

14 April 1929

What are the dangers of Yoga? Is it especially dangerous to the people of the West? Someone has said that Yoga may be suitable for the East, but it has the effect of unbalancing the Western mind.

Yoga is not more dangerous to the people of the West than to those of the East. Everything depends upon the spirit with which you approach it. Yoga does become dangerous if you want it for your own sake, to serve a personal end. It is not dangerous, on the contrary, it is safety and security itself, if you go to it with a sense of its sacredness, always remembering that the aim is to find the Divine.

Dangers and difficulties come in when people take up Yoga not for the sake of the Divine, but because they want to acquire power and under the guise of Yoga seek to satisfy some ambition. If you cannot get rid of ambition, do not touch the thing. It is fire that burns.

There are two paths of Yoga, one of *tapasyā* (discipline), and the other of surrender. The path of *tapasyā* is arduous. Here you rely solely upon yourself, you proceed by your own strength. You ascend and achieve according to the measure of your force. There is always the danger of falling down. And once you fall, you lie broken in the abyss and there is hardly a remedy. The other path, the path of surrender, is safe and sure. It is here, however, that the Western people find their difficulty. They have been taught to fear and avoid all that threatens their personal independence. They have imbibed with their mothers' milk the sense of individuality. And surrender means giving up all that. In other words, you may follow, as Ramakrishna says, either the path of the baby monkey or that of the baby cat. The baby monkey holds to its mother in order to be carried about and it

14 April 1929

must hold firm, otherwise if it loses its grip, it falls. On the other hand, the baby cat does not hold to its mother, but is held by the mother and has no fear nor responsibility; it has nothing to do but to let the mother hold it and cry *ma ma*.

If you take up this path of surrender fully and sincerely, there is no more danger or serious difficulty. The question is to be sincere. If you are not sincere, do not begin Yoga. If you were dealing in human affairs, then you could resort to deception; but in dealing with the Divine there is no possibility of deception anywhere. You can go on the Path safely when you are candid and open to the core and when your only end is to realise and attain the Divine and to be moved by the Divine.

There is another danger; it is in connection with the sex impulses. Yoga in its process of purification will lay bare and throw up all hidden impulses and desires in you. And you must learn not to hide things nor leave them aside, you have to face them and conquer and remould them. The first effect of Yoga, however, is to take away the mental control, and the hungers that lie dormant are suddenly set free, they rush up and invade the being. So long as this mental control has not been replaced by the Divine control, there is a period of transition when your sincerity and surrender will be put to the test. The strength of such impulses as those of sex lies usually in the fact that people take too much notice of them; they protest too vehemently and endeavour to control them by coercion, hold them within and sit upon them. But the more you think of a thing and say, "I don't want it, I don't want it", the more you are bound to it. What you should do is to keep the thing away from you, to dissociate from it, take as little notice of it as possible and, even if you happen to think of it, remain indifferent and unconcerned.

The impulses and desires that come up by the pressure of Yoga should be faced in a spirit of detachment and serenity, as something foreign to yourself or belonging to the outside world. They should be offered to the Divine, so that the Divine may take them up and transmute them.

Questions and Answers

If you have once opened yourself to the Divine, if the power of the Divine has once come down into you and yet you try to keep to the old forces, you prepare troubles and difficulties and dangers for yourself. You must be vigilant and see that you do not use the Divine as a cloak for the satisfaction of your desires. There are many self-appointed Masters, who do nothing but that. And then when you are off the straight path and when you have a little knowledge and not much power, it happens that you are seized by beings or entities of a certain type, you become blind instruments in their hands and are devoured by them in the end. Wherever there is pretence, there is danger; you cannot deceive God. Do you come to God saying, "I want union with you" and in your heart meaning "I want powers and enjoyments"? Beware! You are heading straight towards the brink of the precipice. And yet it is so easy to avoid all catastrophe. Become like a child, give yourself up to the Mother, let her carry you, and there is no more danger for you.

This does not mean that you have not to face other kinds of difficulties or that you have not to fight and conquer any obstacles at all. Surrender does not ensure a smooth and unruffled and continuous progression. The reason is that your being is not yet one, nor your surrender absolute and complete. Only a part of you surrenders; and today it is one part and the next day it is another. The whole purpose of the Yoga is to gather all the divergent parts together and forge them into an undivided unity. Till then you cannot hope to be without difficulties — difficulties, for example, like doubt or depression or hesitation. The whole world is full of the poison. You take it in with every breath. If you exchange a few words with an undesirable man or even if such a man merely passes by you, you may catch the contagion from him. It is sufficient for you to come near a place where there is plague in order to be infected with its poison; you need not know at all that it is there. You can lose in a few minutes what it has taken you months to gain. So long as you belong to humanity and so long as you lead the ordinary life, it

14 April 1929

does not matter much if you mix with the people of the world; but if you want the divine life, you will have to be exceedingly careful about your company and your environment.

What is the way to establish unity and homogeneity in our being?

Keep the will firm. Treat the recalcitrant parts as disobedient children. Act upon them constantly and patiently. Convince them of their error.

In the depths of your consciousness is the psychic being, the temple of the Divine within you. This is the centre round which should come about the unification of all these divergent parts, all these contradictory movements of your being. Once you have got the consciousness of the psychic being and its aspiration, these doubts and difficulties can be destroyed. It takes more or less time, but you will surely succeed in the end. Once you have turned to the Divine, saying, "I want to be yours", and the Divine has said, "Yes", the whole world cannot keep you from it. When the central being has made its surrender, the chief difficulty has disappeared. The outer being is like a crust. In ordinary people the crust is so hard and thick that they are not conscious of the Divine within them. If once, even for a moment only, the inner being has said, "I am here and I am yours", then it is as though a bridge has been built and little by little the crust becomes thinner and thinner until the two parts are wholly joined and the inner and the outer become one.

Ambition has been the undoing of many Yogis. That canker can hide long. Many people start on the Path without any sense of it. But when they get powers, their ambition rises up, all the more violently because it had not been thrown out in the beginning.

A story is told of a Yogi who had attained wonderful powers. He was invited by his disciples to a great dinner. It was served on a big low table. The disciples asked their Master to show

Questions and Answers

his power in some way. He knew he should not, but the seed of ambition was there in him and he thought, "After all, it is a very innocent thing and it may prove to them that such things are possible and teach them the greatness of God." So he said, "Take away the table, but only the table, let the table-cloth remain as it is with all the dishes upon it." The disciples cried out, "Oh, that cannot be done, everything will fall down." But he insisted and they removed the table from under the cloth. Lo, the miracle! The cloth and all that was upon it remained there just as though the table was underneath. The disciples wondered. But all on a sudden the Master jumped up and rushed out screaming and crying, "Nevermore shall I have a disciple, nevermore! Woe is me! I have betrayed my God." His heart was on fire; he had used the divine powers for selfish ends.

It is always wrong to display powers. This does not mean that there is no use for them. But they have to be used in the same way as they came. They come by union with the Divine. They must be used by the will of the Divine and not for display. If you come across someone who is blind and you have the power to make him see — if it is the Divine Will that the man shall see, you have only to say, "Let him see" and he will see. But if you wish to make him see simply because you want to cure him, then you use the power to satisfy your personal ambition. Most often, in such cases, you not only lose your power but you create a great disturbance in the man. Yet in appearance the two ways are the same; but in one case you act because of the Divine Will and in the other for some personal motive.

How are we to know, you will ask, when it is the Divine Will that makes us act? The Divine Will is not difficult to recognise. It is unmistakable. You can know it without being very far on the path. Only you must listen to its voice, the small voice that is here in the heart. Once you are accustomed to listen, if you do anything that is contrary to the Divine Will, you feel an uneasiness. If you persist on the wrong track, you get very much disturbed. If, however, you give some material excuse as

14 April 1929

the cause of your uneasiness and proceed on your way, you gradually lose the faculty of perception and finally you may go on doing all kinds of wrong and feel no uneasiness. But if, when once you feel the least disturbance, you stop and ask of your inner self, "What is the cause of this?" then you do get the real answer and the whole thing becomes quite clear. Do not try to give a material excuse when you feel a little depression or a slight uneasiness. When you stop and look about for the reason, be absolutely straight and sincere. At first your mind will construct a very plausible and beautiful explanation. Do not accept it, but look beyond and ask, "What is it that is behind this movement? Why am I doing this?" Finally you will discover, hidden in a corner, the little ripple — a slight wrong turn or twist in your attitude that is causing the trouble or disturbance.

One of the commonest forms of ambition is the idea of service to humanity. All attachment to such service or work is a sign of personal ambition. The Guru who believes that he has a great truth to teach to humanity and who wants many disciples and who feels uncomfortable when the disciples go away or who seizes on anybody that comes and tries to make him a disciple, is evidently following nothing but his ambition. You must be able, if you are ready to follow the divine order, to take up whatever work you are given, even a stupendous work, and leave it the next day with the same quietness with which you took it up and not feel that the responsibility is yours. There should be no attachment — to any object or any mode of life. You must be absolutely free. If you want to have the true yogic attitude, you must be able to accept everything that comes from the Divine and let it go easily and without regret. The attitude of the ascetic who says, "I want nothing" and the attitude of the man of the world who says, "I want this thing" are the same. The one may be as much attached to his renunciation as the other to his possession.

You must accept all things — and only those things — that come from the Divine. Because things can come from concealed

Questions and Answers

desires. The desires work in the subconscious and bring things to you which, although you may not recognise them as such, nevertheless do not come from the Divine but from disguised desires.

You can easily know when a thing comes from the Divine. You feel free, you are at ease, you are in peace. But when something presents itself to you and you jump at it and cry out, "Oh, at last I have it", then you can know for certain that it does not come from the Divine. Equanimity is the essential condition of union and communion with the Divine.

Does not the Divine sometimes give what you desire?

Certainly. There was a young man who wanted to do Yoga. But he had a mean and cruel father who troubled him very much and tried to prevent him from doing it. He wished ardently to be free from the father's interference. Soon the father fell ill and very seriously; he was about to die. Whereupon the other side of the boy's nature rose up and he loudly bewailed the misfortune and cried, "Oh, my poor father is so ill! It is such a sad thing. Alas, what shall I do?" The father got well. The young man rejoiced and turned once more to Yoga. And the father also began again to oppose and torment him with redoubled violence. The son tore his hair in despair and cried, "Now my father stands in my way more than ever." The whole thing is to know exactly what one wants.

The Divine always brings with it perfect calm and peace. A certain class of Bhaktas, it is true, present generally a very different picture; they jump about and cry and laugh and sing, in a fit of devotion, as they say. But in reality such people do not live in the Divine. They live largely in the vital world.

You say that even Ramakrishna had periods of emotional excitement and would go about with hands uplifted, singing and dancing? The truth of the matter is this. The movement in the inner being may be perfect; but it puts you in a certain condition

14 April 1929

of receptivity to forces that fill you with intense emotional excitement, if your external being is weak or untransformed. Where the external being offers resistance to the inner being or cannot hold the entirety of the Ananda, there is this confusion and anarchy in expression.

You must have a strong body and strong nerves. You must have a strong basis of equanimity in your external being. If you have this basis, you can contain a world of emotion and yet not have to scream it out. This does not mean that you cannot express your emotion, but you can express it in a beautiful harmonious way. To weep or scream or dance about is always a proof of weakness, either of the vital or the mental or the physical nature; for on all these levels the activity is for self-satisfaction. One who dances and jumps and screams has the feeling that he is somehow very unusual in his excitement; and his vital nature takes great pleasure in that.

If you have to bear the pressure of the Divine Descent, you must be very strong and powerful, otherwise you would be shaken to pieces. Some persons ask, "Why has not the Divine come yet?" Because you are not ready. If a little drop makes you sing and dance and scream, what would happen if the whole thing came down?

Therefore do we say to people who have not a strong and firm and capacious basis in the body and the vital and the mind, "Do not pull", meaning "Do not try to pull at the forces of the Divine, but wait in peace and calmness." For they would not be able to bear the descent. But to those who possess the necessary basis and foundation we say, on the contrary, "Aspire and draw." For they would be able to receive and yet not be upset by the forces descending from the Divine.

In the case of some persons who turn to the Divine it happens that every material prop or everything they are fond of is removed from their life. And if they love someone, he also is taken away.

Questions and Answers

It is a thing that does not happen to all. It happens to those that are called.

Whatever difference there is between the West and the East in relation to spiritual life lies not in the inner being or nature, which is an invariable and constant thing, but in the mental habits, in the modes of outer expression and presentation which are the result of education and environment and other external conditions. All people, whether occidental or oriental, are alike in their deepest feelings; they are different in their way of thinking. Sincerity, for example, is a quality which is the same everywhere. Those who are sincere, to whichever nation they belong, are all sincere in the same way. Only the forms given to this sincerity vary. The mind works in different ways in different peoples, but the heart is the same everywhere; the heart is a much truer reality, and the differences belong to the superficial parts. As soon as you go deep enough, you meet something that is one in all. All meet in the Divine. The sun is the symbol of the Divine in the physical nature. Clouds may modify its appearance, but when they are no longer there, you see it is the same sun always and everywhere.

If you cannot feel one with somebody, it means you have not gone deep enough in your feeling.