Chapter Five

Suggestions for Dealing with Experiences

Letting the Experiences Develop Naturally

It is better to let the experiences develop naturally. It is not necessary, when they come freely, to determine with the mind which is to be remembered or sought after.

* An experience should be allowed its full time to develop or have its full effect. It should not be interrupted except in case of necessity or, of course, if it is not a good experience.

* You have to watch and see how they [experiences] develop. For the most part they carry their own meaning and if you go on observing them with a silent and vigilant mind you will understand more than if you were in a constant turmoil of thought about them.

* When an experience begins, you should not interfere with it by either questioning or by disturbing movements.

Thinking about Experiences

To think and question about an experience when it is happening is the wrong thing to do; it stops it or diminishes it. Let the experience have its full play — if it is something like this “new life force” or peace or Force or anything else helpful. When it is over, you can think about it — not while it is proceeding. For these experiences are spiritual and not mental and the mind has
to be quiet and not interfere.

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During the experience the mind should be quiet. After the experience is over it can be active. If it is active while it is there, the experience may stop altogether.

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It was not an imagination, but an experience. When such an experience occurs, the attempt to take hold of it mentally and continue it may on the contrary interrupt it. It is best to let it continue of itself; if it ceases, it is likely to recur.

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There are two centres or parts of the consciousness — one is a witness, sākṣi, and observes, the other consciousness is active and it is this active consciousness that you felt going down deep into the vital being. If your mind had not become active, you would have known where it went and what it went there to experience or do. When there is an experience, you should not begin to think about it, for that is of no use at all and it only stops the experience — you should remain silent, observe and let it go on to its end.

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There is something in you that does want to stick to the habit of mentalising about everything. So long as you were not having real experiences, it did not matter. But once real experiences begin you have to learn to approach them in the right way.

**Observing Experiences without Attachment**

At a certain stage of the sadhana, in the beginning (or near it) of the more intense experiences, it sometimes happens that there is the intense realisation of some aspect of the Divine, a sort of communion with it, and that is seen everywhere and all as that. It is a transitory phase and afterwards one gets the
larger experience of the Divine in all its aspects and beyond all aspects. Throughout the experience there should be one part of the being that observes and understands — for sometimes ignorant sadhaks are carried away by their experience and stop short there or fall into extravagance. It must be taken as an experience through which you are passing.

Observing Experiences without Fear or Alarm

It is always dangerous to allow fear to come in like that and associate itself with experiences in the sadhana. There is nothing in the experiences themselves as you describe them that are at all alarming. A burning in the head or a creeping or ticklish sensation or a sense of something moving and working in the head has often been felt by many when there was an opening and the Force was working there. The other things also are in themselves usual enough, the sense of something separate from oneself and the opening and connection made between the head and the centre above. But where the anomaly comes in is that with the connection comes the fear and nervous physical upsetting. So long as there is fear it is no use going on with these experiences — you have to stop and get back to the normal consciousness. Besides that, as I have already said, you must realise what it is in you that has come across and created this upsetting. It is not the descent and the experiences, for many have had them or similar things without being any the worse. It is something in you, probably in your lower vital and physical, that does not want the Higher Consciousness because it will have to change and it has no intention of changing. When this pressure acts, it gets at once a fear and shakes the physical mind and system by its fear. You will have then to get rid of this — till then it will not be safe for you to go farther.

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These experiences are symbolic in their character, so there is no reason to be horrified by the green waters even if you did drown in a well in the last life. All such experiences should be observed
quietly without alarm or depression or other such feelings. One can look at them and try to see or feel their meaning, but too active a speculation in the mind rather hinders than helps the seeing.

If you sink down into an unopened part and open it to the light or empty and clear it, that is a quite salutary and necessary operation and there is no reason for alarm. As for self-preservation, one does not drown in these inner wells — it is only a bath or a plunge. And if it happens to be the well of the psychic, nothing more salutary than to plunge into it.

**Speaking about Experiences**

The usual rule given by Yogis is that one should not speak of one’s experience to others except of course the Guru while the sadhana is going on because it wastes the experience, there is what they call ksāya of the tapasya. It is only long past experiences that they speak of and even that not too freely.

* The Light left you because you spoke of it to someone who was not an adhikāri. It is safest not to speak of these experiences except to a guru or to one who can help you. The passing away of an experience as soon as it is spoken of is a frequent happening and for that reason many Yogis make it a rule never to speak of what happens within them unless it is a thing of the past or a settled realisation that nothing can take away. A settled permanent realisation abides, but these were rather things that come to make possible an opening in the consciousness to something more complete — to prepare it for realisation.

* I thought it was understood that what I wrote to you about persons was private. Experiences one’s own or others’ if one comes to know of them, should not be talked about or made a matter of gossip. It is only if there can be some spiritual profit to others and even then if they are experiences of the past that one
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can speak of them. Otherwise it becomes like news of Abyssinia or Spain, something common and trivial for the vital mass-mind to chew or gobble.

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To show what is written about experiences or to speak about one’s experiences to others is always risky. They are much better kept to oneself.

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I rather doubt whether it should be done. There is a privacy about experiences which stands in the way of their being dealt with like that, at least until the sadhak has got into siddhi. They can be spoken of to a few, if one wishes, but to make public like that in a general way, even without names, is a little difficult. People besides might begin to speculate on these experiences, gossip and ask questions. What might be useful is some experiences with explanation, if the answer gives one, which would make clear certain sides of the sadhana. But they would have to be carefully chosen.

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General knowledge is another matter, it is intellectual and the intellect gains by the intellectual activity of teaching. Also if in Yoga it were only a matter of imparting intellectually one’s mental knowledge of the subject, that rule would perhaps hold; but this mental aspect is only a small part of Yoga. There is something more complex which forms the bigger part of it. In teaching Yoga to another one becomes to some extent a master with disciples. The Yogis have always said that one who takes disciples, takes upon himself the difficulties of his disciples as well as one’s own — that is why it is recommended not to take

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1 The correspondent wished to compile a “Journal of Experiences” containing the letters of sadhaks who had written about their experiences to Sri Aurobindo and he had commented on them. This collection of letters would be kept in the Ashram library for sadhaks to read. — Ed.

2 The rule that one understands something better by teaching it. — Ed.
disciples unless and until one is siddha and even then only if one receives the Divine authority to do it — what Ramakrishna called getting the cāprās. Secondly, there is the danger of egoism — when one is free from that, then the objection no longer holds. There is a separate question and that is the telling of one’s own experiences to others. That too is very much discouraged by most Yogis — they say it is harmful to the sadhana. I have certainly seen and heard of any number of instances in which people were having a flow of experiences and, when they told it, the flow was lost — so there must be something in this objection. I suppose however it ceases to apply after one has reached a certain long-established stability in the experience, that is to say, when the experience amounts to a definite and permanent realisation, something finally and irrevocably added to the consciousness. I notice that those who keep their experiences to themselves and do not put themselves out on others seem to have a more steady sadhana than others, but I don’t know whether it is an invariable rule. It would probably not apply any longer after a certain stage of realisation.

It is true that experiences often disappear when spoken or written about to others. But that does not always happen, nor does it happen to everybody.

It is not good to talk too much to others about the sadhana and its experiences. There can be exceptions to the rule, but that depends on the person and circumstances.

If you want to keep the joy, it will be wise not to speak of it to others. Things spoken about get wings and try to escape.

The Difficulty of Keeping Experiences

The rush of the experience at the beginning is often very powerful, so powerful that the resisting elements remain quiescent —
afterwards they rise up. The experience has then to be brought down and settled in these parts also.

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Yes, that is the truth of the working. At first what has to be established comes with difficulty and is felt as if abnormal, an experience that one loses easily — afterwards it comes of itself, but does not yet stay; finally it becomes a frequent and intimate state of the being and makes itself constant and normal. On the other hand all the confusions and errors once habitual to the nature are pushed out; at first they return frequently, but afterwards they in their turn become abnormal and foreign to the nature and lose frequency and finally disappear.

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One can speak of a condition as coming freely and spontaneously when it comes of itself or as soon as it is remembered after an interruption. One can speak of it as coming at will, when it comes back at a slight pressure of the will and nothing more is necessary. Yours comes by an effort of the will which has to be sustained and is kept at the price of a constant vigilance. But this effort and vigilance are quite the right thing and must be done until the condition either becomes stable or comes automatically or at will, as described above. This is not pulling, so you need not hesitate to go on with it fully. It is the necessary tapasya.

What prevents it from remaining is the natural lapse to a lower consciousness which comes either from the mind’s or vital’s inclination to indulge in accustomed occupations or by sleep or by losing oneself in some outer action such as talking — because these things are associated with the ordinary mental consciousness and still need it to be done. At a later stage it will be possible to do these things with the surface mind only while the new consciousness remains intact and is either found there immediately as soon as the surface occupation ceases or else remains even during the occupation upholding the surface action or enveloping it as a small movement in itself.

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All that you have written is quite correct; but the smallness is a general characteristic of the human instrument before it has the spiritual change. When the quietude comes, then the wideness also begins to come. The state you feel in which things go right, is the psychic and spiritual condition of the being; it is true that at first it is there only at times, but that is usual in the sadhana. All new states and realisations come like that at first; they are there for a short time, then seem to cease and other things come up from below and cover and hide the new condition. This is because of the habit of the past nature. But the true condition goes on returning till it and not the old things establishes itself as the habit and rule of a new nature.

The inward condition and its new outlook on things without the eagerness of the old consciousness in work is simply a passage through which you are going towards the new nature in which you will remain unmoved and undisturbed by things, but with a new and freer power of action which comes from within and from above.

* It is more difficult at this stage for the experiences of Ananda (this felicity seems from your description to be an intense psychic Ananda) to be kept permanently than for peace to remain abidingly. The difficulty of keeping up these states in work or reading is more a matter of habit than anything else, because the mind is accustomed to absorb in the reading or work and forget all else for the time being. But once one gets the right poise and can keep in the inner being during work, that difficulty disappears.