

Chapter One

The Right Attitude towards Difficulties

The Sunlit Path and the Path of Darkness

I don't believe much in this Divine Darkness. It is a Christian idea. For us the Divine is Peace, Purity, Wideness, Light, Ananda.

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I spoke of strange ideas in connection with what you said about peace and cheerfulness being obstacles in the Yoga because they are incompatible with an ardent longing for realisation. Peace was the very first thing that the Yogins and seekers of old asked for and it was a quiet and silent mind — and that always brings peace — that they declared to be the best condition for realising the Divine. A cheerful and sunlit heart is the fit vessel for the Ananda and who shall say that Ananda or what prepares it is an obstacle to the divine union? As for despondency, it is surely a terrible burden to carry on the way. One has to pass through it sometimes, like Christian of *The Pilgrim's Progress* through the Slough of Despond, but its constant reiteration cannot be anything but an obstacle. The Gita specially says, "Practise the Yoga with an undespondent heart", *anirvinṇacetasā*.

I know perfectly well that pain and suffering and struggle and excesses of despair are natural — though not inevitable — on the way, — not because they are helps, but because they are imposed on us by the darkness of this human nature out of which we have to struggle into the Light. . . .

The dark path is there and there are many who make like the Christians a gospel of spiritual suffering; many hold it to be the unavoidable price of victory. It may be so under certain circumstances, as it has been in so many lives at least at the beginning, or one may choose to make it so. But then the price has

to be paid with resignation, fortitude or a tenacious resilience. I admit that if borne in that way the attacks of the Dark Forces or the ordeals they impose have a meaning. After each victory gained over them, there is then a sensible advance; often they seem to show us the difficulties in ourselves which we have to overcome and to say, "Here you must conquer us and here." But all the same it is a too dark and difficult way which nobody should follow on whom the necessity does not lie.

In any case one thing can never help and that is to despond always and say, "I am unfit; I am not meant for the Yoga." And worse still are these perilous mental formations such as you are always accepting that you must fare like X (one whose difficulty of exaggerated ambition was quite different from yours) and that you have only six years etc. These are clear formations of the Dark Forces seeking not only to sterilise your aspiration but to lead you away and so prevent your sharing in the fruit of the victory hereafter. I do not know what Krishnaprem has said but his injunction, if you have rightly understood it, is one that cannot stand as valid, since so many have done Yoga relying on tapasya or anything else but not confident of any Divine Grace. It is not that, but the soul's demand for a higher Truth or a higher life that is indispensable. Where that is, the Divine Grace whether believed in or not, will intervene. If you believe, that hastens and facilitates things; if you cannot yet believe, still the soul's aspiration will justify itself with whatever difficulty and struggle.

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I am extremely glad to know that the worst of the attack has passed; I hope the after-effects will quickly disappear. You had stood out so well for two months and repelled all incipient movements of the kind, that the sudden violence of this one was not expected — especially as the last darshan had gone off well. But when they get a chance these forces take it.

I quite agree with you in not relishing the idea of another attack of this nature. I am myself, I suppose, more a hero by necessity than by choice — I do not love storms and battles —

at least on the subtle plane. The sunlit way may be an illusion, though I do not think it is — for I have seen people treading it for years; but a way with only natural or even only moderate fits of rough weather, a way without typhoons surely is possible — there are so many examples. *Durgam pathastat* may be generally true and certainly the path of laya or nirvana is difficult in the extreme to most (although in my case I walked into nirvana without intending it or rather nirvana walked casually into me not so far from the beginning of my Yogic career without asking my leave). But the path *need* not be cut by periodical violent storms, though that it *is* so for a great many is an obvious fact. But even for these, if they stick to it, I find that after a certain point the storms diminish in force, frequency, duration. That is why I insisted so much on your sticking — for if you stick, the turning-point is bound to come. I have seen some astonishing instances here recently of this typhonic periodicity beginning to fade out after years and years of violent recurrence.

These things are not part of the normal difficulties, however acute, of the nature but especial formations — tornadoes which start (usually from a particular point, sometimes varying) and go whirling round in the same circle always till it is finished. In your case the crucial point, whatever may have been the outward starting-point if any, is the idea or feeling of frustration in the sadhana; once that takes hold of the mind, all the rest follows. That again is why I have been putting all sorts of suggestions before you for getting rid of this idea — not because my suggestions, however useful and true if they can be followed, are binding laws of Yoga, but because if followed they can wipe out this point of danger. A formation like this is very often the result of something in past lives — the Mother has so seen it in yours — which prolongs a karmic sanskara (as the Buddhists would say) and tries to repeat itself once again. To dissolve it ought to be possible if one sees it for what it is and is resolved to get rid of it — never allowing any mental justification of it, however logical, right and plausible the justification may seem to be — always replying to all the mind's arguments or the vital's feelings in favour of it, like Cato to the debaters, "*Delenda est*

Carthago” — “Carthage must be destroyed”, Carthage in this case being the formation and its nefarious circle.

Anyway the closing idea in your letter is the right one. “The Divine is worth ferreting out even if oceans of gloom have to be crossed.” If you could confront the formation always with that firm resolution, it should bring victory. In the Mother’s vision Kali did express a wish to interfere and break the thing — I don’t know how she proposes to do it — by giving you the strength you pray for or by breaking the head of the unwelcome lodger or visitor. I hope she will soon do it.

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A possibility in the soul or in the inner being generally remains always a possibility — at the worst, its fulfilment can be postponed, but even that only if the possessor of the possibility gives up or breaks away from the true spiritual path without probability of early return — because he is in chase of the magnified and distorted shadow of his own ego or for some other distortion of the nature produced by a wrong egoistic misuse of the Yoga. A mere appearance of inability or obstruction of progress in the outer being, a covering of the inner by the outer, even if it lasts for years, has no probative value, because that happens to a great number, perhaps to the majority of aspirants to Yoga. The reason is that they take somehow the way of raising up all the difficulties in their nature almost at the beginning and tunnelling through the mass instead of the alternative way of going ahead, slowly or swiftly, and trusting to time, Yoga and the Force Divine to clear out of them in the proper season what has to be eliminated. It is not of their own deliberate choice that they do it, something in their nature drives them. There are many here who have had or still have that long covering of the inner by the outer or separation of the inner from the outer consciousness. You yourself took that way in spite of our expostulations to you advising you to take the sunlit road, and you have not yet got out of the habit. But that does not mean that you won’t get out of the tunnel and when you do you will find your inner being waiting for you on the other side — in the

sun and not in the shadow. I don't think I am more patient than a guru ought to be. Anyone who is a guru at all ought to be patient, first because he knows the difficulty of human nature and, secondly, because he knows how the Yoga force works, in so many contrary ways, open or subterranean, slow or swift, volcanic or coralline, — passing even from one to the other — and he does not use the surface reason but the eye of inner knowledge and Yogic experience.

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There is no contradiction between my former statements about the sunlit path and what I have said about the difficult and unpleasant passages which the Yoga has to pass through in its normal development in the way of human nature. The sunlit path can be followed by those who are able to practise surrender, first a central surrender and afterwards a more complete self-giving in all the parts of the being. If they can achieve and preserve the attitude of the central surrender, if they can rely wholly on the Divine and accept cheerfully whatever comes to them from the Divine, then their path becomes sunlit and may even be straightforward and easy. They will not escape all difficulties, no seeker can, but they will be able to meet them without pain and despondency, — as indeed the Gita recommends that Yoga should be practised, *anirvinñacetasā*, — trusting in the inner guidance and perceiving it more and more or else in the outer guidance of the Guru. It can also be followed even when one feels no light and no guidance if there is or if one can acquire a bright settled faith and happy bhakti or has the nature of the spiritual optimist and the firm belief or feeling that all that is done by the Divine is done for the best even when we cannot understand his action. But all have not this nature, most are very far from it, and the complete or even the central surrender is not easy to get and to keep it always is hard enough for our human nature. When these things are not there, the liberty of the soul is not attained and we have instead to undergo the law or fulfil a hard and difficult discipline.

That law is imposed on us by the Ignorance which is the

nature of all our parts; our physical being is obviously a mass of ignorance, the vital is full of ignorant desires and passions, the mind is also an instrument of Ignorance struggling towards some kind of imperfect and mostly inferior and external knowledge. The path of the seeker proceeds through this ignorance; for a long time he can find no light of solid experience or realisation, only the hopes and ideas and beliefs of the mind which do not give the true spiritual seeing; or he gets glimpses of light or periods of light but the light often goes out and the luminous periods are followed by frequent or long periods of darkness. There are constant fluctuations, persistent disappointments, innumerable falls and failures. No path of Yoga is really easy or free from these difficulties or fluctuations; the way of bhakti is supposed to be the easiest, but still we find constant complaints that one is always seeking but never finding and even at the best there is a constant ebb and tide, *milana* and *viraha*, joy and weeping, ecstasy and despair. If one has the faith or in the absence of faith the will to go through, one passes on and enters into the joy and light of the divine realisation. If one gets some habit of true surrender, then all this is not necessary; one can enter into the sunlit way. Or if one can get some touch of what is called pure bhakti, *śuddhā bhakti*, then whatever happens that is enough; the way becomes easy, or if it does not, still this is a sufficient start to support us to the end without the sufferings and falls that happen so often to the ignorant seeker.

In all Yoga there are three essential objects to be attained by the seeker: union or abiding contact with the Divine, liberation of the soul or the Self, the Spirit, and a certain change of the consciousness, the spiritual change. It is this change, which is necessary for reaching the other two objects, necessary at least to a certain degree, that is the cause of most of the struggles and difficulties; for it is not easy to accomplish it; a change of the mind, a change of the heart, a change of the habits of the will is called for and is obstinately resisted by our ignorant nature. In this Yoga a complete transformation of the nature is aimed at because that is necessary for the complete union and the complete liberation not only of the soul and the spirit but of the

nature itself. It is also a Yoga of works and of the integral divine life; for that the integral transformation of nature is evidently necessary; the union with the Divine has to carry with it a full entrance into the divine consciousness and the divine nature; there must be not only *sāyujya* or *sālokya* but *sādṛśya* or, as it is called in the Gita, *sādharmya*. The full Yoga, Purna Yoga, means a fourfold path, a Yoga of knowledge for the mind, a Yoga of bhakti for the heart, a Yoga of works for the will and a Yoga of perfection for the whole nature. But, ordinarily, if one can follow wholeheartedly any one of these lines, one arrives at the result of all the four. For instance, by bhakti one becomes close to the Divine, becomes intensely aware of Him and arrives at knowledge, for the Divine is the Truth and the Reality; by knowing Him, says the Upanishads, one comes to know all. By bhakti also the will is led into the road of the works of love and the service of the Divine and the government of the nature and its acts by the Divine, and that is Karmayoga. By bhakti also comes spiritual change of the consciousness and the action of the nature which is the first step towards its transformation. So it is with all the other lines of the fourfold path.

But it may be that there are many obstacles in the being to the domination of the mind and heart and will by bhakti and the consequent contact with the Divine. The too great activity of the intellectual mind and its attachment to its own pride of ideas, its prejudices, its fixed notions and its ignorant reason may shut the doors to the inner light and prevent the full tide of bhakti from flooding everything; it may also cling to a surface mental activity and refuse to go inside and allow the psychic vision and the feelings of the inner heart to become its guides, though it is by this vision and this feeling that bhakti grows and conquers. So too the passions and desires of the vital being and its ego may block the way and prevent the self-giving of the mind and heart to the Divine. The inertia, ignorance and inconstancy of one's physical consciousness, its attachment to fixed habits of thought and feeling and action, its persistence in the old grooves may come badly in the way of the needed change. In such circumstances the Divine may have to bide his

time; but if there is real hunger in the heart, all that cannot prevent the final realisation; still, it may have to wait till the obstructions are removed or at least so much cleared out as to admit an unimpeded working of the Divine Power on the surface nature. Till then, there may be periods of inner ease and some light in the mind, periods also of the feeling of bhakti or of peace, periods of the joy of self-consecration in works and service; for these will take long to stay permanently and there will be much struggle and unrest and suffering. In the end the Divine's working will appear and one will be able to live in his presence.

I have described the difficulties of Yoga at their worst, as they may hamper and afflict even those predestined to the realisation but as often there is an alternation or a mixture of the light and the darkness, initial attainment perhaps and heavy subsequent difficulties, progress and attacks and retardations, strong movements forward and a floundering in the bogs of the Ignorance. Even great realisations may come and high splendours of light and spiritual experience and yet the goal is not attained; for in the phrase of the Rig Veda, "As one climbs from peak to peak there is made clear the much that is still to be done." But there is always something that either carries us on or forces us on. This may take the shape of something conscious in front, the shape of a mastering spiritual idea, indestructible aspiration or fixed faith which may seem sometimes entirely veiled or even destroyed in periods of darkness or violent upheaval, but always they reappear when the storm has passed or the blackness of night has thinned, and reassert their influence. But also it may be something in the very essence of the being deeper than any idea or will in the mind, deeper and more permanent than the heart's aspiration but hidden from one's own observation. One who is moved to Yoga by some curiosity of the mind or even by its desire for knowledge can turn aside from the path from disappointment or any other cause; still more can those who take it up from some inner ambition or vital desire turn away through revolt or frustration or the despondency of frequent check and failure. But if this deeper thing is there, then one

cannot permanently leave the path of spiritual endeavour: one may decide to leave the path but is not allowed from within to do it or one may leave but is obliged to return to it by the secret spiritual need within him.

All these things are common to every path of Yoga; they are the normal difficulties, fluctuations and struggles which come across the path of spiritual effort. But in this Yoga there is an order or succession of the workings of the secret Force which may vary greatly in its circumstances in each sadhak, but still maintains its general line. Our evolution has brought the being up out of inconscient Matter into the Ignorance of mind, life and body tempered by an imperfect knowledge and is trying to lead us into the light of the Spirit, to lift us into that light and to bring the light down into us, into body and life as well as mind and heart and to fill with it all that we are. This and its consequences, of which the greatest is the union with the Divine and life in the divine consciousness, is the meaning of the integral transformation. Mind is our present topmost faculty; it is through the thinking mind and the heart with the soul, the psychic being behind them that we have to grow into the Spirit, for what the Force first tries to bring about is to fix the mind in the right central idea, faith or mental attitude and the right aspiration and poise of the heart and to make these sufficiently strong and firm to last in spite of other things in the mind and heart which are other than or in conflict with them. Along with this it brings whatever experiences, realisations or descent or growth of knowledge the mind of the individual is ready for at the time or as much of it, however small, as is necessary for its further progress: sometimes these realisations and experiences are very great and abundant, sometimes few and small or negligible; in some there seems to be in this first stage nothing much of these things or nothing decisive—the Force seems to concentrate on a preparation of the mind only. In many cases the sadhana seems to begin and proceed with experiences in the vital; but in reality this can hardly take place without some mental preparation, even if it is nothing more than a turning of the mind or some kind of opening which makes the

vital experiences possible. In any case, to begin with the vital is a hazardous affair; the difficulties there are more numerous and more violent than on the mental plane and the pitfalls are innumerable. The access to the soul, the psychic being, is less easy because it is covered up with a thick veil of ego, passion and desire. One is apt to be swallowed up in a maze of vital experiences, not always reliable, the temptation of small siddhis, the appeal of the powers of darkness to the ego. One has to struggle through these densities to the psychic being behind and bring it forward; then only can the sadhana on the vital plane be safe.

However that may be, the descent of the sadhana, of the action of the Force into the vital plane of our being becomes after some time necessary. The Force does not make a wholesale change of the mental being and nature, still less an integral transformation before it takes this step: if that could be done, the rest of the sadhana would be comparatively secure and easy. But the vital is there and always pressing on the mind and heart, disturbing and endangering the sadhana and it cannot be left to itself for too long. The ego and desires of the vital, its disturbances and upheavals have to be dealt with and if not at once expelled, at least dominated and prepared for a gradual if not a rapid modification, change, illumination. This can only be done on the vital plane itself by descending to that level. The vital ego itself must become conscious of its own defects and willing to get rid of them; it must decide to throw away its vanities, ambitions, lusts and longings, its rancours and revolts and all the rest of the impure stuff and unclean movements within it. This is the time of the greatest difficulties, revolts and dangers. The vital ego hates being opposed in its desires, resents disappointment, is furious against wounds to its pride and vanity; it does not like the process of purification and it may very well declare Satyagraha against it, refuse to cooperate, justify its own demands and inclinations, offer passive resistance of many kinds, withdraw the vital support which is necessary both to the life and the sadhana and try to withdraw the being from the path of spiritual endeavour. All this has to be faced and

overcome, for the temple of the being has to be swept clean if the Lord of our being is to take his place and receive our worship there.

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I know that this is a time of trouble for you and everybody. It is so for the whole world; confusion, trouble, disorder and upset everywhere is the general state of things. The better things that are to come are preparing or growing under a veil and the worse are prominent everywhere. The one thing is to hold on and to hold out till the hour of light has come.

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I am afraid I can hold out but cold comfort for the present at least to those of your correspondents who are lamenting the present state of things. Things *are* bad, are growing worse and may at any time grow worst or worse than worst if that is possible — and anything however paradoxical seems possible in the present perturbed world. The best thing for them is to realise that all this was necessary because certain possibilities had to emerge and be got rid of if a new and better world was at all to come into being; it would not have done to postpone them for a later time. It is as in Yoga where things active or latent in the being have to be put into action in the light so that they may be grappled with and thrown out or to emerge from latency in the depths for the same purificatory purpose. Also they can remember the adage that night is darkest before dawn and that the coming of dawn is inevitable. But they must remember too that the new world whose coming we envisage is not to be made of the same texture as the old and different only in pattern and that it must come by other means, from within and not from without — so the best way is not to be too much preoccupied with the lamentable things that are happening outside, but themselves to grow within so that they may be ready for the new world whatever form it may take.

Optimism and Pessimism

You are quite right in taking an optimistic and not a pessimistic attitude in the sadhana — progressive sadhana is enormously helped by an assured faith and confidence. Such a confidence helps to realise, for it is dynamic and tends to fulfil itself.

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As for the sceptics — well, optimism even unjustified is still justifiable because it gives a chance and a force for getting things done, while pessimism even with all the grounds that appearances can give to it, is simply a clog and a “No going” affair. The right thing is to go ahead and get done all that can be, if possible all that ought to be, but at least do so much that all that ought will feel bound to come along on the heels of my doing. That is the prophets and the gospel.

Treating Difficulties as Opportunities

The attitude you have taken is the right one. It is this feeling and attitude which help you to overcome so rapidly the attacks that sometimes fall upon you and throw you out of the right consciousness. As you say, difficulties so taken become opportunities; the difficulty faced in the right spirit and conquered, one finds that an obstacle has disappeared, a fresh step forward has been taken. To question, to resist in some part of the being increases trouble and difficulties — that was why an unquestioning acceptance, an unflinching obedience to the directions of the Guru was laid down as indispensable in the old Indian Yogas — it was demanded not for the sake of the Guru, but for the sake of the disciple.

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This kind of acute struggle comes very often to a sadhak when he wants to make a complete and decisive progress instead of the slow elimination which is the usual course of nature; the strong urge upward is resisted by a vehement pull-back from below.

But the advantage is that when one persists and conquers, much has been gained by the struggle and in that part of the being that resists a decisive advantage. Persevere therefore and do not grieve for occasional waverings or stumbles which can easily happen in so arduous a combat. It should always be the rule for the sadhak not to linger over such things but to pick oneself up again and go resolutely forward. Our help, our force, our blessings will be with you always aiding each step till the final victory.

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Why get excited over these small things or let them disturb you? If you remain quiet, things will go much better and, if there is any difficulty, you are more likely to find out a way in a quiet mind open to the Peace and Power. That is the secret of going on, not to allow things and happenings, not even real mistakes, to upset you, but to remain very quiet, confiding in the Power to lead you and set things more and more right. If one does that, then things do get actually more and more right and even the difficulties and mistakes become means for learning and steps towards progress.

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Do not allow yourself to be worried or upset by small things. Look at things from an inner point of view and try to get the benefit of all that happens. If you make a mistake, don't get distressed because you made a mistake — rather profit by it to see the reason so as to get the right movement in future. This you can do only if you look at it quietly from the inner being without sorrow or disturbance.

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Of course, one must not make a mistake for the purpose of bringing it out or accept the mistake once made, — but if it comes, one has to take advantage of it to change.

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An occurrence like that should always be taken as an opportunity of self-conquest. Put your pride and dignity in that — in not

being mastered by the passions, but their master.

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It is indeed true that when one conquers a difficulty or goes forward, it creates a right current in the atmosphere. Moreover each time one gets an opening, it becomes more possible to make it permanent.

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It is true that if one has the true basis, then after every attack one finds oneself farther advanced in progress.

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Yes, a great progress should only spur one on to a greater progress beside which the first will appear as nothing.

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Yes, that is so. Each victory gained over oneself means new strength to gain more victories.

The Certitude of Victory

You must make grow in you the peace that is born of the certitude of victory.

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If these things [*anger, desire etc.*] had disappeared already, there would be the victory already. What I mean [*by “the certitude of victory”*] is the certitude of the eventual victory which is a matter of faith and an inner reliance upon the Divine. The peace born of this certitude carries one through all persistence or return of difficulties.

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Whatever resistance there is in the outer being will go, only it takes time. It is always best to take one's foundation on that certitude and remain quiet and steadfast with it in mind even

when one cannot react actively against the difficulty. For the quiet passive resistance will make it pass sooner, — even if one is disturbed and anxious.

Even when one cannot call in actively the Mother's Force, one must keep the reliance that it will come.

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Do not let the difficulties you feel or meet from outside overcome or depress you. Keep this one thing in your mind that to come to the Divine is your spiritual destiny and since you have been here and been accepted by us that can be taken as the seal upon it. If it takes a little longer time than you could wish for it to materialise, this should not make you think of it otherwise — for these difficulties and external obstacles and incertitudes always come to the seeker. Neither the difficulties in yourself or the obstacles presented by life are as insurmountable as they seem to your physical mind when they are pressing upon it. Remember also that although here the conditions would be more favourable, yet even at a distance the grace and help can be there with you. Only fix yourself on the goal, make the inner choice once for all firmly and completely; it is there in your soul, fix it in your mind also. Once there, fixed and unalterable, it will prevail over the difficulties of your own vital nature and the physical world's opposition, misunderstanding or reluctance.

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The reaching is already assured, as it cannot but be when a sincere and abiding aspiration is supported by a sincere and abiding endeavour. With that and the Grace supporting, all difficulties can be and surely will be overcome.

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The victory is always sure — even when there is difficulty, never doubt that the victory will be there.