

Chapter One

The Difficulties of Yoga

Difficulties and the Aim of Life

It is the lesson of life that always in this world everything fails a man — only the Divine does not fail him, if he turns entirely to the Divine. It is not because there is something bad in you that blows fall on you, — blows fall on all human beings because they are full of desire for things that cannot last and they lose them or, even if they get, it brings disappointment and cannot satisfy them. To turn to the Divine is the only truth in life.

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As for the blows, well, are they always given by the Yoga — is it not sometimes the sadhak of the Yoga who gives blows to himself? There are plenty of blows too in ordinary life according to my experience. Blows are the order of existence, and of Yoga; our nature or the nature of things brings them upon us until we learn to present to them a back which they cannot touch.

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The ordinary life naturally has its mental, vital and physical pleasures, but it is of a superficial character and there is no firm foundation of the consciousness anywhere — all is at the mercy of the play of forces. In Yoga there is the period of struggle and difficulty in which the difficulty and suffering can be acute and the period of the foundation in the true consciousness after which there is no serious disturbance of the peace and freedom leading to the state of realisation in all the being in which grief etc. are impossible.

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All X's troubles are due partly to past Karma in another life, partly to his nature which is unable to harmonise with his

surroundings or to master them by strong will and clear understanding or to face them with calm poise and balance. Life is for experience and growth and until one has learned one's lesson things go on happening that are the result of one's imperfect balance with Nature or inner imperfections. All that happens is for the best is true only if we see with the cosmic view that takes in past and future development which is aided by ill fortune, as well as good fortune, by danger, death, suffering and calamity, as well as by happiness, success and victory. It is not true if it means that only things happen which are fortunate or obviously good for the person in the human sense.

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What you describe is a nature divided against itself by a mind which has corrupted its action through a wrong use of its powers and a physical weakened by indulgence of vital desire.

Introspection is good only when it is used as a means for changing the nature so as to bring it into accord with a higher ideal steadily held before you. The present nature of man is egoistic in motive, full of falsehoods created by the Ignorance into which he is born and which the mind and life accept in order to follow their ego's aims and desires. By introspection one comes to see that, but by itself that can only create distrust of oneself, loss of motive to action, cynicism and weakness. One must have the faith and aspiration towards a higher consciousness which one has to build up in place of this lower nature, then the introspection and the knowledge of the defects of the nature it gives become useful, as it helps one to see what has to be changed while the higher ideal gives what has to take the place of the old movements and the old nature.

But all that is not easy to do unless you resolve to give an aim to your life and erect the higher ideal towards which you have to grow. Just as the mind can destroy the force of life and its balance, so it can do that also, it can help to restore the power on a new basis and acquire a new and greater force and true balance. But for that you must have the will to do it. To create

the will the mind must press for faith and vision and discourage their opposites.

What you have written has some power of thought and style and vision though of a mixed character. There is no harm in writing these things when they of themselves come; it may help the inner element of aspiration to grow in you.

Difficulties and the Integral Yoga

This Yoga is certainly difficult, but is any Yoga really easy? You speak of the lure of liberation into the extracosmic Absolute, but how many who set out on the path of Nirvana attain to it in this life or without a long, strenuous and difficult endeavour? Which of the paths has not to pass through the dry desert in order to reach the promised land? Even the path of Bhakti which is said to be the easiest is full of the lamentations of the bhaktas complaining that they call but the Beloved eludes their grasp, the place of meeting is prepared but even now Krishna does not come. Even if there is the joy of a brief glimpse or the passion of *milana*, it is followed by long periods of *viraha*. It is a mistake to think that any path of Yoga is facile, that any is a royal road or short cut to the Divine, or that like a system of “French made easy” or “French without tears”, so there can be a system of “Yoga made easy” or “Yoga without tears”. A few great souls prepared by past lives or otherwise lifted beyond the ordinary spiritual capacity may attain realisation more swiftly; some may have uplifting experiences at an early stage, but for most the *siddhi* of the path, whatever it is, must be the end of a long, difficult and persevering endeavour. One cannot have the crown of spiritual victory without the struggle or reach the heights without the ascent and its labour. Of all it can be said, “Difficult is that road, hard to tread like the edge of a razor.”

You find the path dry precisely because you have not yet touched the fringe of it. But all paths have their dry periods and for most though not for all it is at the beginning. There is a long stage of preparation necessary in order to arrive at the inner psychological condition in which the doors of experience

can open and one can walk from vista to vista — though even then new gates may present themselves and refuse to open until all is ready. This period can be dry and desert-like unless one has the ardour of self-introspection and self-conquest and finds every step of the effort and struggle interesting or unless one has or gets that secret of trust and self-giving which sees the hand of the Divine in every step of the path and even in the difficulty the grace or the guidance. The description of Yoga as “bitter like poison in the beginning” because of the difficulty and struggle “but in the end sweet as nectar” because of the joy of realisation, the peace of liberation or the divine Ananda and the frequent description by sadhaks and bhaktas of the periods of dryness shows sufficiently that it is no unique peculiarity of this Yoga. All the old disciplines recognised this and it is why the Gita says that Yoga should be practised patiently and steadily with a heart that refuses to be overcome by despondency. It is a recommendation applicable to this path but also to the way of the Gita and to the hard “razor” path of the Vedanta, and to every other. It is quite natural that the higher the Ananda to come down, the more difficult may be the beginning, the drier the deserts that have to be crossed on the way.

Certainly, the supramental manifestation does not bring peace, purity, force, power of knowledge only; these give the necessary conditions for the final realisation, are part of it, but Love, Beauty and Ananda are the essence of its fulfilment. And although the supreme Ananda comes with the supreme fulfilment, there is no real reason why there should not be the love and Ananda and beauty of the way also. Some have found that even at an early stage before there was any other experience. But the secret of it is in the heart, not the mind — the heart that opens its inner door and through it the radiance of the soul looks out in a blaze of trust and self-giving. Before that inner fire the debates of the mind and its difficulties wither away and the path however long or arduous becomes a sunlit road not only towards but through love and Ananda.

Nevertheless, even if that does not come at first, one can arrive at it by a patient perseverance — the psychic change is

indeed the indispensable preliminary of any approach to the supramental path and this change has for its very core the blossoming of the inner love, joy, bhakti. Some may find a mental opening first and the mental opening may bring peace, light, a beginning of knowledge first, but this opening from above is incomplete unless it is followed by an opening inward of the heart. To suppose that the Yoga is dry and joyless because the struggles of your mind and vital have made your first approach to it dry is a misunderstanding and an error. The hidden springs of sweetness will reveal themselves if you persevere, even if now they are guarded by the dragons of doubt and unsatisfied longing. Grumble, if your nature compels you to it, but persevere.

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The only thing to do with such depressing thoughts is not to indulge them, to send them away at once. Vital difficulties are the common lot of every human being and of every sadhak — they are to be met with a quiet determination and confidence in the Divine Grace.

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It needs either a calm resolute will governing the whole being or a very great *samatā* to have a quite smooth transformation. If they are there, then there are no revolts though there may be difficulties, no attacks, only a conscious dealing with the defects of the nature, no falls but only setting right of wrong steps or movements.

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These obstacles can only be got rid of gradually by persistent sadhana. The alternation of dark and bright states is normal and inevitable.

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The headache if it comes is only a result of the body not being accustomed to the pressure or else to some resistance there. The difficulties of course rise up, but it is not always in the

beginning. Sometimes the first effect is such that one feels as if there were no difficulties, — they rise afterwards when the exultation wanes and the normal consciousness has a chance to assert itself against the flood of power or light from above. There is a resistance that has to be fought out or worked out — fought out if the nature is unsteady or resists violently, worked out if the will is steady and the nature moderate in its reactions. On the other hand if there has been a long preparation and the resistances of the nature have been already largely dealt with by the psychic or by the enlightened mental will, then there are no primary or later aggravations but a steady and quiet pulsing of the change, the remaining difficulties falling away of themselves as the new consciousness develops, or else there may be no difficulties at all, only a necessary readjustment and change.

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If X has allowed any fall in her consciousness and action which retards her sadhana and is not yet able wholly to overcome her weakness, that is no reason why you should allow *her* difficulty to overcome *your* faith and endeavour. There is no natural connection between the two and no reason why there should be — it is only your mind that is making one. Each sadhak has his own separate sadhana, his own difficulties, his own way to follow. His sadhana is between him and the Divine; no one else has a part in it. Nor is there any reason why, even if one falls or fails, the other should torment himself for that, lose his faith and abandon his way. X's struggle, whatever its nature or limits, is her own and concerns herself and the Mother. It is not yours and ought not to touch or concern you at all; if you allow it to touch and shake you because she happens to be your sister, you bring in an unnecessary difficulty to add to your own and hamper your own progress. Keep to your own path, concentrate on your own obstacles to overcome them. As for her, you can at most pray to the Divine Power to help her and leave it there.

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Yoga has always its difficulties, whatever Yoga it be. Moreover

it acts in a different way on different seekers. Some have to overcome the difficulties of their nature first before they get any experiences to speak of, others get a splendid beginning and all the difficulties afterwards, others go on for a long time having alternate risings to the top of the wave and then a descent into the gulfs and so on till the vital difficulty is worked out — that is the case with X; others have a smooth path which does not mean that they have no difficulties — they have plenty, but they do not care a straw for them, because they feel sure that the Divine will help them to the goal, or that he is with them even when they do not feel him — their faith makes them imperturbable. What Y feels is true — there are certain signs by which one can know it. As for Z he never tried to do Yoga, so he is not a case in point at all — if he had wanted he might have done something, but except at the beginning he did not want it in the least.

For yourself it seems to me that the consciousness is growing towards the point at which there can be the decisive change upwards and inwards, decisive and effective, and there is no cause for depression — for that change is the one thing needful.

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The difficulties that remain, although not identical, are similar in their cause and their fundamental nature to those you have either largely or completely overcome, and they can be conquered in the same way; it is a question of time and of acquiescence within yourself in the pressure from the Divine which makes man change.

Human nature and the character of the individual are a formation that has arisen in and out of the inconscience of the material world and can never get entirely free from the pressure of that Inconscience. As consciousness grows in the being born into this material world, it takes the form of an Ignorance slowly admitting or striving with difficulty after knowledge and human nature is made of that Ignorance and the character of the individual is made from the elements of the Ignorance. It is largely mechanistic like everything else in material Nature and there is almost invariably a resistance and, more often than not, a strong

and stubborn resistance to any change demanded from it. The character is made up of habits and it clings to them, is disposed to think them the very law of its being and it is a hard job to get it to change at all except under a strong pressure of circumstances. Especially in the physical parts, the body, the physical mind, the physical life movements, there is this resistance; the tamasic element in Nature is powerful there, what the Gita describes as *aprakāśa*, absence of light, and *apavṛtti*, a tendency to inertia, inactivity, unwillingness to make an effort and, as a result, even when the effort is made, a constant readiness to doubt, to despond and despair, to give up, renounce the aim and the endeavour, collapse.

Fortunately, there is also in human nature a sattvic element which turns towards light and a rajasic or kinetic element which desires and needs to act and can be made to desire not only change but constant progress. But these too, owing to the limitations of human ignorance and the obstructions of the fundamental inconscience, suffer from pettiness and division and can resist as well as assist the spiritual endeavour. The spiritual change which Yoga demands from human nature and individual character is, therefore, full of difficulties, one may almost say that it is the most difficult of all human aspirations and efforts. In so far as it can get the sattvic and the rajasic (kinetic) elements to assist it, its path is made easier but even the sattvic element can resist by attachment to old ideas, to preconceived notions, to mental preferences and partial judgments, to opinions and reasonings which come in the way of higher truth and to which it is attached: the kinetic element resists by its egoism, its passions, desires and strong attachments, its vanity and self-esteem, its constant habit of demand and many other obstacles. The resistance of the vital has a more violent character than the others and it brings to the aid of the others its own violence and passion and that is a source of all the acute difficulty, revolt, upheavals and disorders which mar the course of the Yoga. The Divine is there, but He does not ignore the conditions, the laws, the circumstances of Nature; it is under these conditions that He does all His work, His work in the world and in man and

consequently also in the sadhak, the aspirant, even in the God-knower and God-lover; even the saint and the sage continue to have difficulties and to be limited by their human nature. A complete liberation and a complete perfection or the complete possession of the Divine and possession by the Divine is possible but it does not usually happen by an easy miracle or a series of miracles. The miracle can and does happen but only when there is the full call and complete self-giving of the soul and the entire widest opening of the nature.

Still, if the call of the soul is there, although not yet full, however great and obstinate the difficulties, there can be no final and irretrievable failure; even when the thread is broken it is taken up again and reunited and carried to its end. There is a working in the nature itself in response to the inner need which, however slowly, brings about the result. But a certain inner consent is needed; the progress that you have marked in yourself is due to the fact that there was this consent in the soul and also in part of the nature; the change was insisted on by the mind and desired by part of the vital; the resistance in part of the mind and part of the vital made it slow and difficult but could not prevent it. The strong development you have observed in your powers with its proof in the response of others is due to the same reason; part of your being consented to it, wanted and needed it as a self-fulfilment of the nature and the soul wanted it as a means of service to the Divine; the rest was due to the pressure of the Divine force and my pressure. As for the distaste, the lack of interest etc. all this is temporary and belongs only to a part of you. In so far as it comes from a kind of *vairāgya*, it may have helped you in overcoming some of your attachments, but it is defective in so far as the element of *tamas* and *apavṛtti* is there; it is not so fundamental as to resist the victorious drive of the pressure of the Divine Force.

You ask what I want you to do. What I want is that you should persist and give more and more that assent in you which brought about the progress you have made so that here too the resistance may diminish and eventually disappear.

And you must now get rid of an exaggerated insistence

on the use of reason and the correctness of your individual reasoning and its right to decide in all matters. The reason has its place especially with regard to certain physical things and general worldly questions — though even there it is a very fallible judge — or in the formation of metaphysical conclusions and generalisations; but its claim to be the decisive authority in matters of Yoga or in spiritual things is untenable. The activities of the outward intellect there lead only to the formation of personal opinions, not to the discovery of Truth. It has always been understood in India that the reason and its logic or its judgment cannot give you the realisation of spiritual truths but can only assist in an intellectual presentation of ideas; realisation comes by intuition and inner experience. Reason and intellectuality cannot make you see the Divine, it is the soul that sees. Mind and the other instruments can only share in the vision when it is imparted to them by the soul and welcome and rejoice in it. But also the mind may prevent it or at least stand long in the way of the realisation or the vision. For its prepossessions, preconceived opinions and mental preferences may build a wall of arguments against the spiritual truth that has to be realised and refuse to accept it if it presents itself in a form which does not conform to its own previous ideas: so also it may prevent one from recognising the Divine if the Divine presents himself in a form for which the intellect is not prepared or which in any detail runs counter to its judgments and prejudices. One can depend on one's reason in other matters provided the mind tries to be open and impartial and free from undue passion and is prepared to concede that it is not always right and may err; but it is not safe to depend on it alone in matters which escape its jurisdiction, especially in spiritual realisation and in matters of Yoga which belong to a different order of knowledge.

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The Divine may be difficult, but his difficulties can be overcome if one keeps at him.

Why Difficulties Come

No, it is not a test. The difficulties come because the mind, vital and physical or some part is open to the movements which bring the difficulties.

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The difficulties are there in vital and physical nature because they are full of obscurity, falsehood, inertia and ignorance. They have to be got rid of by opening the vital and physical wholly to the power of the psychic and the power of the Truth from above.

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It is quite true that falsehood reigns in this world; that is the reason why these difficulties manifest. But you have not to allow yourself to be shaken. You must remain calm and strong and go straight, using the power of Truth and the Divine Force supporting you to overcome the difficulties and set straight what has been made crooked by the falsehood.

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All who enter the spiritual path have to face the difficulties and ordeals of the path, those which rise from their own nature and those which come in from outside. The difficulties in the nature always rise again and again till you overcome them; they must be faced with both strength and patience. But the vital part is prone to depression when ordeals and difficulties rise. This is not peculiar to you, but comes to all sadhaks — it does not imply an unfitness for the sadhana or justify hopelessness. But you must train yourself to overcome this reaction of depression, calling in the Mother's force to aid you.

All who cleave to the path steadfastly can be sure of their spiritual destiny. If anyone fails to reach it, it can only be for one of two reasons, either because they leave the path or because for some lure of ambition, vanity, desire etc. they go astray from the sincere dependence on the Divine.

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The Power does not descend with the object of raising up the lower forces, but in the way it has to work at present, that uprising comes in as a reaction to the working. What is needed is the establishment of the calm and wide consciousness at the base of the whole Nature so that when the lower nature appears, it will not be as an attack or struggle but as if a Master of forces were there seeing the defects of the present machinery and doing step by step what is necessary to remedy and change it.

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It [*progress, then struggle*] is the usual course of the process by which the change of consciousness is effected. The lower Forces seldom yield the ground without a protracted and often repeated struggle. What is gained can be covered over, but it is never lost.

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If you go down into your lower parts or ranges of nature, you must be always careful to keep a vigilant connection with the higher already regenerated levels of the consciousness and to bring down the Light and Purity through them into these nether still unregenerated regions. If there is not this vigilance, one gets absorbed in the unregenerated movement of the inferior layers and there is obscuration and trouble.

The safest way is to remain in the higher part of the consciousness and put a pressure from it on the lower to change. It can be done in this way, only you must get the knack and the habit of it. If you achieve the power to do that, it makes the progress much easier, smoother and less painful.

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There are higher forces and the lower — the latter have to be worked out by contact with the higher and in the working out sometimes they rise, sometimes disappear till they are done with. It is not necessarily due to some mistake or fault that they rise.

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I am not aware of any case in which the lower forces did not

rise up. If such a case occurred, I fancy it would be the first in human history.

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All the difficulties are bound to vanish in time under the action of the Force. They rise, because if they did not rise the action would not be complete, for all has to be faced and worked out, in order that nothing may be left to rise up hereafter. The psychic being itself can throw the light by which the full consciousness will come and nothing remain in the darkness.