Chapter Two

The Place of Study in Sadhana

Study and Sadhana

Study cannot take the same or a greater importance than sadhana.

* Study is of importance only if you study in the right way and with the turn for knowledge and mental discipline. What is the use of studying French if you go on always making the same mistakes and having the same inaccurate and slovenly hold of the language?

* I have already said that you can spend the time in study as the sadhana is not active. If the sadhana were active then study could be done in the spare time, i.e. in times not given to work or meditation.

Study and Mental Development

A well-trained intellect and study are two different things — there are plenty of people who have read much but have not a well-trained intellect. Inertia can come to anybody, even to the most educated people.

* Reading, learning about things, acquiring complete and accurate information, training oneself in logical thinking, considering dispassionately all sides of a question, rejecting hasty or wrong inferences and conclusions, learning to look at all things clearly and as a whole [are what is meant by mental training].

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By training it to see, observe and understand in the right way [one can have a well-developed intellect]. Reading and study are only useful to acquire information and widen one's field of data. But that comes to nothing if one does not know how to discern and discriminate, judge, see what is within and behind things.

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A man may have read much and yet be mentally undeveloped. It is by thinking, understanding, receiving mental influences from his intellectual superiors that a man’s mind develops.

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There is no such rule.¹ It is better if the mind is strong and developed, but scholarship does not necessarily create a strong and developed mind.

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Intelligence does not depend on the amount one has read, it is a quality of the mind. Study only gives it material for its work as life also does. There are people who do not know how to read and write well who are more intelligent than many highly educated people and understand life and things better. On the other hand a good intelligence can improve itself by reading because it gets more material to work on and grows by exercise and by having a wider range to move in. But book knowledge by itself is not the real thing; it has to be used as a help to the intelligence, but it is often used only as a help to a loquacious stupidity or ignorance — ignorance because knowledge of facts is a poor thing if one cannot see their true significance.

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You have either to train the memory by practising to remember — or if you cannot do that, try only to understand, read much and let the memory remember what it can. There are people who

¹ The correspondent asked whether a scholar would progress rapidly in spiritual life if his mind was “developed, large and enlightened through education”. — Ed.
have a bad memory but they succeed in their studies in spite of it.

School Studies and Yoga

I see no objection to his going on with his studies, — whether they will be of any use to him for a life of sadhana will depend on the spirit in which he does them. The really important thing is to develop a state of consciousness in which one can live in the Divine and act from it on the physical world. A mental training and discipline, knowledge of men and things, culture, capacities of a useful kind are a preparation that the sadhak would be all the better for having, — even though they are not the one thing indispensable. Education in India gives very little of these things; but if one knows how to study without caring much for the form or for mere academic success, the life of the student can be used for the purpose.

At this age he is too young to give up study. It would be best for him to attend the school still; it will be worth while leaving it only if other and better arrangements could be made for his studies. Development of the mind is not a useless thing for one who wishes to follow this sadhana and it can very well go along with the Yoga.

There is no reason why X should not complete his studies or learn something which will make him useful in life. To be useless is not a qualification for Yoga.

The Study of Languages

Knowing languages is part of the equipment of the mind.

There is no harm in learning [a new language] — provided it is
kept in its subordinate place and one is not too much lost in it.

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Your objection was to learning languages and especially French as inimical to peace and silence because it meant activity. The mind, when it is not in meditation or in complete silence, is always active with something or another — with its own ideas or desires or with other people or with things or with talking etc. None of these is any less an activity than learning languages. Now you shift your ground and say it is because owing to their study they have no time for meditation that you object. That is absurd, for if people want to meditate, they will arrange their time of study for that; if they don’t want to meditate, the reason must be something else than study and if they do not study they will simply go on thinking about “small things”. Want of time is not the cause of their non-meditation and passion for study is not the cause.

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One does not learn English or French as an aid to the sadhana; it is done for the development of the mind and as part of the activity given to the being. For that purpose learning French is as good as learning English and, if it is properly done, better. Nor is there any reason, if one has the capacity, to limit oneself to one language only.

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It depends on what you want to do with the language. If it is only to read the literature, then to learn to read, pronounce and understand accurately is sufficient. If it is a complete mastery one wants, then conversation and writing have to be thoroughly learned in that language.

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To read many books quickly gives freedom and ease and familiarity with the language. The other method [to read a book carefully more than once] is necessary for thoroughness and accuracy in detail.
The Study of Philosophy

I don’t know that there is anything false in your philosophical reflections. Philosophy is of course a creation of the mind but its defect is not that it is false, but that a philosophical system is only a section of the Truth which the philosopher takes as a whole. If one does not shut oneself up like that but looks at all sides, there is no harm in philosophising.

*It depends on the nature of the book [whether it is harmful or useful]. Philosophy makes the mind subtle in certain directions — or ought to do so. The only harm it can do is if the mind begins clinging to ideas instead of going forward to direct experience.*

*I do not know about this Commentary [on the Taittiriya Upanishad], but most commentaries on the Upanishads are written out of the reasoning and speculating intellect. They may be of use to people who are trying to find out intellectually the meaning of the Upanishads — but they can be of no help to you as a sadhak who are seeking experience; it is likely rather to confuse the mind by taking it off the true basis and throwing it out from the road of experience and spiritual receptivity into the tangle of intellectual debate.*

*Yes, that [to read critically] is the right way to read these things. These philosophies [of the early Greeks] are mostly mental intuitions mixed with much guessing (speculation), but behind, if one knows, one can catch some Truth to which they correspond.*

*Metaphysics deals with the ultimate cause of things and all that lies behind the world of phenomena. As regards mind and consciousness, it asks what they are, how they came into existence, what is their relation to Matter, Life etc. Psychology deals with
mind and consciousness and tries to find out not so much their ultimate nature and relations as their actual workings and the rule and law of these workings.

The Study of Logic

It [the study of logic] is a theoretical training; you learn by it some rules of logical thinking. But the application depends on your own intelligence. In any sphere of knowledge or action a man may be a good theorist but a poor executant. A very good military theorist and critic if put in command of an army might very well lose all his battles, not being able to suit the theories rightly to the occasion. So a theoretical logician may bungle the problems of thought by want of insight, of quickness of mind or of plasticity in the use of his capacities. Besides, logic is not the whole of thinking; observation, intuition, sympathy, many-sidedness are more important.

* I never heard that learning logic was necessary for good expression. So far as I know very few good writers ever bothered about learning that subject.

* I am not aware that by learning logic one gets freed from physical things. A few intellectuals lead the mental life and are indifferent to physical needs to a great extent, but these are very few.

* Common sense by the way is not logic (which is the least common-sense-like thing in the world), it is simply looking at things as they are without inflation or deflation — not imagining wild imaginations — or for that matter despairing “I know not why” despairs.
The Study of Science

I think some knowledge of science will be most useful to you — that field is quite a blank for most people here, and yet the greater part of modern thought and knowledge is influenced by it.

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Yes, the scientific mind does not lead very far [in spiritual life]; it only multiplies experiences but brings neither the realisation, nor the knowledge.