Chapter Four
Speech and Yoga

Outer Speech and the Inner Life

Even those who have a strong inner life, take a long time before they can connect it with the outer speech and action. Outer speech belongs to the externalising mind — that is why it is so difficult to connect it with the inner life.

* Talk is more external than writing, it depends more on the physical and its condition. Therefore in most cases it is more difficult to get it out of the clutch of the external mind.

* In talking one has the tendency to come down into a lower and more external consciousness because talking comes from the external mind. But it is impossible to avoid it altogether. What you must do is to learn to get back at once to the inner consciousness — this so long as you are not able to speak always from the inner being or at least with the inner being supporting the action.

* You have to learn not to allow the speaking to alter your condition or else to recover it as soon as the interruption is over.

* In speaking there should be always a sort of instinctive defence — except with those who are free from the ordinary vital impulse.
To remain aloof from the talk is what you should always do. The detachment is the first necessary condition for being free.

Talking and Dispersion of the Consciousness

Talking cannot be always avoided. I don’t think it matters much so long as there is not excessive dispersion of the consciousness.

There are some who have the flow of speech by nature and those who are very vital cannot do without it. But the latter case (not being able to do without it) is obviously a disability from the spiritual point of view. There are also certain stages in the sadhana when one has to go inward and silence is at that time very necessary while unnecessary speech becomes a dispersion of the energies or externalises the consciousness. It is especially this chat for chat’s sake tendency that has to be overcome.

It is one thing to speak simply and easily with others, keeping the inner consciousness, and another to let oneself go in the vital stream of an externalised consciousness — it was that which I said I had told you not to do.

It [a feeling of dispersion] is of course because the consciousness is thrown out in these things [light talk and laughter] and one comes out of the inner poise and has difficulty in going back to it — especially as there is a sort of dispersion of the vital energy. If one attains to a condition in which one can do these things only with the surface of the consciousness, keeping inside and observing what is done on the surface, but not forgetting oneself in it, then the poise is not lost. But it is a little difficult to get at this duplication of oneself — one comes to it however in time especially if the inner peace and calm become very intense and durable.
X’s talk is certainly not very helpful to his sadhana and I think he knows it— but he has not made any real attempt to control his tongue as yet. Talk— of the usual kind— does very easily disperse or bring down the inner condition because it usually comes out of the lower vital and the physical mind only and expresses that part of the consciousness— it has a tendency to externalise the being. That is of course why so many Yogis take refuge in silence.

Talking and Fatigue

Everyone who lives much inside tends to feel too much talking a fatiguing thing and quite shallow and unnecessary unless it is talk that comes from within. Of course if you make a practice of talking much, that will bring you outside, externalise you and then you will no longer find it fatiguing even if you talk for 18 hours out of the 24.

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Talking has a very exhausting effect for the inner energies— unless the inner itself controls the talk.

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That [feeling of fatigue after talking] happens very usually. Talking of an unnecessary character tires the inner being because the talk comes from the outer nature while the inner has to supply the energy which it feels squandered away.

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Chat of that kind [about others] has indeed a very tiring effect when one is at all in the stream of true experience, because it dissipates the energy uselessly and makes the mind movement a thing of valueless shreds and patches instead of gathered and poised in itself so as to receive.

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The headache and the fatigue is always a sign that the consciousness no longer wants this outward-going thought and speech and
is even physically strained by it. But it is the subconscious habit that wants to continue. Mostly human speech and thought go on mechanically in certain grooves that always repeat themselves and it is not really the mind that controls or dictates them. That is why this habit can go on for some time even after the conscious mind has withdrawn its support and consent and resolved to do otherwise. But if one perseveres, this subconscious mechanical habit runs down like all machinery that is not kept wound up to go on again. Then one can form the opposite habit in the subconscious of admitting only what the inner being consents to think or speak.

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It is the nervous envelope that is weak — it is this that you saw. The fact that you feel weak when talking with people shows that the origin of the whole trouble is a weakened nervous force. It is this that you have to get strong. You should avoid much talking with others — you can also take rest when you feel the symptoms very strong. But faith, quietude and openness to the higher force are the fundamental cure.

Useless, Unnecessary or Light Speech

There should be no useless talking or mere chat, still less anything untrue or prompted by egoism and desire. One can talk, but with silence within and quietude in the speech.

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On the whole you are right. Useless conversation which lowers the consciousness or brings back something of a past consciousness is better avoided. Talking about sadhana also comes under the category when it is merely mental discussion of a superficial kind.

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The depression came into you subconsciously because you had the discussion with X. When you discuss like that with people,
you put something in them, but something also comes from them to you. So, as X was not in quite a good condition, though nothing like what he used to be in his depressions, you easily got a touch of it and as soon as the subconscious could find a habitual excuse it sent it up to the mind. You should always be on your guard against these automatic interchanges. A little care is sufficient — and no needless discussion.

* It is true that to indulge in useless or harmful conversations is not good, but on the other hand it is not good to be too much shut up in oneself. Some company and going out of oneself is also necessary.

* It is always helpful to limit a little unnecessary talking — it has always a tendency to bring the consciousness down and outwards.

* You are right — to minimise speech is sure to be helpful both for right action and for inner sadhana.

* It is something very external that takes pleasure in light talk, and it is only when the quietude and with it a certain spontaneous self-control is established in the lower vital nature that this tendency can be entirely conquered in those who have it — i.e. in most people.

All these things will be worked out in time. What is most important is to get down the quietude into all the being and with it the true force bringing the energy which you describe above.

* There is always a chance of something light and unbalancing coming in when there is levity indulged in for its own sake.
The consciousness feels a little shaken in its seat, if not pulled out. Once the consciousness is well set inside, then the outward movement gets determined from within and there is no such trouble.

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Yes; excessive hilarity and unnecessary chat do most undoubt-
edly dissipate the force. A great moderation is necessary in these things.

**Control of Speech**

Yes, it would be better to get full control of the speech — it is an important step towards going inward and developing a true inner and Yogic consciousness.

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Yes. The speech must come from within and be controlled from within.

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Yes, control of the speech is very necessary for the physical change.

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To control speech is to stand back from the speech impulse and observe it, not to say whatever the impulse makes you say but only to speak what one really needs to say or chooses to say, not to speak in haste or anger or impatience or lightly, not to talk at random or say what is harmful. It does not necessarily mean to speak very little, though that is often helpful.

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It [speech] can only be controlled if you separate yourself from the part that is speaking and are able to observe it. It is the external mind that speaks — one has to watch it from the inner witnessing mind and put a control.
Yes, of course, complete truth of speech is very important for the sadhak and a great help for bringing Truth into the consciousness. It is at the same time difficult to bring the speech under control; for people are accustomed to speak what comes to them and not to supervise and control what they say. There is something mechanical about speech and to bring it to the level of the highest part of the consciousness is never easy. That is one reason why to be sparing in speech is helpful. It helps to a more deliberate control and prevents the tongue from running away with one and doing whatever it likes.

To stand back means to become a witness of one’s own mind and speech, to see them as something separate from oneself and not identify oneself with them. Watching them as a witness, separate from them, one gets to know what they are, how they act and then put a control over them, reject what one does not approve and think and speak only what one feels to be true. This cannot, of course, be done all at once. It takes time to establish this attitude of separateness, still more time to establish the control. But it can be done by practice and persistence.

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It is obvious that things which are a long habit cannot go at once. Especially the speech is a thing which in most people is largely automatic and not under their control. It is the vigilance that establishes the control, so one must be on guard against the danger of which you speak, the slacking of the vigilance. Only the more it can be a quiet and unmixed, not an anxious vigilance, the better.

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The habits of the physical or the vital-physical nature are always the most difficult to change, because their action is automatic and not governed by the mental will and it is therefore difficult for the mental will to control or transform them. You have to persevere and form the habit of control. If you can succeed in controlling the speech often, — it needs a constant vigilance, — you will finally find that the control extends itself and can in the
long run always intervene. This must be done so long as that movement is not fully opened to the Mother’s Light and Force, for if that happens the thing can be done more quickly and sometimes with a great rapidity. There is also the intervention of the psychic — if the psychic being is sufficiently awake and active to intervene each time you are going to speak at random and say “No”, then the change becomes more easy.

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The psychic self-control that is desirable in these surroundings and in the midst of discussion would mean among other things:

(1) Not to allow the impulse of speech to assert itself too much or say anything without reflection, but to speak always with a conscious control and only what is necessary and helpful.

(2) To avoid all debate, dispute or too animated discussion and simply say what has to be said and leave it there. There should also be no insistence that you are right and the others wrong, but what is said should only be thrown in as a contribution to the consideration of the truth of the matter. I notice that what you report X as having said in this discussion had its truth and what you said was also true, so that really there should have been no dispute.

(3) To keep the tone of speech and the wording very quiet and calm and uninsistent.

(4) Not to mind at all if others are heated and dispute, but remain quiet and undisturbed and yourself speak only what can help things to be smooth again.

(5) If there is gossip about others and harsh criticism (especially about sadhaks), not to join — for these things are helpful in no way and only lower the consciousness from its higher level.

(6) To avoid all that would hurt or wound others.

**Criticising Others**

The habit of criticism — mostly ignorant criticism of others — mixed with all sorts of imaginations, inferences, exaggerations, false interpretations, even gross inventions is one of the universal
illnesses of the Asram. It is a disease of the vital aided by the physical mind which makes itself an instrument of the pleasure taken in this barren and harmful pursuit of the vital. Control of the speech, refusal of this disease and the itch of the vital is very necessary if inner experience has to have any true effect of transformation in the outer life.

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It is also better to be more strict about not talking of others and criticising them with the ordinary mind—not only in the case of X or Y but all. It is necessary in order to develop a deeper consciousness and outlook on things that understands in silence the movements of Nature in oneself and others and is not moved or disturbed or superficially interested and drawn into an external movement.

Gossip

It [gossiping] can be and very often is [a hindrance to sadhana]. A gossiping spirit is always an obstacle.

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The difficulty you experience exists because speech is a function which in the past has worked much more as an expression of the vital in man than of the mental will. Speech breaks out as the expression of the vital and its habits without caring to wait for the control of the mind; the tongue has been spoken of as the unruly member. In your case the difficulty has been increased by the habit of talk about others, — gossip, to which your vital was very partial, so much that it cannot even yet give up the pleasure in it. It is therefore this tendency that must cease in the vital itself. Not to be under the control of the impulse to speech, to be able to do without it as a necessity and to speak only when one sees that it is right to do so and only what one sees to be right to say, is a very necessary part of Yogic self-control.

It is only by perseverance and vigilance and a strong resolution that this can be done, but if the resolution is there, it can
be done in a short time by the aid of the Force behind.

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Truth is far above this false gossip and scandal. Care only for the Divine’s opinion and not for that of men.

**Speaking the Truth**

It [*truthfulness*] means first truth-speaking, but beyond that to keep the speech in harmony with the deepest truth of which one is conscious.

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It is very evident from this inward control which you feel enlightening and guiding you and the resolution of truth-speaking that it made you take, that your psychic being is awake within you.

The fault of character of which you speak is common and almost universal in human nature. The impulse to speak what is untrue or at least to exaggerate or understate or twist the truth so as to flatter one’s own vanity, preferences, wishes or to get some advantage or secure something desired is very general. But one must learn to speak the truth alone if one is to succeed truly in changing the nature.

To become conscious of what is to be changed in the nature is the first step towards changing it. But one must observe these things without being despondent or thinking “it is hopeless” or “I cannot change”. You do right to be confident that the change will come. For nothing is impossible in the nature if the psychic being is awake and leading you with the Mother’s consciousness and force behind it and working in you. This is now happening. Be sure that all will be done.

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Very obviously, you ought not to have said or written what was a lie, and you should avoid doing it in future.

The things that you imagined, would not have happened
and therefore there was not even any use in this untruth — but useless or not, untruth should be avoided.

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In the first place, there is a great difference between uttering as truth what one believes or knows to be false and uttering as truth what one conscientiously believes to be true, but is not in fact true. The first is obviously going against the spirit of truth, the second does homage to it. The first is deliberate falsehood, the second is only error at worst or ignorance.

This is from the practical point of view of truth-speaking. From the point of view of the higher Truth, it must not be forgotten that each plane of consciousness has its own standard — what is truth to the mind, may be only partial truth to a higher consciousness, but it is through the partial truth that the mind has to go in order to reach the wider more perfect truth beyond. All that is necessary for it is to be open and plastic, to be ready to recognise the higher when it comes, not to cling to the lower because it is its own, not to allow the desires and passions of the vital to blind it to the Light or to twist and pervert things. When once the higher consciousness begins to act, the difficulty diminishes and there is a clear progress from truth to greater truth.

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If you get the English original1 from X, you will see that what is written is from the highest standpoint. If you want to be an instrument of the Truth, you must always speak the truth and not falsehood. But this does not mean that you must tell everything to everybody. To conceal the truth by silence or refusal to speak is permissible, because the truth may be misunderstood or misused by those who are not prepared for it or who are opposed to it.

1 Sri Aurobindo is referring to the following statement of the Mother: “If we allow a falsehood, however small, to express itself through our mouth or our pen, how can we hope to become perfect messengers of Truth? A perfect servant of Truth should abstain even from the slightest inexactitude, exaggeration or deformation.” Words of the Mother — II (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 2004), Collected Works of the Mother (second edition), vol. 14, p. 202. — Ed.
— it may even be made a starting point for distortion or sheer falsehood. But to speak falsehood is another matter. Even in jest it should be avoided, because it tends to lower the consciousness. As for the last point, it is again from the highest standpoint — the truth as one knows it in the mind is not enough, for the mind’s idea may be erroneous or insufficient — it is necessary to have the true knowledge in the true consciousness.

Why should it be lying [to leave something unsaid]? One is not bound to tell everything to everybody — it might often do more harm than good. One has only to say what is necessary. Of course what is said must be true and not false and there must never be any intention to deceive.

“As one likes” is never a formula that leads to truth; it implies enthroning the vital and its desire as the standard or following the mind’s preferences — which even in any mental discipline is regarded as contrary to the very principle of the search for Truth.

Because one is dealing with dishonest people, that does not justify one in going down to their own level.

If you think that the prices are too high, or, simply, if you want them to be lower, you can say so and ask for a reduction, but it is not right to support your demand by a false statement.

No one is bound to speak the truth when it would be harmful or to speak whatever is in one’s mind; it is always permissible to keep silence or evade a reply and not to say what one does not wish or think it right to tell. But to tell a lie is superfluous and not justifiable.

It is usually out of weakness (mind and vital) that people lie; those who are strong in nature do not need to lie. A sadhak has to be strong and not weak — straightforward when necessary, silent when necessary, but not a liar. Straightforwardness does not mean of course that one has to babble out everything to
everybody — to keep things to oneself, not to tell what should not be told is very necessary; but falsehood is not the right way to conceal things that have not to be told, the right way is silence.

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If it [what one has said to someone] is true, it should not be withdrawn [even if the person is troubled by it]. But the truth need be told only when it helps the person spoken to, otherwise silence is better.

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It is not the fact that if a man is truthful (in the sense of not lying), all he says happens. For that he must know the Truth — be in touch with the truth of things, not merely speak the truth as his mind knows it.

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Things said of sadhana — or any kind of real truth — always give more meaning with the growth of consciousness and experience. That is why when one rises in the level of consciousness the truth seen before in the mind becomes a new and vastly deeper thing always.

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That [talking about spiritual things when one is full of imperfections] is not hypocrisy but a conflict between two parts of the nature. Hypocrisy comes in only when one preaches a thing one does not believe or deliberately pretends to be or aim at what one is not and has no intention of trying to become.

Mauna or Keeping Silence

That is not the way. Absolute silence and looseness of talk are two extremes; neither is good. I have seen many people practising maunavrata, but afterwards they are just as talkative as before. It is self-mastery you must get.
Mauna is seldom of much use. After it is over, the speech starts again as on the old lines. It is in speech itself that the speech must change.

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It is no use giving up talking altogether — the proper course is to speak usefully to people but not to talk for the sake of talking.

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There is not much utility in complete outer silence or absolute retirement. Unless one is very strong spiritually, these things often end by creating a moribund condition of the consciousness.

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To remain in silence as much as possible is good for a time. But entire retirement is seldom found to be helpful — the lower movements may remain quiescent owing to want of stimulus from outside, but do not disappear. For that you must be able to get an inner quietude and a mastery over the outer movements which will resist any atmosphere.

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The difficulty is that the things in the atmosphere come in even if one does not speak with people. There are always mind waves moving about. It is a mastery that has to be developed, beginning with a power of silence, exclusion, non-response.

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It is really an inner silence that is needed — a something silent within that looks at outer talk and action but feels it as something superficial, not as itself and is quite indifferent and untouched by it. It can bring forces to support speech and action or it can stop them by withdrawal or it can let them go on and observe without being involved or moved.

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If one keeps the inner silence even when among the friends, that is the real thing; the outer silence need only be relative until the time comes when speech itself is an expression out of the silence.

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If the peace is very strong within, talking does not cloud it — because this peace is not mental or vital even when it pervades the mind and vital — or else it is a cloud that quickly passes without touching deeply. Usually however such talk [*about others*] disperses the consciousness and one can lose much. The only disadvantage of not talking is that it isolates too much, if it is absolute, but by not talking these things one loses nothing.

**Other Aspects of Speech Control**

In all things there must be a control over thought and speech also. But while rajasic violence is excluded, a calmly forceful severity of thought and speech where severity is needed is sometimes indispensable.

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Yes, obviously, the power to say “No” is indispensable in life and still more so in sadhana. It is the power of rejection put into speech.

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These [*heated*] discussions are perfectly useless, they only deflect the mind and open the gate to falsehood.

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Harangues and exhortations touch only the surface of the mind. If the mind is in agreement it is pleased and stimulated, but that is all. If it is not in agreement the mind criticises or becomes impatient and turns aside. If the harangue is very forcible it may touch the vital sometimes and produce a momentary effect.

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It is no use being moved by the talk of others; one who follows the path, must be strong enough to go on upon it untouched by the opinion of the outside world. And it is best not to speak of these things to the indifferent or the hostile.

* Hastiness of speech and action — (in excess, because to a certain extent it exists in everybody) — is a matter of temperament. I do not suppose it is more in you than in many others here. Of course it has to be got rid of, but it is one of the lesser, not one of the major imperfections of nature with which the Yogic Force has to deal. It is the externalising mind that has to be disciplined so that it may not leap too soon to conclusions or rush immediately from thought to speech and action.

* That (thinking over what was talked) is a physical mind habit which should in course of time wear out. The mind should be free to shut off immediately as soon as the talk is done.