

Chapter Two

Bhakti, Devotion, Worship

Turning the Emotions towards the Divine

It is no part of this Yoga to dry up the heart; but the emotions must be turned towards the Divine. There may be short periods in which the heart is quiescent, turned away from the ordinary feelings and waiting for the inflow from above; but such states are not states of dryness but of silence and peace. The heart in this Yoga should in fact be the main centre of concentration until the consciousness rises above.

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Emotion is a good element in Yoga; but emotional *desire* becomes easily a cause of perturbation and an obstacle.

Turn your emotions towards the Divine, aspire for their purification; they will then become a help on the way and no longer a cause of suffering.

Not to kill emotion, but to turn it towards the Divine is the right way of the Yoga.

But it must become pure, founded upon spiritual peace and joy, capable of being transmuted into Ananda. Equality and calm in the mind and vital parts, an intense psychic emotion in the heart can perfectly go together.

Awake by your aspiration the psychic fire in the heart that burns steadily towards the Divine—that is the one way to liberate and fulfil the emotional nature.

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Emotion is necessary in the Yoga and it is only the excessive emotional sensitiveness which makes one enter into despondency over small things that has to be overcome. The very basis of this Yoga is bhakti and if one kills one's emotional being there can be no bhakti. So there can be no possibility of emotion

being excluded from the Yoga.

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It is only the ordinary vital emotions, which waste the energy and disturb the concentration and peace, that have to be discouraged. Emotion itself is not a bad thing; it is a necessary part of the nature, and psychic emotion is one of the most powerful helps to the sadhana. Psychic emotion, bringing tears of love for the Divine or tears of ananda, ought not to be suppressed: it is only a vital mixture that brings disturbance in the sadhana.

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It is quite true that by going above one can get out of all problems, for they no longer exist, but the problems are there below and it is difficult to be always above with so much unsolved and calling for solution. But just as one can go high above, so one can go deep within and it is this going deep within that is needed. What happened was at the surface of the emotional being and if one simply stays there the difficulties of the emotional can come, but what has to be done is not to stay on the surface but go deep within. For the psychic is there behind the emotional surface, deep behind the heart centre. Once one reaches it, these things can no longer touch; what will be there is the inner peace and happiness, the untroubled aspiration, the presence or nearness of the Mother.

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To indulge in the emotions, love, grief, sorrow, despair, emotional joy etc. for their own sake with a sort of mental-vital over-emphasis on them is what is called sentimentalism. There should be even in deep feeling a calm, a control, a purifying restraint and measure. One should not be at the mercy of one's feelings and sentiments, but master of oneself always.

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When the consciousness indulges in these things [*joy and sorrow*] and wallows in the excitement of emotional joy or

suffering, that is called sentimentalism. There is another kind in which the mind enjoys its perceptions of emotion, love and suffering etc. and plays with them, but that is a less violent and more superficial sentimentalism.

Bhakti or Devotion

Bhakti is not an experience, it is a state of the heart and soul. It is a state which comes when the psychic being is awake and prominent.

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The very object of Yoga is a change of consciousness—it is by getting a new consciousness or by unveiling the hidden consciousness of the true being within and progressively manifesting and perfecting it that one gets first the contact and then the union with the Divine. Ananda and bhakti are part of that deeper consciousness, and it is only when one lives in it and grows in it that ananda and bhakti can be permanent. Till then, one can only get experiences of ananda and bhakti, but not the constant and permanent state. But the state of bhakti and constantly growing surrender does not come to all at an early stage of the sadhana; many, most indeed, have a long journey of purification and tapasya to go through before it opens, and experiences of this kind, at first rare and interspaced, afterwards frequent, are the landmarks of their progress. It depends on certain conditions, which have nothing to do with superior or inferior Yoga capacity, but rather with a predisposition in the heart to open, as you say, to the Sun of the divine Influence.

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You are no doubt right about asking for the bhakti, for I suppose it is the master-claim of your nature: for that matter, it is the strongest motive force that sadhana can have and the best means for all else that has to come. It is why I said that it is through the heart that spiritual experience must come to you. The loyalty and the rest that you have for me and the Mother

may not, as you say, be part of the bhakti itself, but they could not be there were not the bhakti deep inside. It is its coming out in full force into the surface consciousness that is to be brought about and it seems to me that it is inevitable that it should come as the outer coverings fall off. What is within must surely make its way to the surface.

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You believe in traditional ideas of Yoga — well, according to traditional ideas also, the one easiest method is that of bhakti, reliance, self-giving, *bhakti, nirbhara, samarpana*. What still stands in your way — for it was and is growing towards that in you, is an old confusion in mind and vital. The heart says, “I want bhakti”, the mind says, “No, no, let us reason”, the vital says, “Nonsense, I can’t surrender.” What you need is to quiet down that confusion created by the mind’s past sanskaras and either fix on the one thing or harmonise. Bhakti as the basic force, knowledge, strength and joy in the Divine as the result — that is the harmony proposed in this Yoga. But in either way, if either is done, then peace becomes easily possible.

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What I meant by the change was the great improvement in your mental and vital attitude and reactions to outward things and to life which was very evident in your letters and account of happenings and gave them quite a new atmosphere warm and clear and psychic. Naturally the change is not yet absolute and integral, but it does seem to be fundamental. Moreover, it is certainly due to a growing bhakti within, especially an acceptance of bhakti as your path and of the implications of that acceptance. The mind has taken a new poise less intellectual and more psychic. What prevents you from seeing the growth of bhakti (sometimes you have seen it and written about it) is a continuance of the physical mind which sets going with a constant repetitionary whirl of its fixed ideas whenever there is any touch of depression. One of these ideas is that you don’t progress, will not progress and can never progress, the old thing

that used to say, “Yoga is not for the likes of me” etc. The activity of the physical mind (next to the wrong activity of the vital) is what most keeps one’s consciousness on the surface and prevents it from being conscious within and of what goes on within; it can see something of what happens on the surface of the nature, the results of the inner movement but not the cause of the happenings, which is the inner movement itself. That is one reason why I like to see the physical mind occupied in poetry and music etc. and other salubrious activities which help the inner growth and in which the inner bhakti can express itself, for that keeps the physical mind busy, unoccupied with the mechanical rotatory movement and allows and helps the inner growth. The rotatory movement is less than it was before and I expect it one of these days to get tired of itself and give up altogether.

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What you felt about replacement is quite true. The transformation proceeds to a large extent by a taking away or throwing out of the old superficial self and its movements and replacing them by a new deeper self and its true action.

It does not matter if the higher feelings, devotion etc. seem to you sometimes like an influence or colouring. It looks like that when you feel yourself in the external physical or outer vital or outer mind. These feelings really are those of your inmost self, your soul, the psychic in you and when you are in the psychic consciousness, they become normal and natural. But when your consciousness shifts and becomes more external, then these workings of the soul or of the divine consciousness are felt as themselves external, as merely an influence. All the same, you have to open yourself to them constantly and they will then more and more either soak in steadily or come in successive waves or floods and go on till they have filled the mind, the vital, the body. You will then feel them always as not only normal but as part of your very self and the true substance of your nature.

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The flow of devotion and love is a thing which the more it repeats

or awakens is bound to overflow to all the parts of being and have its effect on them.

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If it is the way of *ahaitukī bhakti* that you want to follow, that can be no obstacle; for there can be none better. For in that way everything can be made a means — poetry and music for instance become not merely poetry and music and not merely even an expression of bhakti, but themselves a means of bringing the experience of love and bhakti. Meditation itself becomes not an effort of mental concentration, but a flow of love and adoration and worship. If simply and sincerely followed, the way of *ahaitukī bhakti* can lead as far as any other.

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There can be no such thing as a mechanical and artificial devotion — there is either devotion or there is not. Devotion may be intense or not intense, complete or incomplete, sometimes manifest and sometimes veiled, but mechanical or artificial devotion is a contradiction in terms.

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These [*arguments against external bhakti*] are the exaggerations made by the mind taking one side of Truth and ignoring the other sides.¹ The inner bhakti is the main thing and without it the external becomes a form and mere ritual, but the external has its place and use when it is straightforward and sincere.

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Bhakti should be for the Divine only — the sadhaks are sadhaks, trying to reach the Divine, but still full of faults and struggles.

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A “bhakti” which claims everything from the Divine and does not give itself is not real bhakti.

¹ *The correspondent had been asked by a fellow-sadhak, “Why do you want to meditate on a photograph of Sri Aurobindo? If you can meditate within, this external form of bhakti is not necessary.” — Ed.*

Bhakti and Love

The nature of bhakti is adoration, worship, self-offering to what is greater than oneself — the nature of love is a feeling or seeking for closeness and union. Self-giving is the character of both; both are necessary in the Yoga and each gets its full force when supported by the other.

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Love is not a name of the Divine, it is a power of his consciousness and being. Bhakti and love are not quite the same thing, but love is one of the elements of bhakti. There are different kinds of bhakti and that which is of the nature of love is the strongest and is considered the highest, most intense and ecstatic of all. Also in love itself that form of it which is made of self-giving; surrender, absolute adoration, urge towards a selfless union is the true kind of bhakti that is love. “Conquering love” or “Love the victor”² means love prevailing over all that stands in the way of its reign, over ignorance, falsehood, selfishness, ego, passion and lust, outward or self-regarding desires and all else till it reigns alone and victorious, bringing down all the other gifts of the Divine Consciousness. It is by force of love and selflessness and self-giving that the sadhak can help Love to conquer.

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I suppose it [*premabhakti*] is bhakti with love as its basis; there can be bhakti of worship, submission, reverence, obedience etc. but without love.

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Selflessness, self-giving, entire faith and confidence, absence of demand and desire, surrender to the Divine Will, love concentrated on the Divine — are some of the main signs [*of true love and bhakti*].

² These are probably the names of two roses named by the Mother according to their significance. — Ed.

Emotional Bhakti

It is a misunderstanding to suppose that I am against Bhakti or against emotional Bhakti — which comes to the same thing, since without emotion there can be no Bhakti. It is rather the fact that in my writings on Yoga I have given Bhakti the highest place. All that I have said at any time which could account for this misunderstanding was against an *unpurified* emotionalism which, according to my experience, leads to want of balance, agitated and disharmonious expression or even contrary reactions and, at its extreme, nervous disorder. But the insistence on purification does not mean that I condemn true feeling and emotion any more than the insistence on a purified mind or will means that I condemn thought and will. On the contrary, the deeper the emotion, the more intense the Bhakti, the greater is the force for realisation and transformation. It is oftenest through intensity of emotion that the psychic being awakes and there is an opening of the inner doors to the Divine.

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If one does not encourage the devotion of the emotional being merely because the lower vital is not yet under control and acts differently, then how is the devotion to grow and how is the lower vital to change? Until the final clarification and harmonising of the nature there are always contradictions in the being, but that is not a reason for in any way suppressing the play of the better movements — on the contrary it is these that should be cultivated and made to increase.

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It [*emotion*] has its place, only it must not be always thrown outward but pressed inward so as to open fully the psychic doors.

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The emotional [*devotion*] is more outward than the psychic [*devotion*] — it tends towards outward expression. The psychic is

inward and gives the direction to the whole inner and outer life. The emotional can be intense, but is neither so sure in its basis nor powerful enough to change the whole direction of the life.

Vital Bhakti

Vital bhakti is usually full of desires and demands, — it expects a return for what it gives; it loves the Divine more for its own sake than for the sake of the Divine. If it does not get what it wants, it is capable of revolting or turning elsewhere. It is often pursued by jealousy, misunderstanding, unfaithfulness, anger etc., — the usual imperfections of human love, and can turn these against its object of bhakti. On the other hand, if there is vital bhakti governed by the psychic, these defects disappear and the vital gives an ardour and enthusiasm to the love and bhakti which gives it a greater push for effectuation in action and life. The vital should always be the instrument of the soul for self-expression in life and not act on its own account (ego, desire) or on its own separate impulse.

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The vital bhakti is egoistic, usually full of claims and demands on the Divine and revolting when they are not satisfied. The mental is simply a worship in the thought and idea without love in the heart.

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It [*an inner state of dryness*] is because it is the analysing mind that is active — that always brings a certain dryness; the higher mind or the intuition bring a much more spontaneous and complete knowledge — the beginning of the real Jnana without this effect. The bhakti which you feel is psychic, but with a strong vital tinge; and it is the mind and the vital between them that bring in the opposition between the bhakti and the Jnana. The vital concerned only with emotion finds the mental knowledge dry and without rasa, the mind finds the bhakti to be a blind emotion fully interesting only when its character has been analysed and understood. There is no such opposition when the psychic

and the higher plane knowledge act together predominantly — the psychic welcomes knowledge that supports its emotion, the higher thought consciousness rejoices in the bhakti.

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It is a mistake to think that a constant absence of *vyākulatā* is a sign that the aspiration or will for the Divine is not true. It is only in certain exclusive forms of Bhakti Yoga that a constant *vyākulatā* or weeping or *hāhākāra* (the latter is more often vital than psychic) is the rule. Here though the psychic yearning may come sometimes or often in intense waves, what comes as the basis is a quietude of the being and in that quietude a more and more steady perception of the truth and seeking for the Divine and need of the Divine so that all is turned towards that more and more. It is into this that the experience and growing realisation come. Because the opening is growing in you, you are getting this *ābhāsa* of the presence (beyond form) of the Mother. It is as the inner realisation grows that the presence in the physical form takes its full value.

Viraha or Pangs of Separation

Viraha is a transitional experience on the plane of the vital seeking for the Spirit — there is no reason why it should not be possible at a quite early stage. It is the realisations without any uneasiness, realisations in pure Ananda that belong to the more developed sadhana.

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The pure feeling of *viraha* is psychic — but if rajasic or tamasic movements come in (such as depression, complaint, revolt etc.) then it becomes tamasic or rajasic.

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Pangs of separation belong to the vital, not to the psychic; the psychic having no pangs need not express them. The psychic is always turned towards the Divine in faith, joy and confidence

— whatever aspiration it has is full of trust and hope.

Enmity to the Divine

I have not had time yet to write about the enmity theory. I will do so more fully in two or three days. But I may say at once that the idea does not seem to me at all true that by enmity to the Divine one can reach the Divine and that too more quickly than by bhakti. The idea is contrary to the spiritual truth of things, to reason, to nature and to experience.

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As regards your defence of X, they sound like X's own ideas and very queer ideas they are. If they are right, we should have to come to the following conclusions —

1. Sattwa is not the best passage towards realisation, Rajas is the best way to become spiritual. It is the rajasic man with his fierce ego and violent passions who is the true sadhak of the Divine.

2. The Asura is the best bhakta. The Gita is quite wrong in holding up the Deva nature as the condition of realisation and the Asura nature as contrary to it. It is the other way round.

3. Ravana, Hiranyakashipu, Shishupala were the greatest devotees of the Divine because they were capable of hostility to the Divine and so were liberated in a few lives — compared with them the great Rishis and Bhaktas were very poor spiritual vessels. I am aware of the paradox about Ravana in the Purana, but let me point out that these Asuras and Rakshasas did not pretend to be disciples or worshippers of Rama or Krishna or Vishnu or use their position as disciples to get moksha by revolt — they got it by being enemies and getting killed and absorbed into the Godhead.

4. Obedience to the Guru, worship of the Divine are all tommy rot and fit only for sheep, not men. To turn round furiously on the Guru or the Divine, abuse him, express contempt, challenge his sincerity, declare his actions to be wrong, foolish or a trick — to assert oneself as right at every point and his

judgment as mistaken, prejudiced, absurd, false, a support of devils etc. etc. is the best way of devotion and the true relation between Guru and Shishya. Disobedience is the highest respect to the Guru, anger and revolt are the noblest worship one can give to the Divine.

5. One who takes the blows of Mahakali with joy as a means of discovering his faults and increasing in light and strength and purity is a sheep and unworthy of discipleship — one who responds to the quietest pressure to change by revolt and persisting in his errors is a strong man and a mighty adhar and a noble disciple on the way to perfection.

I could go on multiplying the consequences, but I have no time. Do you really believe all these things? They are the natural consequences of X's theory or of this theory of revolt as the way to perfection. If you accept the premiss, you have to accept the logical consequences. That is what X did — only he called his errors Truth and the way prescribed by me was falsehood explicable only by the fact that I was a "Master who had forgotten his higher self". And the consequences led to his departure, not willed by us, but by his own choice — and under such circumstances that he has made it a practical impossibility for me to let him come back unless he undergoes a change which the experience of the past does not warrant me in thinking possible.

Contact with the Divine

Aspiration and devotion are the natural and easy means for getting the contact. The other way by effort is laborious, slow and not sure. The mind must open, but it will open best by the power of devotion and aspiration.

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The more the calm, peace, joy and happiness descend and take possession, the stronger the foundation. It is the sign of the contact.

The other thing needed is the descent of the consciousness which you felt in the heart and breast. That will come of itself,

if this devotion and sole dependence on the Light continues.

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The psychic contact does not bring mental knowledge, but it brings true perception and true feeling and it can bring down also, if you aspire from the psychic centre, a knowledge higher and truer than intellectual knowledge.

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Quietude and surrender are the first things to be established. In that must come the full contact. By that contact, if well established, will come a steady progressive sadhana, not the old confused sadhana.

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When you fall from the contact, the first and only thing you have to do is to reestablish it—to remain quiet and open yourself. Everything else you must detach yourself from and reject. It is because you listen to ideas and suggestions of all kinds and still attach value to the old kind of “experiences”, that you cannot reestablish the contact.

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As for not having it [*contact*] always, it is because there are parts of the being that are still unconscious or perhaps states of unconsciousness come. For instance, people write letters to each other, but they are quite unconscious that they are exchanging forces in doing so. You have become conscious of it, because of the development of your inner consciousness by Yoga — and yet there are likely to be times when you still write from the external awareness only, and then you will see the words only without being aware of what is behind. So owing to the development of the inner consciousness, you are able to understand what contacts are and get the true contact, but at times the external consciousness may be stronger than the inner one, then you are no longer (for the time being) able to get the contact.

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The photograph is a vehicle only³ — but if you have the right consciousness, then you can bring something of the living being into it or become aware of the being for which it stands and can make it a means of contact. It is like the *prāṇapratīṣṭhā* in the image in the temple.

Contact and Union with the Divine

Seeing is of many kinds. There is a superficial seeing which only erects or receives momentarily or for some time an image of the Being seen; that brings no change, unless the inner bhakti makes it a means for change. There is also the reception of the *living* image of the Divine in one of his forms into oneself, — say, in the heart, — that can have an immediate effect or initiate a period of spiritual growth. There is also the seeing outside oneself in a more or less objective and subtle physical or physical way.

As for *milana*, the abiding union is within and that can be there at all times; the outer *milana* or contact is not usually abiding. There are some who often or almost invariably have the contact whenever they worship; the Deity may become living to them in the picture or other image they worship, may move and act through it; others may *feel* him always present, outwardly, subtle-physically, abiding with them where they live or in the very room; but sometimes this is only for a period. Or they may feel the Presence with them, see it frequently in a body (but not materially except sometimes), feel its touch or embrace, converse with it constantly, — that is also one kind of *milana*. The greatest *milana* is one in which one is constantly aware of the Deity constantly abiding in oneself, in everything in the world, holding all the world in him, identical with existence and yet supremely beyond the world — but in the world too one sees, hears, feels nothing but him, so that the very senses bear witness to him alone — and this does *not* exclude such specific personal manifestations as those vouchsafed to Krishnaprem

³ While looking at a photograph of Sri Aurobindo, the correspondent felt that he was looking at a living being with eyes “as living as real eyes”. — Ed.

and his guru. The more ways there are of the union, the better.

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Adesh and darshan are elements of a stage of sadhana in which there is still much distance from the closer state of union. The mind and vital seek the contact through darshan and the guidance through Adesh. What we aim at in our Yoga is the constant union and presence and control of the Divine at every moment. But on the mental and vital level this usually remains imperfect and there is much chance of error. It is by the supramentalisation that the perfect Truth of this Divine Union in action can come.

Outer Worship

There is no restriction in this Yoga to inward worship and meditation only. As it is a Yoga for the whole being, not for the inner being only, no such restriction could be intended. Old forms of the different religions may fall away, but absence of all forms is not the rule of the sadhana.

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I was thinking [*in writing* “*Old forms . . . may fall away*”] not of Pranam etc. which have a living value, but of old forms which persist although they have no longer any value — e.g. Sraddha for the dead. Also here forms which have no relation to this Yoga — for instance Christians who cling to the Christian forms or Mahomedans to the Namaz or Hindus to the Sandhyavandana in the old way may soon find them either falling off or else an obstacle to the free development of their sadhana.

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What is meant by *bāhyapūjā*? If it is purely external, then of course it is the lowest form; but if done with the true consciousness inside, it can bring the greatest completeness of the adoration by allowing the body and the most external consciousness to share in the spirit and act of worship.

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What you say is no doubt true, but it is better not to take away the support that may still be there for the faith of those who need such supports. These visions and images and ceremonies are meant for that. It is a spiritual principle not to take away any faith or support of faith unless the persons who have it are able to replace it by something larger and more complete.

If the *prāṇapratīṣṭhā* brings down a powerful Presence [*into an image*], that may remain there long after the one who has brought it has left his body. Usually it is maintained by the bhakti of the officiant and the sincerity of belief and worship of those who come to the temple for adoration. If these fail there is likely to be a withdrawal of the Presence.

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The “scientific” explanation [*for the disappearance of food offered to a deity in a temple*] would be that somebody, a servant perhaps, disregarding prohibitions got secretly in and polished off the food of offering when there was nobody to see! That however assumes that occult manifestations are impossible, which is not the case; it is besides only a probable inference or theory. Occultists, or some of them, hold that the food offered to unseen beings is sometimes (but not by any means always) taken in its subtle elements, leaving the outward body of the food as it was. The actual taking of the food, physically, is rare, but instances are believed to have happened where the bhakti was very strong.

Prayer

Prayer and aspiration are a part of the spiritual life and do not conflict with surrender, provided one is not disturbed in either way by the fulfilment or unfulfilment of the prayer and keeps one’s faith and quietude all the same. In the ordinary life prayer is one of the chief elements of human relation with the Divine and is often but not always answered; when it is not answered the religious man keeps his faith in the Divine and either understands that to answer was not the Divine Will or else he prays

more fervently till his prayer is heard — that depends on the man and the circumstances. A sadhak can intercede internally for others in their affairs, provided he remains unattached and equal-minded, but he is not bound to intervene.

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Of course all prayer is not heard — the world would be a still more disastrous affair than it is, if everybody's prayers were heard, however sincere. Even the Godward prayer is not always heard — at once, even as faith is not always justified at once. Both prayer and faith are powers towards realisation which have been given to man to aid him in his struggle — without them, without aspiration and will and faith (for aspiration is a prayer) it would be difficult for him to get anywhere. But all these things are merely means for setting the Divine Force in action — and it sometimes takes long, very long even, before the forces come into action or at least before they are seen to be in action or bear their result. The ecstasist is not altogether wrong even when he overstates his case. Even the overstatements sometimes help to convince the Cosmic Power, so that it says “Oh well, if it is like that all right —”.

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As for prayer, no hard and fast rule can be laid down. Some prayers are answered, all are not. You may ask, why should not then all prayers be answered? But why should they be? It is not a machinery: put a prayer in the slot and get your asking. Besides, considering all the contradictory things mankind is praying for at the same moment, God would be in a rather awkward hole if he had to grant all of them; it wouldn't do.

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If one lives in the world one can offer such prayers [*for help in resolving worldly problems*]; but one must not expect that the Divine shall fulfil all those prayers or think that he is bound to do so. When one is a sadhak the prayer should be for the inner things belonging to the sadhana and for outer things only so far

as they are necessary for that and for the divine work.

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What you say about prayer is correct. That [*impersonal prayer*] is the highest kind of prayer, but the other kind also (i.e. the more personal) is permissible and even desirable. All prayer rightly offered brings us closer to the Divine and establishes a right relation with Him.

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As for the prayers, the fact of praying and the attitude it brings, especially unselfish prayer for others, itself opens you to the higher Power, even if there is no corresponding result in the person prayed for. Nothing can be positively said about that, for the result must necessarily depend on the persons, whether they are open or receptive or something in them can respond to any Force the prayer brings down.

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Prayers should be full of confidence and without sorrow or lamenting.