

Chapter Two

Combining Work, Meditation and Bhakti

The Place of Work in Sadhana

There is no stage of the sadhana in which works are impossible, no passage in the path where there is no foothold and action has to be renounced as incompatible with concentration on the Divine. The foothold is there always; the foothold is the reliance on the Divine, the opening of the being, the will, the energies to the Divine, the surrender to the Divine. All work done in that spirit can be made a means for the sadhana. It may be necessary for an individual here and there to plunge into meditation for a time and suspend work for that time or make it subordinate; but that can only be an individual case and a temporary retirement. Moreover, a complete cessation of work and entire withdrawal into oneself is seldom advisable; it may encourage a too one-sided and visionary condition in which one lives in a sort of midworld of purely subjective experiences without a firm hold on either external reality or on the highest Reality and without the right use of the subjective experience to create a firm link and then a unification between the highest Reality and the external realisation in life.

Work can be of two kinds — the work that is a field of experience used for the sadhana, for a progressive harmonisation and transformation of the being and its activities, and work that is a realised expression of the Divine. But the time for the latter can be only when the Realisation has been fully brought down into the earth-consciousness; till then all work must be a field of endeavour and a school of experience.

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I do not mean by work action done in the ego and the ignorance,

for the satisfaction of the ego and in the drive of rajasic desire. There can be no Karmayoga without the will to get rid of ego, rajas and desire, which are the seals of ignorance.

I do not mean philanthropy or the service of humanity or all the rest of the things — moral or idealistic — which the mind of man substitutes for the deeper truth of works.

I mean by work action done for the Divine and more and more in union with the Divine — for the Divine alone and nothing else. Naturally that is not easy at the beginning, any more than deep meditation and luminous knowledge are easy or even true love and bhakti are easy. But like the others it has to be begun in the right spirit and attitude, with the right will in you, then all the rest will come.

Works done in this spirit are quite as effective as bhakti or contemplation. One gets by the rejection of desire, rajas and ego a quietude and purity into which the Peace ineffable can descend; one gets by the dedication of one's will to the Divine, by the merging of one's will in the Divine Will the death of ego and the enlarging into the cosmic consciousness or else the uplifting into what is above the cosmic; one experiences the separation of Purusha from Prakriti and is liberated from the shackles of the outer nature; one becomes aware of one's inner being and feels the outer as an instrument; one feels the universal Force doing one's works and the Self or Purusha watching or witness but free; one feels all one's works taken from one and done by the universal or the supreme Mother or by the Divine Power controlling and acting from behind the heart. By constant reference of all one's will and works to the Divine, love and adoration grow, the psychic being comes forward. By the reference to the Power above we can come to feel it above and its descent and the opening to an increasing consciousness and knowledge. Finally works, bhakti and knowledge join together and self-perfection becomes possible — what we call the transformation of the nature.

These results certainly do not come all at once; they come more or less slowly, more or less completely according to the condition and growth of the being. There is no royal road to

the divine realisation.

This is the Karmayoga as it is laid down in the Gita as I have developed it for the integral spiritual life. It is founded not on speculation and reasoning but on experience. It does not exclude meditation and it certainly does not exclude bhakti, for the self-offering to the Divine, the consecration of all oneself to the Divine which is the essence of this Karmayoga are essentially a movement of bhakti. Only it does exclude a life-fleeing exclusive meditation or an emotional bhakti shut up in its own inner dream taken as the whole movement of the Yoga. One may have hours of pure absorbed meditation or of the inner motionless adoration and ecstasy, but they are not the whole of the integral Yoga.

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To say that one enters the stream of sadhana through work only is to say too much. One can enter it through meditation or bhakti also, but work is necessary to get into full stream and not drift away to one side and go circling there. Of course all work helps provided it is done in the right spirit.

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Why argue from your personal experience great or little and turn it into a generalisation? A great many people (the majority perhaps) find it [*sadhana through work*] the easiest of all. Many find it easy to think of the Mother when working; but when they read or write, their mind goes off to the thing read or written and they forget everything else. I think that is the case with most. Physical work on the other hand can be done with the most external part of the mind, leaving the rest free to remember or to experience.

A Defence of Works

In spite of your disclaimer you practically come to the conclusion that all my nonsense about integral Yoga and karma being as much a way to realisation as jnana and bhakti is either

a gleaming chimaera or practicable only by Avatars or else a sheer laborious superfluity — since one can bump straight into the Divine through the open door of Bhakti or sweep majestically in on him by the easy high road of meditation; so why this scramble through the jungle of karma by which nobody ever reached anywhere? The old Yogas are true, are they not? Then why a new-fangled, more difficult Yoga with unheard talk about the supramental and God knows what else? There can be no answer to that; for I can only answer by a repetition of the statement of my own knowledge and experience — that is what I have done in today's answer to X — and that amounts only to a perverse obstinacy in riding my gleaming and dazzling chimaera and forcing my nuisance of a superfluity on a world weary of itself and anxious to get a short easy cut to the Divine. Unfortunately, I don't believe in short cuts — at any rate none ever led me where I wanted to go. However, let it rest there.

I have never disputed the truth of the old Yogas — I have myself had the experience of Vaishnava Bhakti and of Nirvana in the Brahman; I recognise their truth in their own field and for their own purpose — the truth of their experience so far as it goes — though I am in no way bound to accept the truth of the mental philosophies founded on the experience. I similarly find that my Yoga is true in its own field — a larger field, as I think — and for its own purpose. The purpose of the old is to get away from life to the Divine — so, obviously, let us drop karma. The purpose of the new is to reach the Divine and bring the fullness of what is gained into life — for that, Yoga by works is indispensable. It seems to me that there is no mystery about that or anything to perplex anybody — it is rational and inevitable. Only you say that the thing is impossible; but that is what is said about everything before it is done.

I may point out that Karmayoga is not a new but a very old Yoga: the Gita was not written yesterday and Karmayoga existed before the Gita. Your idea that the only justification in the Gita for works is that it is an unavoidable nuisance, so better make the best of it, is rather summary and crude. If that were all, the Gita would be the production of an imbecile and I would

hardly have been justified in writing two volumes on it or the world in admiring it as one of the greatest scriptures, especially for its treatment of the problem of the place of works in spiritual endeavour. There is surely more in it than that. Anyhow your doubt whether works can lead to realisation or rather your flat and sweeping denial of the possibility contradicts the experience of those who have achieved this supposed impossibility. You say that work lowers the consciousness, brings you out of the inner into the outer — yes, if you consent to externalise yourself in it instead of doing works from within; but that is just what one has to learn not to do. Thought and feeling can also externalise one in the same way; but it is a question of linking thought, feeling and act firmly to the inner consciousness by living there and making the rest an instrument. Difficult? Even bhakti is not easy and Nirvana is for most men more difficult than all.

You again try to floor me with Ramakrishna. But one thing puzzles me, as Shankara's stupendous activity of karma puzzles me in the apostle of inaction — you see you are not the only puzzled person in the world. Ramakrishna also gave the image of the jar which ceased gurgling when it was full. Well, but Ramakrishna spent the last years of his life in talking about the Divine and receiving disciples — that was not action, not work? Did Ramakrishna become a half-full jar after being a full one or was he never full? Did he get far away from God and so begin a work? Or had he reached a condition in which he was bound neither to rajasic work and mental prattling nor to inactivity and silence, but could do from the divine realisation the divine work and speak from the inner consciousness the divine word? If the last, perhaps in spite of his dictum, his example at least is rather in my favour.

I do not know why you drag in humanitarianism, activism, philanthropical *sevā* etc. None of these are part of my Yoga or in harmony with my definition of works, so they don't touch me. I never thought that politics or feeding the poor or writing beautiful poems would lead straight to Vaikuntha or the Absolute. If it were so, Romesh Dutt on one side and Baudelaire on the other would be the first to attain the Highest and welcome us

there. It is not the form of the work itself or mere activity but the consciousness and Godward will behind it that are the essence of Karmayoga; the work is only the necessary instrumentation for the union with the Master of works, the transit to the pure Will and power of Light from the will and power of the Ignorance.

Finally, why suppose that I am against meditation or bhakti? I have not the slightest objection to your taking either or both as the means of approach to the Divine. Only I saw no reason why anyone should fall foul of works and deny the truth of those who have reached, as the Gita says, through works perfect realisation and oneness of nature with the Divine, *samsiddhim*, *sādharmyam*, as did “Janaka and others”, simply because he himself cannot find or has not yet found their deeper secret—hence my defence of works.

Work and Meditation

Work by itself is only a preparation [*for spiritual life*], so is meditation by itself, but work done in the increasing Yogic consciousness is a means of realisation as much as meditation is.

I have not said, I hope, that work *only* prepares. Meditation also prepares for the direct contact. If we are to do work only as a preparation and then become motionless meditative ascetics, then all my spiritual teaching is false and there is no use for supramental realisation or anything else that has not been done in the past.

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The including of the outer consciousness in the transformation is of supreme importance in this Yoga—meditation cannot do it. Meditation can deal only with the inner being. So work is of primary importance—only it must be done with the right attitude and in the right consciousness, then it is as fruitful as any meditation can be.

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You need not have qualms about the time you give to action and

creative work. Those who have an expansive creative vital or a vital made for action are usually at their best when the vital is not held back from its movement and they can develop faster by it than by introspective meditation. All that is needed is that the action should be dedicated, so that they may grow by it more and more prepared to feel and follow the Divine Force when it moves them. It is a mistake to think that to live in introspective meditation all the time is invariably the best or the only way of Yoga.

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It is not meditation (thinking with the mind) but a concentration or turning of the consciousness that is important, — and that can happen in work, in writing, in any kind of action as well as in sitting down to contemplate.

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It does not depend on sitting [*to meditate*]. Many don't sit. They become conscious by working.

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There are some who cannot meditate and progress through work only. Each has his own nature. But to extend one method to all is always an error.

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Meditation is best when it comes spontaneously. But there should be full concentration in the work if it is to take the place of meditation.

No Competition between Work and Meditation

There are several sadhaks who have advanced very far by work alone, work consecrated to the Mother or else by work mainly with very little time for meditation. Others have advanced far by meditation mainly, but work also. Those who tried to do meditation alone and became impatient of work (because they could not consecrate it to the Mother) have generally been failures like

X and Y. But one or two may succeed by meditation alone — if it is in their nature or if they have an intense and unshakable faith and bhakti. All depends on the nature of the sadhak.

As for the *purātana mānuṣa* I do not see that the workers have their external being less changed than others. There are some who are where they were or only a little progressive, there are others who have changed a good deal — none is transformed altogether, though some have found a sure and sound spiritual and psychic basis. But that applies equally to workers who do not spend time in meditation and to those who spend a long time in meditation.

Each sadhak must be left to himself and the Mother to find his right way which need not be that of his neighbour. There is in the Asram too much observation of each other by the sadhaks, criticism, discussion of persons, even baseless gossip about each other's character, ideas, sadhana, actions along sometimes with theories and (usually mistaken) advice. All that is not very consistent with the atmosphere of Yoga. People should keep all their energy for their own sadhana — unless of course they are commissioned by the Mother to speak or state anything about the Yoga.

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The ignorance underlying this attitude [*that meditation is greater than work*] is in the assumption that one must necessarily do only work or only meditation. Either work is the means or meditation is the means, but both cannot be! I have never said, so far as I know, that meditation should not be done. To set up an open competition or a closed one between works and meditation is a trick of the dividing mind and belongs to the old Yoga. Please remember that I have been declaring all along an integral Yoga in which Knowledge, Bhakti, works — light of consciousness, Ananda and love, will and power in works — meditation, adoration, service of the Divine have all their place. Have I written seven volumes of the *Arya* all in vain? Meditation is not greater than Yoga of works nor works greater than Yoga by knowledge — both are equal.

Another thing — it is a mistake to argue from one's own very limited experience, ignoring that of others, and build on it large generalisations about Yoga. This is what many do, but the method has obvious demerits. You have no experience of major realisations through work, and you conclude that such realisations are impossible. But what of the many who have had them — elsewhere and here too in the Asram? That has no value? You kindly hint to me that I have failed to get anything by works? How do you know? I have not written the history of my sadhana — if I had, you would have seen that if I had not made action and work one of my chief means of realisation — well, there would have been no sadhana and no realisation except that, perhaps, of Nirvana.

I shall perhaps add something hereafter as to what works can do, but no time tonight.

Do not conclude however that I am exalting works as the sole means of realisation. I am only giving it its due place.

The Time Given to Work and Meditation

The work should not be diminished for that purpose [*meditation and japa*]. On the other hand it is not necessary for you to work all the time. If the work assigned to you is finished earlier, it does not matter about your not keeping the full office hours.

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If this arrangement [*in work*] gives no time for meditation — no time for going inside and establishing there the peace, wideness and joy in which you can meet the Divine inside and in work — it seems defective. What I meant is that it is not necessary either to work all the time or to intoxicate the brain by unrelieved meditation as some do. The result of meditation can be obtained by work, but then you must be able or learn to live inwardly even in the work and to do all from within.

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Half an hour's meditation in the day ought to be possible — if

only to bring a concentrated habit into the consciousness which will help it, first to be less outward in work and, secondly, to develop a receptive tendency which can bear its fruits even in the work.

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I have not suggested that you are to progress by *dhyāna* alone; but you have a great capacity for that and you cannot progress fully without it. In this Yoga some kind of action is necessary for all — though it need not take the form of some set labour. But for the moment progress through concentration and inner experience is the first necessity for you.

This [*stream of thoughts*] is what we call the activity of the mind, which always comes in the way of the concentration and tries to create doubt and dispersion of the energies. It can be got rid of in two ways, by rejecting it and pushing it out, till it remains as an outside force only — by bringing down the higher peace and light into the physical mind.

Concentration, Meditation and Prayer

What you felt before was in your mental being and consciousness; after coming here you have evidently come out into your external and physical consciousness, that is why you feel as if all you had before was gone. It is only covered over by the obscurity of the physical consciousness and not gone.

As for sadhana, I presume you mean by that some kind of exercise of concentration etc. For work also is sadhana, if done in the right attitude and spirit. The sadhana of inner concentration consists in:

(1) Fixing the consciousness in the heart and concentrating there on the idea, image or name of the Divine Mother, whichever comes easiest to you.

(2) A gradual and progressive quieting of the mind by this concentration in the heart.

(3) An aspiration for the Mother's presence in the heart and the control by her of mind, life and action.

But to quiet the mind and get the spiritual experience it is necessary first to purify and prepare the nature. This sometimes takes many years. Work done with the right attitude is the easiest means for that — i.e. work done without desire or ego, rejecting all movements of desire, demand or ego when they come, done as an offering to the Divine Mother, with the remembrance of her and prayer to her to manifest her force and take up the action so that there too and not only in inner silence you can feel her presence and working.

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I don't think you understood very well what Mother was trying to tell you. First of all she did not say that prayers or meditation either were no good — how could she when both count for so much in Yoga? What she said was that the prayer must well up from the heart on a crest of emotion or aspiration, the Japa or meditation come in a live push carrying the joy or the light of the thing in it. If done mechanically and merely as a thing that ought to be done (stern grim duty!), it must tend towards want of interest and dryness and so be ineffective. It was what I meant when I said I thought you were doing Japa too much as a means for bringing about a result — I meant too much as a device, a process laid down for getting the thing done. That again was why I wanted the psychological conditions in you to develop, the psychic, the mental — for when the psychic is forward, there is no lack of life and joy in the prayer, the aspiration, the seeking, no difficulty in having the constant stream of bhakti and when the mind is quiet and intuned and upturned there is no difficulty or want of interest in meditation. Meditation by the way is a process leading towards knowledge and through knowledge, it is a thing of the head and not of the heart; so if you want dhyana, you can't have an aversion to knowledge. Concentration in the heart is not meditation, it is a call on the Divine, on the Beloved. This Yoga too is not a Yoga of knowledge alone — knowledge is one of its means, but its base being self-offering, surrender, bhakti, it is based on the heart and nothing can be eventually done without this base. There are plenty of people here who

do or have done Japa and base themselves on bhakti, very few comparatively who have done the “head” meditation; love and bhakti and works are usually the base — how many can proceed by knowledge? Only the few.

Bhakti and Knowledge

To know about the sadhana with the mind is not indispensable. If one has bhakti and aspires in the heart’s silence, if there is the true love for the Divine, then the nature will open of itself, there will be the true experience and the Mother’s power working within you, and the necessary knowledge will come.