Chapter Two

Emptiness, Voidness, Blankness and Silence

Periods of Emptiness

If it is only emptiness, there is nothing wrong. Alternations of emptiness and fullness are a quite normal feature of experience in sadhana.

Emptiness usually comes as a clearance of the consciousness or some part of it. The consciousness or part becomes like an empty cup into which something new can be poured. The highest emptiness is the pure existence of the Self in which all manifestation can take place.

To be an empty vessel is a very good thing if one knows how to make use of the emptiness.

Keep the quiet and do not mind if it is for a time empty; the consciousness at times is like a vessel which has to be emptied of its mixed and undesirable contents; it has to be kept vacant for a while till it can be filled with the right contents. The one thing to be avoided is the refilling of the cup with the old contents. Meanwhile wait, open yourself upwards, call very quietly and steadily, not with a too restless eagerness for the peace to come into the silence and, once the peace is there, for the joy and the presence.

You have written of the Force coming down [during a period of
Emptiness, Voidness, Blankness and Silence

— even sometimes of its filling all parts — so what is this “never”? I did not at all mean that there is a mechanical process by which every time there is emptiness afterwards there comes an entire filling up. It depends on the stage of the sadhana. The emptiness may come often or stay long before there is any descent — what fills may be silence and peace or Force or Knowledge and they may fill only the mind or mind and heart or mind and heart and vital or all. But there is nothing fixed and mechanically regular about these two processes.

* Usually such feelings of emptiness [in the body] come when the identification with the body is lessening and the consciousness is preparing to take its seat either above or in a cosmic wideness or in some beginning of that wideness.

* An emptiness in the mind or vital may be spiritual without emptiness being an essential characteristic of the higher consciousness. If it were, there could be no Force, Light or Ananda in the higher consciousness. Emptiness is only a result produced by a certain action of the higher Force on the system in order that the higher consciousness may be able to come into it. It is a spiritual emptiness as opposed to the dull and inert emptiness of complete tamas which is not spiritual.

* If it is the spiritual emptiness then it will not be felt as interfering with the sadhana.

* If it is real emptiness, one can last in it for years together, — it is because the vital is restless and full of desires (not empty) that it is like that [difficult to remain empty]. Also the physical mind is by no means at rest. If the desires were thrown out and the ego less active and the physical mind at rest knowledge would come from above; in place of the physical mind’s stupidities,
the vital mind could be calm and quiet and the Mother’s Force take up the action and the higher consciousness begin to come down. That is the proper sequel of emptiness. But nothing of this has happened because the “emptiness” could not complete itself, that is to say, the true silence and peace.

**Emptiness — A Transitional State**

The emptiness that you described in your letter yesterday was not a bad thing—it is this emptiness inward and outward that often in Yoga becomes the first step towards a new consciousness. Man’s nature is like a cup of dirty water—the water has to be thrown out, the cup left clean and empty for the divine liquor to be poured into it. The difficulty is that the human physical consciousness feels it difficult to bear this emptiness—it is accustomed to be occupied by all sorts of little mental and vital movements which keep it interested and amused or even if in trouble and sorrow still active. The cessation of these things is hard to bear for it. It begins to feel dull and restless and eager for the old interests and movements. But by this restlessness it disturbs the quietude and brings back the things that had been thrown out. It is this that is creating the difficulty and the obstruction for the moment. If you can accept emptiness as a passage to the true consciousness and true movements, then it will be easier to get rid of the obstacle.

All in the Asram are not suffering from the sense of dullness and want of interest, but many are because the Force that is descending is discouraging the old movements of the physical and vital mind which they call life and they are not accustomed to accept the renunciation of these things, or to admit the peace or joy of silence.

* There is a certain truth in what you say about the empty cup—a certain emptying of the consciousness of old things is necessary before anything positive can settle itself. It is what is happening in your physical consciousness, the old movements are being
emptied out and you fall quiet, but they press in again and the cup has to be repeatedly emptied. If there is a firm and persistent rejection, then this repeated return of these old movements will cease to be so persistent; the periods of quiet and its intensity will increase until the peace and quietude can be established and permanent.

It is not however a fact that the whole nature has to be emptied of the old things before there can be the Light and Grace. It is done usually in different parts of the nature at different times. You had your former experiences because the mind and higher vital were sufficiently emptied and quiet to receive some experiences of a new consciousness. Now it is the physical mind, physical vital and body that have to be emptied — these always take longer than the others because the physical is more full of old habits, more obstinate in keeping and always repeating them, more slow to receive anything new or to change. But by the detachment and steady rejection and reliance on the Mother’s force, this obstinacy can be overcome and the cup emptied for filling with the Divine Light.

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There is nothing out of the normal in what you describe — it happens in the course of the change of consciousness. What has to be remedied is that you feel the stillness, emptiness, but seem to have no joy of it or the satisfied peace of the self or sense of wideness or quiet release and freedom. Usually the cessation of the lower activities brings a sense of freedom, release, repose. The inner consciousness does not miss the mental jumpings or the vital swirl — it feels as if the silence were its native element.

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Emptiness is not in itself a bad condition, only if it is a sad and restless emptiness of the dissatisfied vital. In sadhana emptiness is very usually a necessary transition from one state to another. When mind and vital fall quiet and their restless movements, thoughts and desires cease, then one feels empty. This is at first often a neutral emptiness with nothing in it, nothing in it either
good or bad, happy or unhappy, no impulse or movement. This neutral state is often or even usually followed by the opening to inner experience. There is also an emptiness made of peace and silence, when the peace and silence come out from the psychic within or descend from the higher consciousness above. This is not neutral, for in it there is the sense of peace, often also of wideness and freedom. There is also a happy emptiness with the sense of something close or drawing near which is not yet there, e.g. the closeness of the Mother or some other preparing experience. What you describe is the neutral quiet. There is no need for anxiety. When it comes, one has only to remain quiet and open and turned to the Mother till something develops from within.

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What you describe is the same neutral condition that you had before. It is a transitional state in which the old consciousness has ceased to be active, the new is preparing behind a neutral quietude. One must take it quietly and wait for it to turn into the spiritual peace and the psychic happiness which is quite different from vital joy and grief. To have neither vital joy nor vital grief is considered by the Yogins to be a very desirable release, — it makes it possible to pass from the ordinary human vital feelings to the true and constant inner peace, joy or happiness. I suppose you have no time just now for sitting in meditation. The pressure of sleep is a pressure to go inside and the habit of meditation makes it possible to turn the sleep that comes into a kind of sleep-samadhi in which one is conscious of various experiences and progresses in the inner being.

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If you mean that after this kind of samadhi [during the afternoon rest], you feel a greater emptiness or voidness, it is quite natural. To void the being of the old consciousness and its movements and to fill the mind from above are the two main processes now by the Force from above.
When you feel empty like that, you have only to remain very still and open yourself to receive the Light and Force. Emptiness is a bad condition only when it is dull or when you receive into it wrong movements. But often one has to be empty in order to receive what is to be given.

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In itself this emptiness and quietude free from all anxiety or trouble or thought about people or things is not a bad sign or an undesirable state. It is a state of what the Yogis call *udāsinatā*, a separateness from all things and indifference, an untroubled neutral quietude. In many Yogas it is considered a very advanced and desirable condition — a state of liberation from the world, though not yet of realisation of the Divine, — but they consider it a necessary passage to the realisation. In our Yoga it is only a passage through which one arrives at a more positive spiritual calm consciousness in which all experiences and all realisations become possible. The feeling of dullness is due probably not to this state which is in itself a condition of ease and release, but to the depressed condition of the bodily health and strength. That also is probably the cause why the more positive state does not come quickly. The forgetfulness you speak of comes sometimes in the period of change, but passes away afterwards; a new force of memory comes.

**Voidness**

The voidness is the best condition for a full receptivity.

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The voidness (if by that you mean silence and emptiness of thoughts, movements etc.) is the basic condition into which the higher consciousness can flow.

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The usual result of voidness is to quiet down any vital tumult although it does not, unless it is complete, stop the mechanical
recurrent action of the mind.

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Yes, it becomes like that.¹ In the end you feel as if you had no body, but were spread out in the vastness of space as an infinite consciousness and existence — or as if the body were only a dot in that consciousness.

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There is no reason why the void should be a dull or unhappy condition. It is usually the habit of the mind and vital to associate happiness or interest only with activity, but the spiritual consciousness has no such limitations.

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Voidness can come from anywhere, mind, vital or from above.

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Voidness may be of different kinds — a certain kind of spiritual voidness or the emptiness that is a preparation for new experience. But an exhaustion of life energy is a very different thing. It may arise from fatigue, from somebody or something drawing away the vital force or from an invasion of tamas.

**Blankness**

In the course of the sadhana a state of blankness, of “neutral quiet” like this often comes — especially when the sadhana is in the physical consciousness. It is not that the aspiration is gone, but that it does not manifest for the time being, because all has become neutrally quiet. This condition is trying for the human mind and vital which are accustomed to be in some kind of activity always and regard this as a lifeless state. But one must not feel disturbed or disappointed when this comes, but remain calm in the full confidence that it is a stage only, a ground that

¹ The correspondent wrote that in the state of voidness his body felt as light as cotton. — Ed.
has to be crossed in the sadhana. In whatever condition, the faith and the fixed idea of surrender must be kept before the mind. As for the brief movements of restlessness, they will still down if this is kept and the quiet mind and vital reassert themselves quickly.

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The physical does not get tired of the blankness. It may feel tamasic because of its own tendency to inertia, but it does not usually object to voidness. Of course it may be the vital physical — you have only to reject it as a remnant of the old movements.

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Blankness is only a condition in which realisation has to come. If aspiration is needed for that, it has to be used; if the realisation comes of itself, then of course aspiration is not necessary.

**Emptiness, Blankness and Silence**

Silence of the being is the first natural aim of the Yoga. You and some others do not find satisfaction in it because you have not overcome the vital mind which wants always some kind of activity, change, doing something, making something happen. The eternal immobility of the silent Brahman is a thing it does not relish. So when emptiness comes, it finds it dull, inert, monotonous.

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I do not quite gather what is the nature of this silence and this heat which makes you feel like that. An inner silence is a condition favourable to the sadhana even if for a time it means the cessation of all activity within, all thoughts, emotions or mental perceptions. But it is possible and it does happen that the unaccustomed physical consciousness feels the silence to be dull and a deprivation of intelligence rather than a release and repose, and the strangeness of this inactive condition causes it apprehension and an alarmed perplexity. As for the heat that also may be troublesome and difficult to bear to the physical
consciousness because it is unaccustomed and gets alarmed and troubled. If it is that we must try to slow down and diminish the intensity of the force that is acting.

But in any case try to dismiss any alarm that may be suggested to you and keep the faith which you express in the last part of the letter.

* I cannot have written that it is only you who feel the silence as empty, as there are plenty who do so feel it at first. One feels it empty because one is accustomed to associate existence with thought, feeling and movement or with forms and objects, and there are none of these there. But it is not really empty.

* Certainly, the vital cannot take an interest in a blank condition. If you depend on your vital you cannot prolong it. It is the spirit that feels a release in the silence empty of all mental or other activities, for in that silence it becomes self-aware. For the blankness to be real one must have got into the Purusha or Witness consciousness. If you are looking at it with your mind or vital, then there is not blankness,—for even if there are no distinct thoughts then there must be a mental attitude or mental vibrations — e.g. the not feeling interest.

* The silence can remain when the blankness has gone. All sorts of things can pour in and yet the silence still remains, but if you become full of force, light, Ananda, knowledge etc. you can’t call yourself blank any longer.

* Every kind of realisation — infinite self, cosmic consciousness, the Mother’s Presence, Light, Force, Ananda, Knowledge, Sachchidananda realisation, the different layers of consciousness up to the Supermind— all these can come in the silence which remains but ceases to be blank.
The emptiness, silence and peace are the basic condition for the spiritual siddhi — it is the first step towards it. It enables the Purusha to be free from the movements of Prakriti, to see and know where they come from since they no longer rise from within the mind, heart etc., these being in a state of quietude, and to reject the lower movements and to call in the knowledge, will etc. of the higher Consciousness which is above.

Emptiness, Voidness and the Self

Emptiness is a state of quietude of the mental or vital or all the consciousness not visited by any mind or vital movements, but open to the Pure Existence and ready or tending to be that or already that but not yet realised in its full power of being. Which of these conditions it happens to be depends on the particular case. The Self state or the state of pure Existence is sometimes also called emptiness, but only in the sense that it is a state of sheer static rest of being without any contacts of mobile Nature.

* Emptiness as such is not a character of the higher consciousness, though it often looks like that to the human vital when one has the pure realisation of the Self, because all is immobile, and for the vital all that is not full of action appears empty. But the emptiness that comes to the mind, vital or physical is a special thing intended to clear the room for the things from above.

* The void is the condition of the Self — free, wide and silent. It seems void to the mind, but in reality is simply a state of pure existence and consciousness, Sat and Chit with Shanti.

* There is no such thing as néant. By “void” is meant emptiness clear of all contents except existence pure and simple. Without that one cannot realise the silent Brahman.