

## Chapter Seven

# The Vital Being and Vital Consciousness

### The Vital

Mind and vital are two different processes of one consciousness.

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It [*vital*] means *prāṇa* — it is the life-force and desire-force in a man and the part of the being that responds to desire and is the instrument of the life-forces.

### The True Vital Being and Consciousness

There is behind all the vital nature in man his true vital being concealed and immobile which is quite different from the surface vital nature. The surface vital is narrow, ignorant, limited, full of obscure desires, passions, cravings, revolts, pleasures and pains, transient joys and griefs, exultations and depressions. The true vital being on the contrary is wide, vast, calm, strong, without limitations, firm and immovable, capable of all power, all knowledge, all Ananda. It is moreover without ego, for it knows itself to be a projection and instrument of the Divine; it is the divine Warrior, pure and perfect; in it is an instrumental Force for all divine realisations. It is the true vital being that has become awake and come in front within you. In the same way there is too a true mental being, a true physical being. When these are manifest, then you are aware of a double existence in you; that behind is always calm and strong, that on the surface alone is troubled and obscure. But if the true being behind remains stable and you live in it, then the trouble and obscurity remain only on the surface; in this condition the exterior parts can be dealt

with more potently and they also made free and perfect.

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The true vital is in the inner consciousness, the external is that which is instrumental for the present play of Prakriti in the surface personality. When the change comes, the true vital rejects what is out of tune with its own truth from the external and makes it a true instrument for its expression, a means of expression of its inner will, not a thing of responses to the suggestions of the lower Nature. The strong distinction between the two practically disappears.

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The higher and lower [*vital*] are divisions of the ordinary vital and equally ignorant. It is the true vital that is in contact with the Divine.

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The true vital consciousness is one in which the vital makes full surrender, converts itself into an instrument of the Divine, making no demand, insisting on no desire, answering to the Mother's force and to no other, calm, unegoistic, giving an absolute loyalty and obedience, with no personal vanity or ambition, only willing to be a pure and perfect instrument, desiring nothing for itself but that the Truth may prevail within itself and everywhere and the Divine Victory take place and the Divine Work be done.

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It [*the true vital*] is capable of receiving the movements of the higher consciousness, and afterwards it can be capable of receiving the still greater supramental power and Ananda. If it is not, then the descent of the higher consciousness would be impossible and supramentalisation would be impossible. It is not meant that it possesses these things itself in its own right and that as soon as one is aware of the true vital, one gets all these things as inherent in the true vital.

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It is as I told you — only by losing ego and having the sense of the Infinite can one experience the true vital. So you got the experience of the loss of ego and the sense of a true vital existence. But there are all those parts of the human vital nature that are not the true vital and these are full of impurities which have to be thrown in the fire of aspiration burning in the true vital being.

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It [*the illumined vital*] is in contact with the Divine Power or the higher Truth and seeks to transform itself and become a true instrument — it rejects the ordinary vital movements.

### Parts of the Vital Being

There are four parts of the vital being — first, the mental vital which gives a mental expression by thought, speech or otherwise to the emotions, desires, passions, sensations and other movements of the vital being; the emotional vital which is the seat of various feelings such as love, joy, sorrow, hatred, and the rest; the central vital which is the seat of the stronger vital longings and reactions, e.g. ambition, pride, fear, love of fame, attractions and repulsions, desires and passions of various kinds and the field of many vital energies; last, the lower vital which is occupied with small desires and feelings, such as make the greater part of daily life, e.g. food desire, sexual desire, small likings, dislikings, vanity, quarrels, love of praise, anger at blame, little wishes of all kinds — and a numberless host of other things. Their respective seats are (1) the region from the throat to the heart, (2) the heart (it is a double centre, belonging in front to the emotional and vital and behind to the psychic), (3) from the heart to the navel, (4) below the navel.

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The point about the emotional and the higher vital is a rather difficult one. In one classification in which mind is taken as something more than the thinking, perceiving and willing intelligence,

the emotional can be reckoned as part of the mind, the vital in the mental. In another classification it is rather the most mentalised part of the vital nature. In the first case, the term higher vital is confined to that larger movement of the conscious life-force which is concerned with creation, with power and force and conquest, with giving and self-giving and gathering from the world for farther action and expenditure of power, throwing itself out in the wider movements of life, responsive to the greater objects of Nature. In the second arrangement, the emotional being stands at the top of the vital nature and the two together make the higher vital. As against them stands the lower vital which is concerned with the pettier movements of action and desire and stretches down into the vital physical where it supports the life of the more external activities and all physical sensations, hungers, cravings, satisfactions. The term lower must not be considered in a pejorative sense; it refers only to the position in the hierarchy of the planes. For although this part of the nature in earthly beings tends to be very obscure and is full of perversions, — lust, greed of all kinds, vanity, small ambitions, petty anger, envy, jealousy are its ordinary guests, — still there is another side to it which makes it an indispensable mediator between the inner being and the outer life.

It is not a fact that every psychic experience embodies itself in a purified and rightly directed vital current; it does that when it has to externalise itself in action. Psychic experience is in itself a quite independent thing and has its own characteristic forms. The psychic being stands behind all the others; its force is the true soul-power. But if it comes to the front, it can suffuse all the rest; mind, vital, the physical consciousness can take its stamp and be transformed by its influence. When the nature is properly developed, there is a psychic in the mental, a psychic in the vital, a psychic in the physical. It is when that is there and strong, that we can say of someone that he evidently has a soul. But there are some in whom this element is so lacking that we have to use faith in order to believe that they have a soul at all. The centre of the psychic being is behind the centre of the emotional being; it is the emotional that is nearest dynamically to the psychic and

in most men it is through the emotional centre that the psychic can be most easily reached and through the psychicised emotion that it can be most easily expressed. Many therefore mistake the one for the other; but there is a world of difference between the two. The emotions normally are vital in their character and not part of the psychic nature.

It must be remembered that while this classification is indispensable for psychological self-knowledge and discipline and practice, it can be used best when it is not made too rigid and cutting a formula. For things run very much into each other and a synthetical sense of these powers is as necessary as the analysis. Mind for instance is everywhere. The physical mind is technically placed below the vital and yet it is a prolongation of the mind proper and can act in its own sphere by direct touch with the higher mental intelligence. And there is too an obscure mind of the body, of the very cells, molecules, corpuscles. Haeckel, the German materialist, spoke somewhere of the will in the atom, and recent Science, dealing with the incalculable individual variation in the activity of the electrons, comes near to perceiving that this is not a figure but the shadow thrown by a secret reality. This body-mind is a very tangible truth; owing to its obscurity and mechanical clinging to past movements and facile oblivion and rejection of the new, we find in it one of the chief obstacles to permeation by the supermind force and the transformation of the functioning of the body. On the other hand, once effectively converted, it will be one of the most precious instruments for the stabilisation of the supramental light and force in material Nature.

### **The Mental Vital or Vital Mind**

It is the mental part of the vital that is there between the throat and the heart. The place of the mind is from the crown of the head to the throat (where is the physical mind); from below the throat to the heart is the emotional heart or the [*higher*] vital (mental emotional, emotional feelings); the navel and abdomen [*are the seats of*] the middle and lower vital.

It is not possible to say with any precision what the resistance in the higher vital parts will be, what form it takes, because it may take different forms with different natures. It is quite normal that there should be some resistance almost at every point to the descent of the higher consciousness; for the different parts of the present nature are each more or less attached to their own established way of seeing, acting, feeling, reacting to things and to the habitual movements and formations of their own domain which each individual has made for himself in the past or in his present life. What is needed is a general plasticity of the mind, the vital, the physical consciousness, a readiness to give up all attachment to these things, to accept whatever the higher consciousness brings down with it however contrary to one's own received ideas, feelings, habits of nature. The greater the plasticity in any part of the nature, the less the resistance there.

By the higher vital parts of the nature I mean the vital mind, the emotional nature, the life-force dynamis in the being. The vital mind is that part of the vital being which builds, plans, imagines, arranges things and thoughts according to the life-pushes, desires, will to power or possession, will to action, emotions, vital ego reactions of the nature. It must be distinguished from the reasoning will which plans and arranges things according to the dictates of the thinking mind proper, the discriminating reason or according to the mental intuition or a direct insight and judgment. The vital mind uses thought for the service not of reason but of life-push and life-power and when it calls in reasoning it uses that for justifying the dictates of these powers, imposes their dictates on the reason instead of governing by a discriminating will the action of the life-forces. This higher vital with all its parts is situated in the chest and has the cardiac centre as its main stronghold governing all this part down to the navel. I need not say anything about the emotional nature, for its character and movements are known to all. From the navel downwards is the reign of the vital passions and sensations and all the small life-impulses that constitute the bulk of the ordinary human life and character. This is what we call the lower vital nature. The Muladhara is the main support of the physical

consciousness and the material parts of the nature.

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It [*the vital mind*] is a mind of dynamic (not rationalising) will, action, desire — occupied with force and achievement and satisfaction and possession, enjoyment and suffering, giving and taking, growth, expansion, success and failure, good fortune and ill fortune etc. etc.

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That [*repetitive imaginative thinking*] is the ordinary activity of the vital mind which is always imagining and thinking and planning what to do about this and how to arrange about that. It has obviously its utility in human nature and human action, but acts in a random and excessive way without discipline, economy of its powers or concentration on the things that have really to be done.

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The things which come to you in this way in sleep or waking are of the nature of vital mind imaginations and activities about things and work and whatever presents itself to the mind. On all things that present themselves to the mind, the vital imagination in man is able to work, imagining, speculating, building ideas or plans for the future etc. etc. It has its utility for the consciousness in ordinary life, but must quiet down and be replaced by a higher action in Yoga. In sleep it is also the vital plane into which you enter. If properly seen and coordinated, what is experienced in the vital plane has its value and gives knowledge which is useful and control over the vital self and vital plane. But all that is coming to you through the subconscious in an incoherent way — this is the cause of the trouble. The whole thing has to be quieted down and we shall try to get that done. When I spoke of your opening yourself, I meant simply that you should fix it in your mind that the help is coming and have the will to receive it — not necessarily that you should open yourself by an effort.

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The source from which these imaginations<sup>1</sup> come has nothing to do with the reason and does not care for any rational objections. They come either from the vital mind, the same source from which come all the fine imaginations and long stories which men tell themselves in which they are the heroes and do great things or they come from little entities attached to the physical mind which pick up any random suggestion anywhere and present it to the mind just to see whether it will be accepted. If one watches oneself closely one can find the most queer and extraordinary or nonsensical things crossing the mind or peeping in on it in this way. Usually one laughs or hardly notices and the thing falls back to the world of incoherent thought from which it came.

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It is again the vital mind. It has no sense of proportion or measure and is eager to be or achieve something big at once.

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All that [*pleasurable imaginations*] is the vital mind — it has in everybody the habit of such imaginations. It is not very important, but of course it has to be got rid of, as the basis is ego.

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The vital mind in the ordinary nature cannot get on without these imaginations — so the habit remains for a long time. To be detached and indifferent is the best, then after a time it may get disgusted and drop the habit.

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That kind of talking [*in one's mind to another person*] is very common with the vital mind. It is a way it has of acting on the subtle plane on things in which it is interested, especially if the physical action is stopped or restricted.

<sup>1</sup> *The disciple had imagined that he was the Buddha. — Ed.*

### **The Emotional Being or Heart**

The emotional being is itself a part of the vital.

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The heart is the centre of the emotional being and the emotions are vital movements. When the heart is purified, the vital emotions change into psychic feelings or else psychicised vital movements.

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The heart is part of the vital—it has to be controlled in the same way as the rest, by rejection of the wrong movements, by acceptance of the true psychic surrender which prevents all demand and clamour, by calling in the higher light and knowledge. It is not usually however the heart that bothers about mental questions and the answer to them.

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Pure and true thoughts and emotions and impulsions can rise from the human mind, heart and vital, because all is not evil there. The heart may be unpurified, but that does not mean that everything in it is impure.

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I make the distinction [*between emotions and lower vital movements*] by noting where these things rise from. Anger, fear, jealousy touch the heart no doubt just as they touch the mind but they rise from the navel region and entrails (i.e. the lower or at highest the middle vital). Stevenson has a striking passage in *Kidnapped* where the hero notes that his fear is felt primarily not in the heart but the stomach. Love, hope have their primary seat in the heart, so with pity etc.

### **The Central Vital or Vital Proper**

Above the heart is the vital mind—sense and the rising of

sensation is lower than the emotion, not higher.

Sensation is much nearer the physical than emotion.

The place of desire is below the heart in the central vital (navel) and in the lower vital, but it invades the emotion and the vital mind.

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A mistake [*to think that all men seek after happiness*]; many men are not after happiness and do not believe it is the true aim of life. It is the physical vital that seeks after happiness, the bigger vital is ready to sacrifice it in order to satisfy its passions, search for power, ambition, fame or any other motive. If you say it is because of the happiness power, fame etc. gives, that again is not universally true. Power can give anything else, but not happiness; it is something in its very nature arduous and full of difficulty to get, to keep or to use — I speak of course of power in the ordinary sense. A man may know he can never have fame in this life but yet work in the hope of posthumous fame or in the chance of it. He may know that the satisfaction of his passion will bring him everything rather than happiness — suffering, torture, destruction — yet he will follow his impulse. So also the mind as well as the larger vital is not bound by the pursuit of happiness. It can seek Truth rather or the victory of a cause. To reduce all to a single hedonistic strain seems to me very poor psychology. Neither Nature nor the vast Spirit in things are so limited and one-tracked as that.

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The nervous part of the being is a portion of the vital — it is the vital physical, the life-force closely enmeshed in the reactions, desires, needs, sensations of the body. The vital proper is the life-force acting in its own nature, impulses, emotions, feelings, desires, ambitions etc. having as their highest centre what we may call the outer heart of emotion, while there is an inner heart where are the higher or psychic feelings and sensibilities, the emotions and intuitive yearnings and impulses of the soul. The vital part of us is, of course, necessary to our completeness, but

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it is a true instrument only when its feelings and tendencies have been purified by the psychic touch and taken up and governed by the spiritual light and power.

### **The Lower Vital, the Physical Vital and the Material Vital**

Below the navel is the lower vital plane, which is ignorant and obscure, the seat of small desires, greeds, passions and enjoyments.

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As there is a physical mind, so there is a physical vital — a vital turned entirely upon physical things, full of desires and greeds and seekings for pleasure on the physical plane.

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That [*seeking enjoyment*] is the attitude not of the whole vital but of the physical vital, the animal part of the human being. Of course it cannot be convinced by mental reasoning of any kind. In most men it is the natural and accepted attitude towards life varnished over with some conventional moralism and idealism as a concession to the mind and higher vital. In a few this part of the being is gripped and subordinated to the mental or the higher vital aim, forced to take a subordinate place so that the mind may absorb itself persistently in mental pursuits or idealisms or great political or personal ambitions (Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini). The ascetic and the Puritan try to suppress it mostly or altogether. In our Yoga the principle is that all must become an instrument of the Spirit and the parts of enjoyment taste the Ananda in things, not the animal enjoyment of the surface. But the Ananda will not come or will not stay so long as this part is not converted and insists on its own way of satisfaction.

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Yes — they [*the lower vital, the physical vital and the material vital*] become very clear to the increasing consciousness. And the distinctions are necessary — otherwise one may influence or

control the lower vital or a part of the physical vital and then be astonished to find that something intangible but apparently invincible still resists — it is the material vital with so much of the rest as it can influence by its resistance.

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I don't know about subtle vital. One says subtle physical to distinguish from gross material physical — because to our normal experience all physical is gross, *sthūla*. But the vital is in its nature non-material, so the adjective is superfluous. By material vital, we mean the vital so involved in matter as to be bound by its movements and gross physical character. The action is to support and energise the body and keep in it the capacity of life, growth, movement etc., also of sensitiveness to outer impacts.

### A Strong Vital

A strong vital is one that is full of life-force, has ambition, courage, great energy, a force for action or for creation, a large expansive movement whether for generosity in giving or for possession and lead and domination, a power to fulfil and materialise — many other forms of vital strength there are also. It is often difficult for such a vital to surrender itself because of this sense of its own powers — but if it can do so, it becomes an admirable instrument for the Divine Work.

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No, a weak vital has not the strength to turn spiritually — and being weak more easily falls under a wrong influence and even when it wants, finds it difficult to accept anything beyond its own habitual nature. The strong vital when the will is there can do it much more easily — its one central difficulty is the pride of its ego and the attraction of its powers.

The chest has more connection with the psychic than the vital. A strong vital may have a good physique, but as often it has not — it draws too much on the physical, eats it up as it were.

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In a mere vampire there is no psychic, for the vampire is a vital being — but in all humans (even if dominated by a vital being or vampire force), there is a psychic veiled behind it all.

### **The Vital Body**

The physical life cannot last without the body nor can the body live without the life force, but the life in itself has a separate existence and a separate body of its own, the vital body, just as the mind has a separate existence and can exist on its own plane. All the organisation is held together by the psychic which is the support of all.

### **The Vital Nature**

It was not your own vital that you saw, but the general vital Nature in the Ignorance that took form and spoke. The battle you saw was the struggle between the Powers of the Light and the Powers of the Darkness for possession of the vital Nature on earth.

*Your* vital cannot be destroyed, because it is needed as an instrument for the manifestation of the Divine element in you. There can be no life and no manifestation here on earth without the vital. It has not to be destroyed, but purified and changed into the true Vital.

### **The Vital Plane and the Physical Plane**

Things do happen on the vital plane — but they are not *more* important than what happens here because it is here we have to realise and what happens in the vital is only a help.

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Most things happen in the vital before they happen in the physical, but all that happens in the vital does not realise itself in the physical or not in the same way. There is always or at least

usually a change in the form, time, circumstances due to the different conditions of the physical plane.

### The Life Heavens

Where do you find in “The Life Heavens”<sup>2</sup> that I say or anybody says the conditions on the earth are glorious and suited to the Divine Life? There is not a word to that effect there! The Life Heavens are the heavens of the vital gods and there is there a perfect harmony but a harmony of the sublimated satisfied senses and vital desires only. If there is to be a Harmony, it must be of all the powers raised to their highest and harmonised together. All the non-evolutionary worlds are worlds of a type limited to its own harmony like the Life Heavens. The Earth on the other hand is an evolutionary world, not at all glorious or harmonious even as a material world (except in certain appearances), but rather most sorrowful, disharmonious, imperfect. Yet in that imperfection is the urge towards a higher and more many-sided perfection. It contains the last finite which yet yearns to the supreme infinite (it is not to be satisfied by sense-joys precisely because in the conditions of earth it is able to see their limitations). God is pent in the mire (mire is not glorious, so there is no claim to glory or beauty here) but that very fact imposes a necessity to break through that prison to a consciousness which is ever rising towards the heights. And so on. That *is* “a deeper power”, not a greater actual glory or perfection. All that may be true or not to the mind, but it is the traditional attitude of Indian spiritual experience. Ask any Yogin, he will tell you that the Life Heavens are childish things; even the gods, says the Purana, must come down to earth and be embodied there if they want *mukti*, giving up the pride of their limited perfection — they must enter into the last finite if they want to reach the last infinite. A poem is not a philosophical treatise or a profession of religious faith — it is the expression of a vision or an experience of some kind,

<sup>2</sup> A poem by Sri Aurobindo. See Collected Poems, volume 2 of THE COMPLETE WORKS OF SRI AUROBINDO, p. 549. — Ed.

mundane or spiritual. Here it is the vision of the Life Heavens, its perfection, its limitations and the counterclaim of the Earth or rather the Spirit or Power behind the earth consciousness. It has to be taken at that, as an expression of a certain aspect of things, an expression of a certain kind of experience, not of a mental dogma. There is a deep truth behind it, though it may not be the whole truth of the matter. In the poem, also, there is no question of a Divine Life here, though that is hinted at as the unexpressed possible result of the ascent — because the Earth is not put aside (“Earth’s heart was felt beating below me still”); nevertheless the poem expresses only the ascent towards the Highest, far beyond the Life Heavens, and the Earth-Spirit claims that power and does not speak of any descent of a Divine Life. I say so much in order to get rid of that misconception so as not to have to go back to it when dealing with Earth’s disharmonies.

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They wouldn’t be heavens if they were not immune [*from attacks by hostile powers*] — a heaven with fear in it would be no heaven. The Life Heavens have an influence on earth and so have the Life Hells, but it does not follow that they influence each other in their own domain. Overmind can influence earth, so can the hostile Powers, but it does not follow that hostile Powers can penetrate the Overmind — they can’t: they can only spoil what it sends to the earth. Each power of the Divine (life like mind and matter are powers of the Divine) has its own harmony inherent in the purity of its own principle — it is only if it is disturbed or perverted that it produces disorder. That is another reason why the evolution could have been a progressing harmony, not a series of discords through which harmony of a precarious and wounded kind has to be struggled for at each step: for the Divine Principle is there within. Each plane therefore has its heavens; there are the subtle physical heavens, the vital heavens, the mental heavens. If Powers of disharmony got in, they would cease to be heavens.