

Chapter One

The Divine Grace and Guidance

The Divine Grace

The Divine Will works in all things — it may work out anything whatever. The Divine Grace comes in to help and save.

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If you would know what is the Divine Grace, it is necessary first to realise that it is something which contradicts the law of the world, for it is outside its normal rule and not of its nature. There is here something which does not seem to govern at all the cosmic action, but only to intervene, and yet it is always there; an element without which this universe would be either a tremendous machine or a fortuitously and yet inexorably ordered chance. For to our observation all here is a process, a mechanism of Ignorance and Inconscience manifesting a precarious consciousness distressed by a nostalgia of Truth that exists somewhere and yet seems to be unseizable and unrealisable, — a mechanism of Law that controls a frightening whirl of Forces, a mechanism of implacable justice measuring things by a mysterious and to us unintelligible balance, a mechanism of evolution with matter and inconscience as its starting point, a precarious and groping life and consciousness as its highest realised term and as its final uncertain poise some possibility of the Divine. Our senses can discover no visible presence of the Divine, our intellect can do without any idea of its intervention — but it is another experience than that of the intellect and the senses which once it is there will no longer let us escape from the Presence or refuse to see the intervening Will or Grace.

This world is a world of Ignorance and by Ignorance a world of strife, seeking, error and suffering. We start by knowing nothing and have to learn everything; because our knowledge is a mixture of truth and falsehood and our will constantly

mistaken when not perverted, we stumble at every step and pay the price of experience in pain and grief and sorrow. It would seem as if nothing could save us but thought and knowledge translated into right will and action and it is that for which man by his intellect is seeking and yet by his intellect he has never found it and it looks as if by his intellect he would never find it. Then there is probably something else beyond the intellect which alone can give him the Light—something beyond his mind and greater than himself—a Grace that intervenes, the law of a supernormal Light and Will, a help, an opening from above.

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I should like to say something about the Divine Grace — for you seem to think it should be something like a Divine Reason acting upon lines not very different from those of human intelligence. But it is not that. Also it is not a universal Divine Compassion either, acting impartially on all who approach it and acceding to all prayers. It does not select the righteous and reject the sinner. The Divine Grace came to aid the persecutor (Saul of Tarsus), it came to St. Augustine the profligate, to Jagai and Madhai of infamous fame, to Bilwamangal and many others whose conversion might well scandalise the puritanism of the human moral intelligence; but it can come to the righteous also — curing them of their self-righteousness and leading to a purer consciousness beyond these things. It is a power that is superior to any rule, even to the Cosmic Law — for all spiritual seers have distinguished between the Law and Grace. Yet it is not indiscriminate — only it has a discrimination of its own which sees things and persons and the right times and seasons with another vision than that of the Mind or any other normal Power. A state of Grace is prepared in the individual often behind thick veils by means not calculable by the mind and when the state of Grace comes then the Grace itself acts. There are these three powers: (1) the Cosmic Law, of Karma or what else; (2) the Divine Compassion acting on as many as it can reach through the nets of the Law and giving them their chance; and (3) the Divine Grace which

acts more incalculably but also more irresistibly than the others. The only question is whether there is something behind all the anomalies of life which can respond to the call and open itself with whatever difficulty till it is ready for the illumination of the Divine Grace — and that something must be not a mental and vital movement but an inner somewhat which can well be seen by the inner eye. If it is there and when it becomes active in front, then the Compassion can act, though the full action of the Grace may still wait attending the decisive decision or change; for this may be postponed to a future hour, because some portion or element of the being may still come between, something that is not yet ready to receive.

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Each mind can have its own way of approaching the supreme Truth and there is an entrance for each as well as a thousand ways for the journey to it. It is not necessary to believe in the Grace or to recognise a Godhead different from one's highest Self — there are ways of Yoga that do not accept these things. Also for many no form of Yoga is necessary — they arrive at some realisation by a sort of pressure of the mind or the heart or the will breaking the screen between it and what is at once beyond it and its own source. What happens after the breaking of the screen depends on the play of the Truth on the consciousness and the turn of the nature. There is no reason therefore why X's realisation of his being should not come in its own way by growth from within, not by the Divine Grace if his mind objects to that description, but let us say by the spontaneous movement of the Self within him.

For, as to this "Grace", we describe it in that way because we feel in the infinite Spirit or Self of existence a Presence or a Being, a Consciousness that determines — that is what we speak of as the Divine, — not a separate Person, but the one Being of whom our individual self is a portion or a vessel. But it is not necessary for everybody to regard it in that way. Supposing it is the impersonal Self of all only, yet the Upanishad says of the Self and its realisation, "This understanding is not to be gained by

reasoning nor by tapasya nor by much learning, but whom this Self chooses, to him it reveals its own body.” Well, that is the same thing as what we call the Divine Grace, — it is an action from above or from within independent of mental causes which decides its own movement. We can call it the Divine Grace; we can call it the Self within choosing its own hour and way to manifest to the mental instrument on the surface; we can call it the flowering of the inner being or inner nature into self-realisation and self-knowledge. As something in us approaches it or as it presents itself to us, so the mind sees it. But in reality, it is the same thing and the same process of the being in Nature.

I could illustrate my meaning more concretely from my own first experience of the Self, long before I knew even what Yoga was or that there was such a thing, at a time when I had no religious feeling, no wish for spiritual knowledge, no aspiration beyond the mind, only a contented agnosticism and the impulse towards poetry and politics. But it would be too long a story, so I do not tell it here.

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It is not indispensable that the Grace should work in a way that the human mind can understand, it generally doesn't: it works in its own “mysterious” way. At first usually it works behind the veil, preparing things, not manifesting. Afterwards it may manifest, but the sadhak does not understand very well what is happening. Finally, when he is capable of it, he both feels and understands or at least begins to do so. Some feel and understand from the first or very early; but that is not the ordinary case.

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“The ordinary action of the Divine is a constant intervention within the actual law of things” — that may or may not be but is not usually called the Divine Grace. The Divine Grace is something not calculable, not bound by anything the intellect can fix as a condition — though ordinarily some call, aspiration, intensity of the psychic being can awaken it, yet it acts sometimes without any apparent cause even of that kind.

The Grace and Personal Effort

Without the Grace of the Divine nothing can be done, but for the full Grace to manifest the sadhak must make himself ready. If everything depends on the Divine intervention, then man is only a puppet and there is no use of sadhana, and there are no conditions, no law of things — therefore no universe, but only the Divine rolling things about at his pleasure. No doubt in the last resort all can be said to be the Divine cosmic working, but it is through persons, through forces that it works — under the conditions of Nature. Special intervention there can be and is, but all cannot be special intervention.

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The Divine Grace and Power can do everything, but with the full assent of the sadhak. To learn to give that full assent is the whole meaning of the sadhana. It may take time either because of ideas in the mind, desires in the vital or inertia in the physical consciousness, but these things have to be and can be removed with the aid or by calling in the action of the Divine Force.

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There are three main possibilities for the sadhak — (1) To wait on the Grace and rely on the Divine. (2) To do everything himself like the full Advaitin and the Buddhist. (3) To take the middle path, go forward by aspiration and rejection etc. helped by the Force.

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Everything should be for the sake of the Divine, this [*aspiration for the Divine's Presence*] also. As for leaving the result to the Divine, it depends on what you mean by the phrase. If it implies dependence on the Divine Grace and equanimity and patience in the persistent aspiration, then it is all right. But it must not be extended to cover slackness and indifference in the aspiration and endeavour.

Strength and Grace

There is nothing unintelligible in what I say about strength and Grace. Strength has a value for spiritual realisation, but to say that it can be done by strength only and by no other means is a violent exaggeration. Grace is not an invention, it is a fact of spiritual experience. Many who would be considered as mere nothings by the wise and strong have attained by Grace; illiterate, without mental power or training, without “strength” of character or will, they have yet aspired and suddenly or rapidly grown into spiritual realisation, because they had faith or because they were sincere. I do not see why these facts which are facts of spiritual history and of quite ordinary spiritual experience should be discussed and denied and argued as if they were mere matters of speculation. Strength, if it is spiritual, is a power for spiritual realisation; a greater power is sincerity; the greatest power of all is Grace. I have said times without number that if a man is sincere, he will go through in spite of long delay and overwhelming difficulties. I have repeatedly spoken of the Divine Grace. I have referred any number of times to the line of the Gita:

Aham tvā sarvaṇāpebhyo mokṣayiṣyāmi mā śucaḥ

“I will deliver thee from all sin and evil, do not grieve.”

Grace and Tapasya

Your experience about the meditation is common enough — I used to have it or analogous things hundreds of times. I suppose it is to teach us first that grace is more effective than tapasya and, secondly, that either equanimity or a cheerful spontaneous happy self-opening is as effective, to say the least, as the grimmest wrestling for a result. But it would be dangerous to assume from that that no tapasya and no endeavour is needful — for that might very well mean inertia. I have seen too that very often a long tapasya with doubtful results prepares the moment of grace and the spontaneous downflow. All which seem to be contradictions, but are not in a whole view of things.

What X says about tapasya is of course true. If one is not prepared for labour and tapasya, control of the mind and vital, one cannot demand big spiritual gains — for the mind and vital will always find tricks and excuses for prolonging their own reign, imposing their likes and dislikes and staving off the day when they will have to become obedient instruments and open channels of the soul and spirit. Grace may sometimes bring undeserved or apparently undeserved fruits, but one can't demand Grace as a right and privilege — for then it would not be Grace. As you have seen one can't claim that one has only to shout and the answer must come. Besides I have always seen that there has been really a long unobserved preparation before the Grace intervenes and, also, after it has intervened one has still to put in a good deal of work to keep and develop what one has got — as it is in all other things — until there is the complete siddhi. Then of course labour finishes and one is in assured possession. So tapasya of one kind or another is not avoidable.

You are right again about the imaginary obstacles. Good Lord! what mountains of them you have piled up on the way — a regular Abyssinia. It is why we always express depreciation of mental constructions and vital formations — because they are the defence works mind and vital throw up against their capture by the Divine. However the first thing is to become conscious of all that as you have now become, — the next thing is to be firm in knocking it all down and making a *tabula rasa*, a foundation of calm, peace, happy openness for the true building.

No Insistence on the Grace

I have surely never said that you should not want the Divine Response. One does Yoga for that. What I have said is that you should not expect or insist on it at once or within an early time. It can come early or it can come late, but come it will if one is faithful in one's call — for one has not only to be sincere but to be faithful through all. If I deprecate insistence, it is because I have always found it creates difficulties and delays — owing to a strain and restlessness which is created in the nature and

despondencies and revolts of the vital when the insistence is not satisfied. The Divine knows best and one has to have trust in His wisdom and attune oneself with His will. Length of time is no proof of an ultimate incapacity to arrive — it is only a sign that there is something in oneself which has to be overcome and if there is the will to reach the Divine it can be overcome.

Suicide solves nothing — it only brings one back to life with the same difficulties to be faced in worse conditions. If one wishes to escape from life altogether, it can only be by the way of complete inner renunciation and merging oneself in the Silence of the Absolute or by a bhakti that becomes absolute or by a karmayoga that gives up one's own will and desires to the will of the Divine.

I have said also that the Grace *can* at any moment act suddenly, but over that one has no control, because it comes by an incalculable Will which sees things that the mind cannot see. It is precisely the reason why one should never despair, — that and also because no sincere aspiration to the Divine can fail in the end.

Trust in the Divine Grace

Face all these things [*inner disturbances*] quietly and firmly with perseverance in the endeavour of the sadhana. Trust firmly in the Divine Grace and the Divine Grace will not fail you.

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The best possible way [*to “repay” the Divine Grace*] is to allow the Divine Grace to work in you, never to oppose it, never to be ungrateful and turn against it — but to follow it always to the goal of Light and Peace and unity and Ananda.

Withdrawal of Grace

As for withdrawal of Grace, it might be said that few are those from whom the Grace withdraws, but many are those who withdraw from the Grace.

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If the will of the individual is towards perdition, if his ego becomes hostile to the Divine, then the Divine is not bound to show him a Grace he does not want at all and kicks at.

The First Responses of the Divine

What you describe in your letter as the response of the Divine would not be called that in the language of Yogic experience — this feeling of greater peace, light, ease, trust, difficulties lessening, certitude would rather be called a response of your own nature to the Divine. There is a Peace or a Light which is the response of the Divine, but that is a wide Peace, a great Light which is felt as a presence other than one's personal self, not part of one's personal nature, but something that comes from above, though in the end it possesses the nature — or there is the Presence itself which carries with it indeed the absolute liberation, happiness, certitude. But the first responses of the Divine are not often like that — they come rather as a touch, a pressure one must be in a condition to recognise and to accept, or it is a voice of assurance, sometimes a very “still small voice”, a momentary Image or Presence; a whisper of Guidance sometimes, — there are many forms it may take. Then it withdraws and the preparation of the nature goes on till it is possible for the touch to come again and again, to last longer, to change into something more pressing and near and intimate. The Divine in the beginning does not impose himself — he asks for recognition, for acceptance. That is one reason why the mind must fall silent, not put tests, not make claims — there must be room for the true intuition which recognises at once the true touch and accepts it.

The Divine Guidance

The question you have put¹ raises one of the most difficult and complicated of all problems and to deal with it at all adequately

¹ *The correspondent said that this unhappy world seems doomed to falsehood and suffering, for it is filled with selfishness, pettiness and heartless greed. Why should one embrace such a world, he asked, “where the divine guidance seems so accidental, almost out of place”? — Ed.*

would need an answer as long as the longest chapter of *The Life Divine*. I can only state my own knowledge founded not on reasoning but on experience that there is such a guidance and that nothing is in vain in this universe.

If we look only at outward facts in their surface appearance or if we regard what we see happening around us as definitive, not as processes of a moment in a developing whole, the guidance is not apparent; at most we may see interventions occasional or sometimes frequent. The guidance can become evident only if we go behind appearances and begin to understand the forces at work and the way of their working and their secret significance. After all, real knowledge — even scientific knowledge — comes by going behind the surface phenomena to their hidden process and causes. It is quite obvious that this world is full of suffering and afflicted with transience to a degree that seems to justify the Gita's description of it as "this unhappy and transient world", *anityam asukham*. The question is whether it is a mere creation of Chance or governed by a mechanic inconscient Law or whether there is a meaning in it and something beyond its present appearance towards which we move. If there is a meaning and if there is something towards which things are evolving, then inevitably there must be a guidance — and that means that a supporting Consciousness and Will is there with which we can come into inner contact. If there is such a Consciousness and Will, it is not likely that it would stultify itself by annulling the world's meaning or turning it into a perpetual or eventual failure.

This world has a double aspect. It seems to be based on a material Inconscience and an ignorant mind and life full of that Inconscience; error and sorrow, death and suffering are the necessary consequence. But there is evidently too a partially successful endeavour and an imperfect growth towards Light, Knowledge, Truth, Good, Happiness, Harmony, Beauty, — at least a partial flowering of these things. The meaning of this world must evidently lie in this opposition; it must be an evolution which is leading or struggling towards higher things out of a first darker appearance. Whatever guidance there is must be given under these conditions of opposition and struggle and

must be leading towards that higher state of things. It is leading the individual, certainly, and the world, presumably, towards the higher state, but through the double terms of knowledge and ignorance, light and darkness, death and life, pain and pleasure, happiness and suffering; none of the terms can be excluded until the higher status is reached and established. It is not and cannot be, ordinarily, a guidance which at once rejects the darker terms or still less a guidance which brings us solely and always nothing but happiness, success and good fortune. Its main concern is with the growth of our being and consciousness, the growth towards a higher self, towards the Divine, eventually towards a highest Light, Truth and Bliss; the rest is secondary, sometimes a means, sometimes a result, not a primary purpose.

The true sense of the guidance becomes clearer when we can go deep within and see from there more intimately the play of the forces and receive intimations of the Will behind them. The surface mind can get only an imperfect glimpse. When we are in contact with the Divine or in contact with an inner knowledge and vision, we begin to see all the circumstances of our life in a new light and can observe how they all tended without our knowing it towards the growth of our being and consciousness, towards the work we had to do, towards some development that had to be made, — not only what seemed good, fortunate or successful but the struggles, failures, difficulties, upheavals. But with each person the guidance works differently according to his nature, the conditions of his life, his cast of consciousness, his stage of development, his need of farther experience. We are not automata but conscious beings and our mentality, our will and its decisions, our attitude to life and demand on it, our motives and movements help to determine our course; they may lead to much suffering and evil, but through it all, the guidance makes use of them for our growth in experience and consequently the development of our being and consciousness. All advance by however devious ways, even in spite of what seems a going backwards or going astray, gathering whatever experience is necessary for the soul's destiny. When we are in close contact with the Divine, a protection can come in which

helps or directly guides or moves us; it does not throw aside all difficulties, sufferings or dangers, but it carries us through them and out of them — except where for a special purpose there is need of the opposite.

It is the same thing though on a larger scale and in a more complex way with the guidance of the world-movement. That seems to move according to the conditions and laws or forces of the moment through constant vicissitudes, but still there is something in it that drives towards the evolutionary purpose, although it is more difficult to see, understand and follow than in the smaller and more intimate field of the individual consciousness and life. What happens in a particular juncture of the world-action or the life of humanity, however catastrophical, is not ultimately determinative. Here too one has to see not only the outward play of forces in a particular case or at a particular time but also the inner and secret play, the far-off outcome, the event that lies beyond and the Will at work behind it all. Falsehood and Darkness are strong everywhere on the earth and have always been so and at times they seem to dominate; but there have also been not only gleams but outbursts of the Light. In the mass of things and the long course of Time, whatever may be the appearances of this or that epoch or moment, the growth of Light is there and the struggle towards better things does not cease. At the present time Falsehood and Darkness have gathered their forces and are extremely powerful; but even if we reject the assertion of the mystics and prophets since early times that such a condition of things must precede the Manifestation and is even a sign of its approach, yet it does not necessarily indicate the victory — even temporary — of the Falsehood. It merely means that the struggle between the Forces is at its acme. The result may very well be the stronger emergence of the best that can be; for the world-movement often works in that way. I leave it at that and say nothing more.