

The Siddhis

Some men sneer at the Siddhis because they do not believe in them, others because they think it is noble and spiritual to despise them. Both attitudes proceed from ignorance. It is true that to some natures the rule of *omne ignotum pro magnifico* holds and everything that is beyond their knowledge is readily accepted as true marvel and miracle, and of such a temper are the credulous made, it is also true that to others it is *omne ignotum pro falso* and they cannot forbear ridiculing as fraud or pitiable superstition everything that is outside the reach of their philosophy. This is the temper of the incredulous. But the true temper is to be neither credulous nor incredulous, but calmly and patiently to inquire. Let the inquiry be scrupulous, but also scrupulously fair on both sides. Some think it shows superior rationality, even when they inquire, to be severe, and by that they mean to seize every opportunity of disproving the phenomenon offered to their attention. Such an attitude is good rather for limiting knowledge than increasing it. If it saves us from some errors of assertion, it betrays us into many errors of negation and postpones developments of the utmost importance to our human advance.

I do not wish to argue the question of the existence or nonexistence of Yogic siddhis; for it is not with me a question of debate, or of belief and disbelief, since I know by daily experience that they exist. I am concerned rather with their exact nature and utility. And here one is met by the now fashionable habit, among people presuming to be Vedantic and spiritual, of a denunciation and holy horror of the Yogic siddhis. They are, it seems, Tantric, dangerous, immoral, delusive as conjuring tricks, a stumbling block in the path of the soul's liberation. Swami Vivekananda did much to encourage this attitude by his eagerness to avoid all mention of them at the outset of his mission in order not to

startle the incredulity of the Europeans. "These things are true" he said, "but let them lie hidden." And now many who have not the motives of Vivekananda, think that they can ape his spiritual greatness by imitating his limitations.

There was no such weakness in the robust temperament of our forefathers. Our great Rishis of old did not cry out upon Siddhis, but recognised them as a part, though not the most important part of Yogic accomplishment, and used them with an abundant and unhesitating vigour. They are recognised in our sacred books, formally included in Yoga by so devotional a Purana as the Bhagawat, noted and some of their processes carefully tabled by Patanjali. Even in the midnight of the Kali great Siddhas and saints have used them more sparingly, but with power and effectiveness. It would be difficult for many of them to do otherwise than use the siddhis since by the very fact of their spiritual elevation, these powers have become not exceptional movements, but the ordinary processes of their thought and action. It is by the use of the siddhis that the Siddhas sitting on the mountains help the world out of the heart of their solitude and silence. Jesus Christ made the use of the siddhis a prominent feature of his pure, noble and spiritual life, nor did he hesitate to communicate them to his disciples — the laying of hands, the healing of the sick, the ashirvada, the abhishap, the speaking with many tongues were all given to them. The day of Pentecost is still kept holy by the Christian Church. Joan of Arc used her siddhis to liberate France. Socrates had his siddhis, some of them of a very material nature. Men of great genius are usually born with some of them and use them unconsciously. Even in natures far below the power and clarity of genius we see their occasional or irregular operation. The West, always avid of knowledge, is struggling, sadly hampered by misuse and imposture, to develop them and gropes roughly for the truth about them in the phenomena of hypnotism, clairvoyance, telepathy, vouched for by men and women of great intellectuality and sincerity. Returning Eastwards, where only their right practice has been understood, the lives of our saints northern and southern are full of the record of Siddhis. Sri Ramakrishna, whose authority is quoted against

them, not only made inward use of them but manifested them with no inconsiderable frequency in His lila. I see nothing in this long record immoral, dangerous or frivolous. But because Europe looks with scorn and incredulity on these “miracles” and this “magic”, we too must needs be ashamed of them, hustle them into the background and plead that only a few charlatans and followers of false paths profess their use. But as for us, we are men of intellect and spirituality, ascetics, devotees, self-deniers, Vedantins; for these things we are too high and we leave them to Theosophists, immoral Tantrics and deluded pseudo-Yogins.

Let us have done with cant and pretension in all matters. There are no such things as miracles in this world of divine processes, for either there is no such thing as a miracle or, if we consider more closely, everything in this world is a miracle. A miracle is, literally, a marvel, a thing to be wondered at — so long as the process is [not] known. Wireless telegraphy is a great marvel, the speechless passage of a thought from brain to brain is a yet greater, yet it happens daily even in the most commonplace minds and existences. But when the process is known, nothing is left to be wondered at except the admirable greatness of wisdom, width & variety of conception & subtlety & minuteness in execution with which this universe is managed. And even that wonder ceases when we know God and realise that the most wonderful movements of the cosmos are but trifles and “conjuring-tricks” compared with His infinite Reality. And as it is with this siddhi of science which we call wireless telegraphy and with this other siddhi of nature which is exemplified in the momentary or rapid spread of a single thought or emotion in a mob, a nation, an army, so it is with the Yogic siddhis. Explain & master their processes, put them in their proper relation to the rest of the economy of the universe and we shall find that they are neither miraculous nor marvellous nor supernatural. They are supernormal only in the way in which aviation is supernormal or motoring or the Chinese alphabet. Nor is there anything magical in them except in so far as magic, the science of the Persian Magi, means originally & properly the operations of superior power or superior knowledge. And in that sense the occultism of the

present day is magic precisely in the same sense as the scientific experiments of Roger Bacon or Paracelsus. There is a good deal of fraud and error and self-deception mixed up with it, but so there was with the earliest efforts of the European scientists. The defects of Western practitioners or Eastern quacks do not get rid of our true & ancient Yoga.