They are only an aid to the inner effort until the inner consciousness is thoroughly established. Usually much reading of newspapers in the ordinary way keeps one attached to the ordinary view and vision of things and interested in that — when one has the inner consciousness one can see things happening in the world with another eye of knowledge and then reading can be of some use, though even then most of what is published is empty and futile. But the mere not-reading by itself is not effective. Also if one has need of a distraction, reading newspapers serves the purpose.

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Reasons given [for reading newspapers] of course prove nothing — they may be only excuses put forward by the mind for doing what the vital wants. The newspapers obviously carry with them a lowering atmosphere. It is a question of fact whether one can separate oneself sufficiently not to be pulled down by it. At the time of reading there is certainly a lower pitch of the consciousness in the frontal or outward parts. Only, if one has a consciousness behind which is not affected, then one can revert immediately after reading to the normal higher level.

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It is not against the principle of Yogic life to know what is happening in the world — what is unyogic is to be attached to these things [such as newspaper reading] and not able to
do without them or to think of them as a matter of main importance. The all-important thing must be the sadhana, the growth into a new consciousness and a new inner life. The rest must be done with detachment and without getting absorbed in them. The feeling must be such that if the Mother were to tell you never to see a newspaper at all, it would be no deprivation to you and you would not even feel the difference.

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The inability to read books or papers is often felt when the consciousness is getting the tendency to go inside.