Chapter One

The Hostile Forces
and the Difficulties of Yoga

The Existence of the Hostile Forces

Whenever anything has to be done, there are always forces that want to interfere. I suppose they want to show that smooth walking and the “wide unbarred and thornless path” belong only to the Vedic Ritam satyam brihat and we must get up there — if we can.

What occult secret? It is a fact always known to all Yogis and occultists since the beginning of time, in Europe and Africa as in India, that wherever Yoga or Yajna is done, there the hostile forces gather together to stop it by any means. It is known that there is a lower nature and a higher spiritual nature — it is known that they pull different ways and the lower is strongest at first and the higher afterwards. It is known that the hostile forces take advantage of the movements of the lower nature and try to spoil through them, smash or retard the siddhi. It has been said as long ago as the Upanishads, “Hard is this path to tread, sharp like a razor’s edge”; it was said later by Christ, “Hard is the way and narrow the gate by which one enters into the kingdom of heaven” and also “Many are called, few chosen” — because of these difficulties. But it has also always been known that those who are sincere and faithful in heart and remain so and those who rely on the Divine will arrive in spite of all difficulties, stumbles or falls.

Yes, certainly [there are hostile forces active in the outside world]. Men are being constantly invaded by the hostiles and
there are great numbers of men who are partly or entirely under their influence. Some are possessed by them, others (a few) are incarnations of hostile beings. At the present moment they are very active all over the earth. Of course in the outside world there is no consciousness such as is developed in Yoga, by which they can either become aware of or consciously repel the attacks — the struggle in them between the psychic and the hostile force goes on mostly behind the veil or so far as it is on the surface is not understood by the mind.

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Yes, of course, there is always a fight between the forces of Light and Darkness.

In sadhana it becomes concentrated and conscious to us.

As for the hostile beings, they are always in battle with each other; but they make common cause against the Truth and Light.

**The Function of the Hostile Forces**

The hostile forces have a certain self-chosen function: it is to test the condition of the individual, of the work, of the earth itself and their readiness for the spiritual descent and fulfilment. At every step of the journey, they are there attacking furiously, criticising, suggesting, imposing despondency or inciting to revolt, raising unbelief, amassing difficulties. No doubt, they put a very exaggerated interpretation on the rights given them by their function, making mountains even out of what seems to us a mole-hill. A little trifling false step or mistake and they appear on the road and clap a whole Himalaya as a barrier across it. But this opposition has been permitted from of old not merely as a test or ordeal, but as a compulsion on us to seek a greater strength, a more perfect self-knowledge, an intenser purity and force of aspiration, a faith that nothing can crush, a more powerful descent of the Divine Grace.

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The purpose they [the hostile forces] serve in the world is to
give a full chance to the possibilities of the Inconscience and Ignorance — for this world was meant to be a working out of these possibilities with the supramental harmonisation as its eventual outcome. The life, the work developing here in the Asram has to deal with the world problem and had therefore to meet, it could not avoid, the conflict with the working of the hostile Powers in the human being.

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The hostile forces make it their function to attack and disturb the sadhaks, but if there were no wrong movement and no imperfection and weakness, they would not be disturbed.

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It happens so with everybody [that the external nature responds to lower vibrations] so long as there is not the positive siddhi of transformation by which it becomes contrary to the very nature of the instrument to respond to these vibrations — because they have become foreign to it. Till then all depends on the vigilance of the consciousness and its will. The repetition of the response does not increase the difficulty — it only retards the clearing out of the invading forces.

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Whatever point the adverse forces choose for attack, however small it may seem to the external human mind, becomes a crucial point and to yield it up may be to yield to them one of the keys of the fortress. Even if it is a small postern door, it is enough for them if they can enter.

    Nothing is really small and unimportant in the Great Path. Especially when the struggle has come down to the physical level, these distinctions cease to have any value; for there “small” things have a not easily calculable index value and are of great importance. On that level to lose a small post may be to make certain the loss of the big battle.

    All have had to pass through the ordeal and test through which you are passing. We would have avoided it for you if
it had been possible, but since it has come we look to you to persist and conquer. Patience, quiet endurance, calm resolution to go through to the end and triumph, these are the qualities now required of you — the less spectacular but more substantial of the warrior virtues.

Also perspicacity and vigilance. Do not shut your eyes to the difficulty in you or turn away from it, but also let it not discourage you. Victory is certain if we persevere and what price of difficulty and endeavour can be too great for such a conquest?

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Hostile forces attack every sadhak; some are conscious, others are not. Their object is either to influence the person or to use him or to spoil the sadhana or the work or any other motive of the kind. Their object is not to test — but their attack may be used by the guiding Power as a test.

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Your description [of recent tests in sadhana] is too vague. From what you write it may just as well be the reaction that frequently follows an experience; the adverse Force coming in with a contrary movement. Tests come sometimes from the hostile forces, sometimes in the course of Nature. I suppose they must be necessary, since they always come in sadhana.

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The method of the Divine Manifestation is through calm and harmony, not through a catastrophic upheaval. The latter is the sign of a struggle, generally of conflicting vital forces, but at any rate a struggle on the inferior plane.

You think too much of adverse forces. That kind of preoccupation causes much unnecessary struggle. Fix your mind on the positive side — open to the Mother’s power, concentrate on her protection, call for light, calm and peace and purity and growth into the divine consciousness and knowledge.

This idea of tests also is not a healthy idea and ought not
to be pushed too far. Tests are applied not by the Divine but by
the forces of the lower planes — mental, vital, physical — and
allowed by the Divine because that is part of the soul's training
and helps it to know itself, its powers and the limitations it has
to outgrow. The Mother is not testing you at every moment,
but rather helping you at every moment to rise beyond the
necessity of tests and difficulties which belong to the inferior
consciousness. To be always conscious of that help will be your
best safeguard against all attacks whether of adverse powers or
of your own lower nature.

Testing Oneself against the Hostile Forces

If one knows how to profit by experience, even the Hostile
Forces and their attacks can be useful — although of course that
does not mean that the attacks should be invited. What they
do is to press with all their force upon some weak point of our
nature and if we are vigilant, we can see and throw away that
weakness. Only the attack method of these Forces is too violent
and upheaving and endangers the good things in one also, faith
and peace etc. — so one has to be careful to keep these against
all attacks.

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There is no use of testing [one's capacity] at all — whatever test
is needed, comes of itself in the ordinary way in the very use
of the capacity and in the very steps of the progress — no other
is needed. Beyond that the tests that come are from the hostile
forces — but their way of testing is to take advantage of any
point of weakness and push with all their force at that point to
break down the sadhana or else to hurl all the adverse forces
on the consciousness while it is still in process of transition and
not yet mature so as to shatter all that has been done. It is
not a true test but mere destruction replacing the constructive
method. By unnecessary “testing” one dangerously invites this
hostile pressure and raises up things which one has to banish. To
be conscious is necessary, but quiet self-examination is sufficient
for that — raising up difficulties under plan of testing is quite the wrong method.

The Divine Force and the Adverse Force

Do you not know the story of the Elephant Brahman? All is Brahman, but in action you have to treat the elephant as the Elephant Brahman and the Asura as the Asura Brahman and neither as merely Brahman pure and simple. One has either to avoid the Rakshasa or overcome him; otherwise the Rakshasa may eat up the man, all Brahman though both be. The Brahman realisation is an inner static realisation, until one has become the dynamic instrument of the Divine Consciousness and Force — then the problem of the elephant and the Rakshasa won’t arise, for the Divine Consciousness will know and the Divine Force will execute what is to be done in each case. There is no need to have vaira inside, but to be friendly with the Rakshasa is not prudent, as the Rakshasa is impervious to that kind of thing — he will take advantage of it to farther his own purpose.

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Your description of the “Golden One” was the description of an Asura — how can that be the Divine? — “efficiently cruel” etc. etc. And, taken in that way, submission to such a Power so conceived would justify a yielding to anything coming with sufficient force from the lower Nature on the ground that it is He who is making you do it.

There is a right and discriminating use of the Vedantic Knowledge that all is One and there is a wrong and undiscriminating use. The latter is more dangerous than complete ignorance. Especially at this moment sadhaks must be on their guard against the subtle intrusion of this error (the undiscriminating acceptance of all as coming from the Divine) — for more than one has fallen a victim to it and got badly hurt.

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Your statement about the Shakti. The mere intensity of the force
does not show that it is a bad power; the Divine Force often works with a great intensity. Everything depends on the nature of the force and its working; what does it do, what seems to be its purpose? If it works to purify or open the system, or brings with it light or peace or prepares the change of the thoughts, ideas, feelings, character in the sense of a turning towards a higher consciousness, then it is the right force. If it is dark or obscure, or perturbs the being with rajasic or egoistic suggestions or excites the lower nature, then it is an adverse Force.

The Forces of the Lower Nature and the Hostile Forces

There are the higher forces of the Divine Nature — the forces of Light, Truth, divine Power, Peace, Ananda — there are the forces of the lower nature which belong either to a lower truth or to ignorance and error — there are also the hostile forces whose whole aim is to maintain the reign of Darkness, Falsehood, Death and Suffering as the law of life.

* The lower nature is ignorant and undivine, not in itself hostile but shut to the Light and Truth. The hostile forces are anti-divine, not merely undivine; they make use of the lower nature, pervert it, fill it with distorted movements and by that means influence man and even try to enter and possess or at least entirely control him.

Free yourself from all exaggerated self-depreciation and the habit of getting depressed by the sense of sin, difficulty or failure. These feelings do not really help, on the contrary, they are an immense obstacle and hamper the progress. They belong to the religious, not to the Yogic mentality. The Yogin should look on all the defects of the nature as movements of the lower prakriti common to all and reject them calmly, firmly and persistently with full confidence in the Divine Power — without weakness or depression or negligence and without excitement, impatience or violence.
No, [the vital ego is] certainly not [a hostile power] — it is part of the ordinary human nature, everybody has it. It has to be purified and transformed, the ego being replaced by the true vital being of which it is a distorted shadow. The forces of the lower nature are often rebellious and resist transformation out of attachment to the familiar movements of the Ignorance, desire, vanity, pride, lust, self-will etc., but they are not in their nature hostile. The hostile Forces are those whose very raison d’être is revolt against the Divine, against the Light and Truth and enmity to the Divine Work.

Normal human defects are one thing — they are the working of the lower nature of the Ignorance. The action of the hostile forces is a special intervention creating violent inner conflicts, abnormal depressions, thoughts and impulses of a kind which can be easily recognised as suggestions, e.g. leaving the Asram, abandoning the Yoga, revolt against the Divine, suggestions of calamity and catastrophe apparently irresistible, irrational impulses and so on. It is a different order from the usual human weaknesses.

The defects of the nature are nothing, they can be dealt with progressively. It is these outward attacks, these suggestions and throwing in of wrong forces to which the sadhak must shut himself altogether.

To have weaknesses of the lower nature is one thing — to call in the hostile forces is quite another. Whoever does the latter, takes his risk. He is going towards the opposite camp — for the marks of the hostile Force are contempt of the Divine, revolt and hatred against the Mother, disbelief in the Yoga, assertion of ego against the Divine Being, preference of falsehood to Truth, seeking after false gods and rejection of the Eternal.
There are some who are never touched by the hostile forces.

The normal resistance of the lower Nature in human beings and the action of the Hostiles are two quite different things. The former is natural and occurs in everybody; the latter is an intervention from the non-human world. But this intervention can come in two forms. (1) They use and press on the lower Nature forces making them resist where they would otherwise be quiescent, making the resistance strong or violent where it would be otherwise slight or moderate, exaggerating its violence when it is violent. There is besides a malignant cleverness, a conscious plan and combination when the Hostiles act on these forces which is not evident in the normal resistance of the forces. (2) They sometimes invade with their own forces. When this happens there is often a temporary possession or at least an irresistible influence which makes the thoughts, feelings, actions of the person abnormal — a black clouding of the brain, a whirl in the vital, all acts as if the person could not help himself and were driven by an overmastering force. On the other hand instead of a possession there may be only a strong influence; there the symptoms are less marked, but it is easy for anyone acquainted with the ways of these forces to see what has happened. Finally it may be only an attack, not possession or influence; the person then is separate, is not overcome, resists.

* It is difficult to observe the difference between the action of the hostile Force and the pressure of the lower Nature because it is the latter that the Force takes hold of for its purpose. But there is in the Force a suggestive character, a conscious arrangement of the attack so as to upset or destroy the sadhana which there is not in the ordinary movement of the lower Nature — for that only comes to satisfy itself and then ceases. In your case the tactical use of a suggestion, the sudden rush clouding the knowledge, the rhythmic character of the periodic return, the attempt to bring despondency and hopelessness and push to departure — all these are clear signs of the hostile attack. People like X and Y who are moving forward in a leisurely way, are not usually subjected
to the hostile pressure. One with an intense and sensitive vital nature is more open; also those who have some vital proclivity in a very developed or exaggerated form e.g. pride, ambition, jealousy, sexuality etc. A complete surrender from the beginning does protect — suggestions may come, but they have no power to develop into a crisis.

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There is a natural movement of the ordinary human nature in the material consciousness which takes time to get rid of. Of course we call them forces of the lower nature but one must not regard them as hostile, but only ordinary. They have to be changed but it usually takes time and it can be done quietly. One must be more occupied with the positive side of the sadhana than with them. If one is always thinking of them as hostile things, getting disturbed when they come, considering as hostile possessions, then it is not good.

The things that are really hostile are few and must be distinguished from the ordinary movements of the nature. The first must be repelled, the second dealt with quietly and without getting troubled or discouraged by their appearance.

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They [certain lower forces] are not hostile forces, they are simply the forces of the ordinary Nature. The hostile forces are those which try to pervert everything and are in revolt against the Divine and opposed to the Yoga.

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The forces of the Ignorance are a perversion of the earth-nature and the adverse Powers make use of them. They do not give up their control of men without a struggle.

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There is a pressure on the forces of the lower nature to change — through that the pressure is felt by the hostiles; but whether they change or are destroyed seems to be left very much to them to choose.
Vital Resistance, Physical Inertia and the Hostile Forces

There are almost always some parts of the being that are either unwilling or feel an incapacity for the effort demanded of them. It is the psychic and the mind and the higher vital usually that join together for the Yoga — for if these three do not join, it is difficult to do any Yoga at all beyond getting a few experiences from time to time. But in the lower vital there is almost always something recalcitrant and there is much of the physical that is too obscure. If the sadhak were left to himself this could be remedied without much difficulty, but it is here that the hostility in the universal (lower) forces comes in — they want to keep their reign over the being. The result is an exacerbation of the resistance of the lower vital and an exaggeration of the obstruction (inertia, passive resistance) in the physical which then admit these suggestions of self-destruction, depression or despair.

* It is more the lack of sleep that is responsible [for the physical weakness], I think; also the excess of struggle which the constant pressure of the vital disturbances and the physical tamas bring in and by that weaken the nerves.

Like the vital disturbance the physical inertia with all its symptoms is an attack of the hostile forces intended to cut short and prevent the higher opening. The ideas that arise to justify it are of no value — it is not true that physical work is of an inferior value to mental culture, it is the arrogance of the intellect that makes the claim. All work done for the Divine is equally divine, manual labour done for the Divine is more divine than mental culture done for one’s own development, fame or mental satisfaction.

This inertia, numbness, pain should be thrown off with the same resolution as the vital disturbances. The only peculiarity of it in your case is the persistent violence of the attack as in the case of the vital — otherwise it is what others get also; but each time they reject, call on the Mother and get free, after a little time if the attack is violent, at once if it is of a lesser character.
If there is temporary physical inability, one can take rest, but solely for the purpose of recovering the physical energy. The idea of giving up physical work for mental self-development is a creation of the mental ego.

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The inertia gives room and power for the hostile forces to act.

The Hostile Forces and Universal Forces

No, they [the hostile forces] do not create universal forces; they are themselves moved by them and move them.

The Hostile Forces and the Spiritual Consciousness

From the higher mind upwards, all is free from the action of the hostile forces. For they [the higher planes] all belong to the spiritual consciousness though with varying degrees of light and power and completeness.