

Chapter One

Occult Knowledge

Occultism and the Supraphysical

[*Occultism:*] The knowledge and right use of the hidden forces of Nature.

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What did he himself [*Ramakrishna*] say about it — that it was the sins of his disciples which constituted the cancer. There is a physical aspect to things and there is an occult supraphysical aspect — one need not get in the way of the other. All physical things are the expression of the supraphysical. The existence of a body with physical instruments and processes does not, as the 19th century wrongly imagined, disprove the existence of a soul which uses the body even if it is also conditioned by it. Laws of Nature do not disprove the existence of God. The fact of a material world to which our instruments are accorded does not disprove the existence of less material worlds which certain subtler instruments can show to us.

Occult Forces

[*Occult forces:*] The forces that can only be known by going behind the veil of apparent phenomena — especially the forces of the subtle physical and supraphysical planes.

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Nature-forces are conscious forces — they can very well combine all that is necessary for an action or a purpose and when one means fails, take another.

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They [*general forces and impulses in the atmosphere*] are able to act with a greater force if they can make a special formation

than by a general psychological action common to all human nature.

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The forces are conscious. There are besides individualised beings who represent the forces or use them. The wall between consciousness and force, impersonality and personality becomes much thinner when one goes behind the veil of matter. If one looks at a working from the side of impersonal force one sees a force or energy at work acting for a purpose or with a result, if one looks from the side of being one sees a being possessing, guiding and using or else representative of and used by a conscious force as its instrument of specialised action and expression. You speak of the wave, but in modern science it has been found that if you look at the movement of energy, it appears on one side to be a wave and act as a wave, on the other as a mass of particles and to act as a mass of particles each acting in its own way. It is somewhat the same principle here.

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The experience you had of something going out from the head like an arrow probably indicates something going out of the mental consciousness towards some aim or object. Sometimes it is a part of the mind-consciousness itself that goes like that either upward to a higher plane or somewhere in the world around — and afterwards returns. Sometimes it is a thought-force or a will-force. Forces are always going out from us without our knowing it even, and often they have some effect there. If we think of a person or a place and things happening there, something can go out like that to that person or place. If we have a will or strong mental desire that something should happen, a will-force may go out and try to make that happen. But also forces can go out from the inner mind without any conscious cause on the surface.

The Play of Forces

My experience shows me that human beings are less deliberate

and responsible for their acts than the moralists, novelists and dramatists make them and I look rather to see what forces drove them than what the man himself may have seemed by inference to have intended or purposed — our inferences are often wrong and even when they are right touch only the surface of the matter.

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All life is the play of universal forces. The individual gives a personal form to these universal forces. But he can choose whether he shall respond or not to the action of a particular force. Only most people do not really choose — they undergo the play of the forces. Your illnesses, depressions etc. are the repeated play of such forces. It is only when one can make oneself free of them that one can be the true person and have a true life — but one can be free only by living in the Divine.

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Predestination and chance are words — words that obscure the truth by their extreme rigidity of definition. All is done through a play of forces which seems to be a play of different possibles, but there is Something that looks and selects and uses without being either blindly arbitrary (predestination) or capriciously decisive (chance).

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There is no question of responsibility.¹ The “Something” does not act arbitrarily, paying no heed to the play of forces or the man’s nature. “Selects” does not mean “selects at random”. If a man puts himself on the side of or into the hands of the hostile influences and says, “This way I will go and no other. I want my ego, my greatness, my field of power and action”, has not the Something the right to say, “I agree. Go and find it — if you can”? On the other hand, if the balance of forces is otherwise,

¹ *The correspondent wrote, in regard to the preceding letter: “If there is Something that looks, selects and uses our actions, then it is not the play of forces that is responsible for any action; the ultimate responsibility lies with this Something.”*

less on one side, the selection may be the other way, the saving element being present, and determine another orientation. But to understand the working of this Cosmic Something one must see not only the few outward factors observed by the human eye, but the whole working with all its multitudinous details — that one cannot do unless one is oneself in the cosmic consciousness and with some opening at least to the Overmind.

There is no such thing as “free” will, but there is the power of the Purusha to say “yes” or “no” to any particular pressure of Prakriti and there is the power of the mind, vital etc. to echo feebly or strongly the Purusha’s “yes” or “no” or to resist it. A constant (not a momentary) Yes or No has its effect in the play of the forces and the selection by the Something.

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No, of course not [*helpful synchronicities are not just accidents*]. But they seem so to all who live in the outward vision only. “Coincidence the scientists do them call.” But anyone with some intelligence and power of observation who lives more in an inward consciousness can see the play of invisible forces at every step which act on men and bring about events without their knowing about the instrumentation. The difference created by Yoga or by an inner consciousness — for there are people like Socrates who develop or have some inner awareness without Yoga — is that one becomes conscious of these invisible forces and can also consciously profit by them or use and direct them. That is all.

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I have not said [*in the preceding letter*] that everything is rigidly predetermined. Play of forces does not mean that. What I said was that behind visible events in the world there is always a mass of invisible forces at work unknown to the outward minds of men and by Yoga (by going inward and establishing a conscious connection with the cosmic Self and Force and forces) one can become conscious of these forces, intervene consciously in the play, to some extent at least determine things in the result of the play. All that has nothing to do with predetermination. On the

contrary one watches how things develop and gives a push here and a push there when possible or when needed. There is nothing in all that to contradict the dictum of the great scientist Sir C. V. Raman. Raman said once that all these scientific discoveries are only games of chance. Only, when he says these things are games of chance, he is merely saying that human beings don't know how it works out. It is not a rigid predetermination, but it is not a blind unconscious Chance either. It is a play in which there is a working out of possibilities in Time.

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What X said is true, the play of the forces is very complex and one has to be conscious of them and, as it were, see and watch how they work before one can really understand why things happen as they do. All action is surrounded by a complexity of forces and if one puts a force for one of them to succeed, one must be careful to do it thoroughly and maintain it and not leave doors open for the other contrary ones to find their way in. I left at least two doors open and the forces that wanted him [*a sadhak*] here pushed in through them. As for what they were, it can only be said that it was probably a mixture. Each man is himself a field of many forces — some were working for his sadhana, some were working for his ego and desires. There are besides powers which seek to make a man an instrument for purposes not his own without his knowing it. All of these may combine to bring about a particular result. These forces work each for the fulfilment of its own drive — they need not be at all what we call hostile forces, — they are simply forces of Nature. It is not a fact however that hostile forces cannot bring a man here — e.g. when Y came back and wanted to enter the Asram, there was clearly a hostile force working that wanted to create trouble, but it was not strong enough to do it.

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X's new consciousness makes him feel more strongly the opposite forces that one contacts when one moves in the world and has to do affairs and meet with others and he is afraid of

a response in his vital which will upset his sadhana or create difficulties. Evidently he is a man who is psychically sensitive or has become so to that thing which you blindly refuse to recognise even when you are in the midst of it — the play of forces. You can feel your friend's atmosphere through the letter "so beautiful, so strengthening, so refreshing" and it has an immediate effect on you. But your mind stares like an owl and wonders, "What the hell can this be?" — I suppose, because your medical books never told you about it and how can things be true which are not known either to the ordinary mind or science? It is by an incursion of an opposite kind of forces that you fall into the Old Man's clutches, but you can only groan and cry, "What's this?" and when they are swept aside in a moment by other forces blink and mutter, "Well, that's funny!" Your friend can feel and know at once when he is being threatened by the opposite forces — and so he can be on his guard and resist Old Nick, because he can detect at once one of his principal means of attack.

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It is this play of forces that is trying to bring about your removal to Burdwan and, if it succeeds, you have not to be troubled or shaken or disappointed, but to accept and make use of all that happens for your sadhana and progress. For the play of cosmic forces, the will in the cosmos — as one might say — does not always work apparently in favour of a smooth and direct line for the work or the sadhana, it often brings in what seem to be upheavals, sudden turns which break or deflect the line, opposing or upsetting circumstances or perplexing departures from what had been temporarily settled and established. The one thing is to preserve equanimity and make an opportunity and means of progress out of all that happens in the course of the life and the sadhana. There is a higher secret Will transcendent behind the play and will of the cosmic forces — a play which is always a mixture of things favourable and things adverse — and it is that Will which one must wait upon and have faith in; but you must not expect to be able always to understand its workings. The mind wants this or that to be done, the line once

taken to be maintained, but what the mind wants is not at all always what is intended in a larger purpose. One has to follow indeed a fixed central aim in the sadhana and not deviate from it, but not to build on outward circumstances, conditions etc. as if they were fundamental things.

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One can not only receive a force, but an impulse, thought or sensation. One may receive it from others, from beings in Nature or from Nature herself if she chooses to give her Force a ready-made form of that kind.

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The force “created” is not yours — it is Prakriti’s — your will sets it in motion, it does not really create it; but once set in motion, it tends to fulfil itself so far as the play of other forces will allow it. So, naturally, if you want to stop it, you have to set a contrary force in motion which will be strong enough to prevail against its momentum.

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There is one cosmic Force working in all and a vibration of that Force or any one of its movements can awake (it does not always) the same vibration in another.

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The play of forces can lead to nothing, if the One Force does not take them up and change them.

The Place of Occult Knowledge in Yoga

To know and use the subtle forces of the supraphysical planes is part of the Yoga.

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You take a very utilitarian view of spiritual things. Whatever develops in the sadhana, provided it is genuine, has its place in

the total experience and knowledge. A knowledge of the occult worlds and occult forces and phenomena has its place also. Visions and voices are only a small part of that vast realm of occult experience. As for utility, for one who has intelligence and discrimination, visions etc. have many uses — but very little use for those who have no discrimination or understanding.

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Because a great number of people don't know how to use these [*occult*] faculties or misuse them or give them excessive value or nourish their ego by them, does it follow that the faculties themselves have no Yogic use or value?

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Even by itself it [*the development of the occult faculties*] is a progress in the development of the consciousness though it may not carry with it any spiritualisation of the nature.

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I do not know what you mean by practical sadhana. If one develops the occult faculty and the occult experience and knowledge, these things can be of great use, therefore practical. In themselves they are a proof of opening of the inner consciousness and also help to open it farther — though they are not indispensable for that.

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He [*Ramana Maharshi*] discouraged his disciples [*from having any occult dealings*] because his aim was the realisation of the inner Self and the intuition — in other words the fullness of the spiritual Mind — visions and voices belong to the inner occult sense, therefore he did not want them to lay stress on it. I also discourage some from having any dealing with visions and voices because I see that they are being misled or in danger of being misled by false visions and false voices. That does not mean that visions and voices have no value.

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People who have the occult faculty always tend to give too large a place to it.

Spiritism

About spiritism I think I can say this much for the present. It is quite possible for the dead or rather the departed—who they are not dead—who are still in regions near the earth to have communication with the living. Sometimes it happens automatically, sometimes by an effort at communication on one side of the curtain or the other. There is no impossibility of such communication by the means used by the spiritists; usually however genuine communications or a contact can only be with those who are yet in a world which is a sort of idealised replica of the earth-consciousness in which the same personality, ideas, memories persist that the person had here. But all that pretends to be communication with departed souls is not genuine,—especially when it is done through a paid professional medium. There is there an enormous amount of mixture of a very undesirable kind—for apart from the great mass of unconscious suggestions from the sitters or the contributions of the medium's subliminal consciousness one gets into contact with a world of beings which is of a very deceptive or self-deceptive illusory nature. Many of these come and claim to be the departed souls of relatives, acquaintances, well-known men, famous personalities etc. There are also beings who pick up the discarded feelings and memories of the dead and masquerade with them. There are a great number of beings who come to such séances only to play with the consciousness of men or exercise their powers through this contact with the earth and who dupe the mediums and sitters with their falsehoods, tricks and illusions. (I am supposing of course the case of mediums who are not themselves tricksters.) A contact with such a plane of spirits can be harmful (most mediums become nervously or morally unbalanced) and spiritually dangerous. Of course, all pretended communications with the famous dead of long-past times are in their very nature deceptive and most of those with

the recent ones also — that is evident from the character of these communications. Through conscientious mediums one may get sound results (in the matter of the dead) but even these are very ignorant of the nature of the forces they are handling and have no discrimination which can guard them against trickery from the other side of the veil. Very little genuine knowledge of the nature of the after-life can be gathered from these séances; a true knowledge is more often gained by the experience of individuals who make serious contact or are able in one way or another to cross the border.

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They [*mediums and clairvoyants*] are most of them in contact with the vital-physical or subtle physical worlds and do not receive anything higher at all.

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Not much confidence can be placed in all that [*communications from spirit guides on other planes*]. If examined closely it will be seen that these spirit guides only suggest to their subjects what is in the mind of the sitter or sitters or in the air and it comes to very little. Influences from the other worlds there are of course and any number of them, but the central guidance is not of this kind except in very rare cases.

Séances

Automatic writings and spiritualistic séances are a very mixed affair. Part comes from the subconscious mind of the medium and part from that of the sitters. But it is not true that all can be accounted for by a dramatising imagination and memory. Sometimes there are things none present could know or remember; sometimes even, though that is rare, glimpses of the future. But usually these séances etc. put one into rapport with a very low world of vital beings and forces, themselves obscure, incoherent or tricky and it is dangerous to associate with them or to undergo any influence. Ouspensky and others must have gone

through these experiments with too “mathematical” a mind, which was no doubt their safeguard but prevented them from coming to anything more than a surface intellectual view of their significance.

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The psychic does not give up the mental and other sheaths (apart from the physical) immediately at death. It is said that it takes three years on the whole to get clear away from the zone of communicability with the earth — though there may be cases of slower or quicker passage. The psychic world does not communicate with earth — at any rate not in that way. And the ghost or spirit who turns up at séances is not the psychic being. What comes through the medium is a mixture of the medium’s subconscious mind (using subconscious in the ordinary, not in the Yogic sense), that of the sitters, vital sheaths left by the departed or perhaps occupied or used by some “spirit”, i.e. some vital being, the departed himself in his vital sheath or else something assumed for the occasion (but it is the vital part that communicates), elementals, spirits of the lowest vital physical world near earth, etc. etc. A horrible confusion for the most part — a hotch-potch of all sorts of things coming through a medium of “astral” grey light and shadow. Many communicants seem to be people who have just gone across into some subtle world where they feel surrounded by an improved edition of the earthly life and think that is the real and definitive other world after earth — but it is a mere optimistic prolongation of the ideas and images and associations of the human plane. Hence the next world as depicted by the spiritualist “guides” and other séance communicants.

Ghosts

What do you mean by a ghost? The word “ghost” as used in popular parlance covers an enormous number of distinct phenomena which have no necessary connection with each other. To name a few only —

(1) An actual contact with the soul of a departed human being housed in its subtle body and transcribed to our mind by the appearance of an image or the hearing of a voice.

(2) A mental formation stamped by the thoughts and feelings of a departed human being on the atmosphere of a place or locality, wandering about there or repeating itself — till that formation either exhausts itself or is dissolved by one means or another. This is the explanation of such phenomena as the haunted house in which the scenes attending or surrounding or preceding a murder are repeated over and over again and many similar phenomena.

(3) A being of the lower vital planes who has assumed the discarded vital sheath of a departed human being or a fragment of his vital personality and appears and acts in the form and perhaps with the surface thoughts and memories of that person.

(4) A being of the lower vital plane who by the medium of a living human being or by some other means or agency is able to materialise itself sufficiently so as to appear and act in a visible form or speak with an audible voice or, without so appearing, to move about material things, e.g. furniture or to materialise objects or to shift them from place to place. This accounts for what are called *poltergeists*, phenomena of stone-throwing, tree-inhabiting *bhūtas* and other well-known phenomena.

(5) Apparitions which are the formations of one's own mind but take to the senses an objective appearance.

(6) Temporary possession of people by vital beings who sometimes pretend to be departed relatives etc.

(7) Thought-images of themselves projected, often by people at the moment of death, which appear at that time or a few hours afterwards to their friends or relatives.

You will see that in only one of these cases, the first, can a soul be posited and there no difficulty arises.