

On the Meaning of Realization

Part 14 of 16

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As our series of classes devoted to a form of practical yoga is drawing to a close, it becomes necessary for us to consider some of the more practical details with which one will have to deal. Part of the yogic call is in a form of high appeal, appeal to one's highest devotion, to his vastest ideation, and to his most exalted will. There are also glimpses of this other consciousness, and many of you have not been strangers to such glimpses during our course of classes. This is valuable as a means of indicating to the mind that we're talking about realities, about something which may be known. I can appreciate the attitude of one who says that before I devote myself completely to an ideal or a supposed reality beyond this ordinary consciousness, I wish some evidence that such a reality is, that such a transcendent consciousness exists, and the Divine or the Superconscient does from time to time bestow foretastes—foretastes which indicate that there is something which may be reached. Between the foretaste and that time when one may at will reach in to the *anandas* of the higher consciousness or perhaps even live permanently in them, during that interval there is normally a long period of effort—effort which in some respects is not too inspiring, is somewhat laborious, somewhat mundane it may seem in its forms; nonetheless, this effort must be put forth.

I propose tonight, therefore, to deal with some of these practical, more ordinary problems of the everyday life that must form a part of the *sadhana*. First of all, of course, I'm envisaging the individual who feels the call to a complete dedication, who is seeking to make the crossing, and is determined to devote his life to that end. I realize that there's a larger number who are not yet prepared to go this far, who, nonetheless, will take some steps, will begin in a small way to take the various passages of the path. And even a moderate effort will bear some fruit, but there is delay. We seek, therefore, especially those who are ready to devote themselves with full dedication.

Now, there are certain things, certain rules that apply to one's physical life. Such matters as illness; the diet; there's talking; and there's sex. And there's some points to be made here—some points that have been very definitely worked out in the experience of Sri Aurobindo's *ashram* at Pondicherry.

First of all, on matters such as what one shall eat or what one shall not eat, there is a great flexibility in the rules. The general rule is this: anything that interferes with the *sadhana* should be discontinued, anything that helps should be encouraged, and that which neither helps nor hinders is a matter of no moment. There is no particular general rule on the matter of diet; only, he who inclines to eat too much should practice dietetic austerity, and he who eats too little should eat more. Now, those rules are rather flexible. It would be quite different from one person to another. You can't judge a person altogether by their physical weight because there is a matter of physical type involved, and very often the very heavy person is the person that eats one meal a day and it goes to

flesh; sometimes the thin person eats many meals a day. To eat according to body need rather than according to one's taste or wants is the general rule. If eating occupies a large place in one's life, that is a sign that he needs to be more ascetic.

Now, if you're under the immediate personal guidance of a guru he might give you the suggestions here in detail, but one can apply these principles to oneself. Lust for food is out. Eating sensibly, eating according to the needs of the body as you have learned them from experience so that it may be most efficient and function at a maximum is the proper thing to do. On the question as to whether some foods are more *sattvic* than others, some more *rajasic*, and some more *tamasic*, this is probably true; nonetheless it's not a matter of fundamental importance. Eating *sattvic* food by itself without earnestness of practice in other respects will do very little for one's spiritual development. In general the *sattvic* foods would be things like fruits, the more, oh, lighter sort of food, and a meat for instance is quite *rajasic*. But suppose you have to live in a *rajasic* environment, suppose you have to fight your way through life; if you were to live upon a one sided *sattvic* diet, you would become so sensitive that you'd be virtually slain trying to live under modern conditions. Such has been the experience of students in the past.

While it's possible in the case of Sri Aurobindo's *ashram* to serve a table that is vegetarian—I don't know whether it's radical vegetarian in the sense of eliminating eggs and milk, but the meat is not served there—that rule is feasible under such conditions particularly with the Oriental peoples. A different rule would have to apply with Western man living not in an *ashram* but in the midst of the city. Common sense, sound judgment, is the guiding principle here: no excess, no undereating, no self-starving, but curbing lust for food nor thinking a great deal about it. Being very greatly concerned about your future meal, that is out. Being disturbed because the food doesn't taste good, that's another thing that's out. Take an equal attitude towards those things that do not taste well and those things that are delicious, equality in these things. Be equally pleased; cultivate the attitude of being equally pleased when eating a wholesome dry crust or some delicious dessert—that's the thing that is important. If you can have an attitude of equality, what you eat is a matter of very minor importance. Equality of attitude is a matter of major importance. If you can get up from the dry crust just as happy, just as cheerful, just as plus in your attitude as you get up from an intriguing and delightful meal, then you've gone far in mastering the essential attitude towards food.

Now, in the matter of speech: it seems that some people have a drive to speech that is virtually an obsession. This is something I don't personally understand too well, but I do realize that it is a fact that there are certain *rajasic* types that find it well-nigh impossible to keep the tongue from wagging. It doesn't matter whether they have anything to say or not. Generally, they have nothing to say. They're emptying themselves so fast that in a multitude of words you find very rarely an idea. I have been acquainted with people of that type and I don't know of any more completely boring experience than to have to be in the environment of such; and a very good title for this kind of verbal tendency is to call it a form of verbal diarrhea. Now, that is a serious barrier in the *sadhana*. Speech of that sort is wastage of energies that have got to be conserved in the *sadhana*. The rule is: speak when there's a reason for speaking, otherwise silence. Now, this is for the real serious practitioner. It's a stopping of the idea that it's a virtue socially to just talk for the sake of talking; rather, that the speech shall serve an end of expressing something worth saying—an idea that needs expression, or a situation that needs

something said about it—otherwise the rule of life be a silence. That's a conservation of energy. It's a force that acts towards the deepening of consciousness.

There is the matter of health. For some forms of yoga, of course, a vital healthy body is essential. This applies to the general pattern which is known as *kundala* yoga, or *laya* yoga, of which a certain important phase is the *hatha* yoga. Superior health and strength of body is essential in this, but this yoga is not fundamental. In the fundamental yogas, health of body is an incident and illness is by no means always a barrier. If illness serves to effect a deepening in consciousness, a tendency to turn inward, as it quite frequently does, it may be something like an initiator. It may be a blessing in disguise. That often is the case. A body that is too healthy may be too physical. It may be a disadvantage. I mean health in the sense that we speak of a perfect body for a prize fighter; such a body is not subtle. It's not a body that supplies a favorable condition for the *sadhana*. A subtle health is desirable, unquestionably; but in the transitional process one will often face conditions that are strains upon the body, strains upon the nervous organism, because radical adjustments are going on. A new basis of life is being found. One should not be disturbed by these facts.

There are different theories as to the part of the body here. Sri Ramakrishna held the view that it was perfectly proper and virtually inevitable that progress in yoga should mean imposing of ill health upon the body and a shortening of the life. Sri Aurobindo doesn't agree with that. His experience is in the contrary direction. Rather, that before he started yoga and was advanced in it, he had many illnesses, he said, which disappeared as a result of the *sadhana*. And contrary to many yogins, he holds that it's perfectly proper to use yogic power in affecting cure of illnesses.

Now, you can see how his point is valid because of a difference of attitude in his yoga. If you have taken the fundamental step of surrender, surrender to the Divine, authentically hold the view that this body is not my body but is a body for the Divine—I stand in the relation of a custodian only with respect to it—then one is not acting in a selfish sense to take reasonable care of that body and to use yogic powers in maintaining its health for that body that you're immediately connected with, or for the bodies of others.

I rather think Sri Aurobindo's position here is the sounder of the two views; although, my own attitude was one of rather considerable indifference to the body whether it was well or whether it was not well. After those days in 1936 the remaining feeling toward the body was that it was a brake on consciousness, something that acted like a drag. There's another consciousness that is so free and so vast that when you sink into the field of body consciousness the experience is somewhat like this: suppose you had to slip into the suit which a diver uses, eighty pounds on each leg for holding you down, thick garments in which you move. Your fingers reduced to something worse than being all thumbs. Every bit of effort sluggish and slow, very difficult to do anything. Well, the physical body had very distinctly that kind of value, and one's natural feeling was that he'd be mighty happy if he could drop it and be freed from that load so that he could move in a freer and vaster consciousness. The only thought is that it is an instrument that has some utility that may serve for effecting results in the physical world. And if it has some utility for the Divine, then it is not proper to cast it aside. However, it is not my experience that the body is an aid in the matter of getting a higher

consciousness, but functions as a drag and a load imposing a certain heaviness from which you are not completely free so long as you are correlated with body consciousness.

Now, Aurobindo would undoubtedly acknowledge all of this as empirically true, but he'd say part of the job is transforming that body and making it over into something that would be a fit instrument. So, from that angle there is a heroic reason for dealing with the body problem. It's a grim problem from this angle, and the job is a painful one to have to deal with it because it is slow, not responsive, not readily responsive, takes a long time. But if it is the Divine purpose that this is the matrix or the starting point of a an ultimate physical instrumentation which can serve a fully conscious divine being, then the only thing to do as part of the surrender is to accept the task of transforming a physical body. Of course, it's always possible to take the yoga that can release one entirely from body connection—to step away from it. That yoga exists. That escape is possible. It can be done. One doesn't have to take up the problem of the body, but if he follows the path of the yoga of surrender, it appears as a matter almost of egoic selfishness to let one's inclination with respect to retreat from the body become decisive in his planning and determination of course of action.

Now, the body, in yoga, is subject to what you might call pseudo-illnesses—illnesses that are not due to real physical causes. There are physical illnesses. If a man breaks his arm there's a definite physical cause there. If a person gets vitally chilled so his resistance is down and he takes pneumonia there is a definite physical cause there. But if without definite physical causes, the body gets ill because of its *tamasic* nature, because of a certain liking of illness, a liking of feeling that it is weak, then we have to deal with that in an heroic way and not in an indulgent way. The body will take suggestions of sickness. It will feel a sick vibration and then respond in kind, taking it on. Whenever this happens don't give way to it at all. Give it a talking to, possibly. You may use certain appropriate *mantrams* in that connection. Insist upon a more *rajasic* heroic attitude on the part of the body. Don't be indulgent, by all means, with respect to this love of sickness that one finds in these animal organisms. We've got to apply some austerities in these problems. There is a line to be drawn between a real sickness and these pseudo-sicknesses that can be taken on.

Now we come to the most serious problem of all in the *sadhana*. It is the problem of sex. The reason why this is a primary problem, one of grave concern, is that we're dealing with a primary force that is of importance in the *sadhana*. In the Sanskrit, sex force as it's known in its ordinary manifestation, is called "*retas*," which may be translated roughly, lust. It can be transformed into *ojas*, which means strength, or to *tejas* which has a dual meaning of fire and of majesty. The effort in the *sadhana* is to make the transformation of *retas* into *ojas* and *tejas*. On this point Sri Aurobindo is in agreement with the vast bulk of the yogas. The only exceptions to the rule I have found is in some references in the Tantra yogas, and not all of the Tantras are in agreement. There are some Tantras that use sex in the ordinary physical sense. They're looked upon as questionable even in the Tantric group of practitioners. Outside of that, if you consider Buddhism, if you consider Shankara, as well as Sri Aurobindo, and the Vedantist group that grew up under Sri Ramakrishna, the rule is transcendence of sex for him who has determined to be a *sadhaka*. Aurobindo covers the problem so clearly and from every side that there is no loophole left. The practice of continence for the serious *sadhaka* is the rule. And this is not only a physical continence, it's elimination of sex thought is even

more important than the physical continence—sex imaginings, sexual emotions, the eliminations of sex dreams, things which one can accomplish. Only the latter is rather difficult because that is an upheaval from the unconscious physical part of one where there is the final resistance, and one must deal patiently with this, but persistently with it.

One thing that may be cast upon one at times is something which we may call a sex glamour. It can come in various ways. It can be experienced in shows, as the result of certain kinds of literature, as the result of a magnetic rapport with someone of the opposite sex, and as a result of certain types of dream experiences which leave an effect that continues over into the waking consciousness where one may feel something that seems to possess him with a kind of exaltation, a kind of reaching above his—or beyond his ordinary routine consciousness. And its grip can be pretty strong. The problem is to break the glamour while in the midst of it, and this can be done. All you have to do is to be on the job with the will, and as soon as you catch any of those glammers that are being cast to cut them off even though the immediate effect is an experience of dryness. And very commonly the immediate effect will be an experience of dryness. This is austerity all right, and this is the kind of austerity that really counts. Sitting on nails or lying on nails doesn't count and doesn't help you very much, but this austerity does because it's dealing with a power that most emphatically is competing with what you're seeking in the *sadhana* and therefore has the greatest capacity to prevent success in the *sadhana*, or a false success, a diversion over a sideline in which one gets certain minor and seductive intoxicating seeming *anandas* rather than the real thing. You see there's one very important distinction between the true *ananda* and the false *anandas*, that the false *anandas* are intoxication; the true *anandas* are not. In the true *ananda* one can step immediately to the austere will without difficulty. One can step immediately over into a rational consciousness without difficulty, without a drag, without the feeling that there's a dryness necessarily because of it. But in the false *anandas* there is a seduction that holds one, as it were, enslaved to them, in bondage to them. He is not ruler and the Divine is not ruler in this kingdom, you see; but something less even than the ego and vastly less that the Divine is taking over and taking possession.

It doesn't matter so much what one eats, it does matter that he gets command over a power principle which is fundamental in effecting Realization and, most of all, in effecting transformation. Back of sex is a still more fundamental power—sex itself being a modification of this more fundamental power. It's the great dynamic principle—sex being the first modification, that modification is to be closed, that door closed, so that this power may be driven up into realms of higher potential. We could consider this from the angle of the *chakras*, but I'm not attempting to go into that technical form of yoga here. We can think of it from the angle of transforming *retas* into *ojas*—lust into strength, and to fire, into majesty. Now, what happens, you can have a building up of an auric emanation, a field of power around you that is impossible if there is wastage through lust. This, then, is as fundamental as any practice in the *sadhana*.

Now, I'm perfectly well aware that the physician is often right with the ordinary man in the world in saying that asceticism leads to adverse results with many, many individuals. I'm speaking only with respect to the *sadhaka* that has chosen to go the way which will lead to the complete transformation, the complete Realization, the biggest thing that can happen to him. I'm not laying down rules for the person that is living the life of the world or living an intermediate sort of half and half life which is not

necessarily bad, but it's not yet reached the point of determinate decision. When we come to this decision then vigilance becomes necessary—vigilance on all sides. It is somewhat dangerous—and you'll have to use your judgment here—to read literature, attend dramas, that are sexually suggestive until one has established himself upon a new base where he can look down upon all such things and be unmoved. And an awful lot of literature and drama is sexually suggestive, and your *sadhana* force will just simply bleed off and you become deflated in terms of the very power by which you rise. And there are many factors in the midst of life that one can hardly avoid meeting or dealing with that have this effect. Hence, building a consciousness that closes itself to such suggestions as far as is possible, building a certain iron into one's consciousness, is necessary. But that is not sufficient; that's merely closing a door. Along with closing a door there must be just as energetic and determined effort to arise to the higher possibilities. There must be the aspiration. There must be the surrender, the total self-giving. Otherwise one gets a banking up of force that can be explosive and destructive in its effect. So the two things go together. The total surrender to the Divine is not a matter of being merely relaxed, *tamasic*, and slump. It is rather moving into a field of a higher dynamism, higher potentials of force, once things get to moving, once you have been able to take effective steps.

A question very naturally arises as to whether there is some meaning that attaches to the surrender of the Divine. Is there a Divine to surrender to, or is there another Power to surrender to? I think there have been demonstrations here that should answer that question for most of you. At any rate, if you have not had demonstrative demonstration, there still is the force or voice of faith to guide one. Here's a little instruction that was written to one of the students by Sri Aurobindo upon this question of the demand for experience before seeking the Divine. It's under the general head of the true movement of devotion. He says to his correspondent:

Your whole-hearted acceptance of the Vaishnava idea and Bhakti becomes rather bewildering when it is coupled with an insistence that love cannot be given to the Divine until one has experience of the Divine. For what is more common in the Vaishnava attitude than the joy of Bhakti for its own sake?

If you're going to be *bhaktis*, here's something for you.... You don't have to all be *bhaktis*.

"Give me Bhakti," it cries, "whatever else you may keep from me. Even if it is long before I can meet you, even if you delay to manifest yourself, let my Bhakti, my seeking for you, my cry, my love, my adoration be always there." How constantly the Bhakta has sung, "All my life I have been seeking you and still you are not there, but still I seek and cannot cease to seek and love and adore."

Then Aurobindo goes on to say:

If it were really impossible to love God unless you first experience him, how could this be? In fact, your mind seems to be putting the cart before the horse. One seeks after God first with persistence or with passion, one finds him afterwards, some sooner than others, but most after a long

seeking. One does not find him first, then seek after him. Even a glimpse often comes only after long or fervent seeking.

You've had my . . .

One has the love of God or at any rate some heart's desire for him and afterwards one becomes aware of God's love, its reply to the heart's desire, its response of the supreme joy and Ananda. One does not say to God, "Show your love from the first, shower on me the experience of yourself, satisfy my demand, then I will see whether I can love you so long as you deserve it." It is surely the seeker who must seek and love first, follow the quest, become impassioned for the Sought—then only does the veil move aside and the Light appear and the Face manifest that alone can satisfy the soul after its long sojourn in the desert.

Then again you may say, "Yes, but whether I love or not, I want, I have always wanted and now I want more and more, but I get nothing." Yes, but wanting is not all. As you now begin to see, there are conditions that have to be met—like the purification of the heart. Your thesis was, "Once I want God, God must manifest to me, come to me, at least give glimpses of himself to me, the real, solid, concrete experience, not mere vague things which I can't understand or value. God's Grace must answer my call for it, whether I yet deserve it or not—or else there is no Grace." God's Grace may indeed do that in certain cases, but where does the "must" come in? If God must do it, it is no longer God's Grace, but God's duty or an obligation or a contract or a treaty. The Divine looks into the heart and removes the veil at the moment which he knows to be the right moment to do it. You have laid stress on the Bhakti theory that one has only to call his name and he must reply, he must at once be there. Perhaps, but for whom is this true? For a certain kind of Bhakta surely who feels the power of the Name, who has the passion of the Name and puts it into his cry. If one is like that, then there may be the immediate reply—if not, one has to become like that, then there will be the reply. But some go on using the Name for years, before there is an answer. Ramakrishna himself got it after a few months, but what months! and what a condition he had to pass through before he got it! Still he succeeded quickly because he had a pure heart already—and that divine passion in it.

It is not surely the Bhakta but the man of knowledge who demands experience first. He can say, "How can I know without experience?" but he too goes on seeking like Tota Puri even for thirty years, striving for the decisive realization. It is really the man of intellect, the rationalist who says, "Let God, if he exists, prove himself to me first, then I will believe, then I will make some serious and prolonged effort to explore him and see what he is like."

All this does not mean that experience is irrelevant to sadhana—I certainly cannot have said such a stupid thing. What I have said is that the love and seeking of the Divine can be and ordinarily is there before the experience

comes—it is an instinct, an inherent longing in the soul and it comes up as soon as certain coverings of the soul disappear or begin to disappear. The next thing I have said is that it is better to get the nature ready first (the purified heart and all that) before the “experiences” begin rather than the other way round and I base that on the many cases there have been of the danger of experiences before the heart and vital are ready for the true experience. Of course, in many cases there is a true experience first, a touch of the Grace, but it is not something that lasts and is always there but rather something that touches and withdraws and waits for the nature to get ready. But this is not in every case, not even in the majority of cases, I believe. One has to begin with the soul’s inherent longing then the struggle with the nature to get the temple ready, then the unveiling of the Image, the permanent Presence in the sanctuary.¹

That’s what *bhakta* means, a devotion to the Divine, or shall we say this higher Power, the Eternal, which is unconditional, unconditional self-giving, that makes no demand, that builds a complete or as nearly a complete vacuum in the nature as possible which then is filled by the higher Power.

Now, it’s not a terrible thing or a terrible experience. It only seems so to the ego. And it is possible that one may go even a sunlit way in which there is very little of the experience of the desert. If the nature puts up little or no fight, is seeking before there has been a pain that has driven him to seek, goes forth in the search with an essential joy, the way may be bright and lighted all along, but that is not the rule. We do pass most commonly through periods that are like unto the desert when the old drives, the old motives in life is becoming weak, passing away, and the new, new Power has not yet taken hold. When on one hand . . .²

¹ Aurobindo Ghose, *Letters on Yoga*, vol. 23 of *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centennial Library* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, 1970), 787-789.

² This audio recording is apparently incomplete.