

# SEVEN GUIDELINES FOR SPIRITUAL LIVING

by Larry Seidlitz



*Spiritual significance: Constant remembrance of the Divine*  
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How does one do Integral Yoga? Most other spiritual paths have a fairly clearly defined set of practices or techniques. In the Integral Yoga, there are specific techniques that may be used if one wishes, but they do not form the core of its approach. While I do not deny that various kinds of yogic techniques can be valuable aids in the Integral Yoga, I want to focus here on seven psychological methods that I believe are more essential. There are other psychological methods that also are important, but these seven seem to complement each other and together form a strong, balanced discipline. These are relatively simple and straightforward things that anyone can understand and practice, though it is not easy to develop them to a point of perfection. Indeed, each of these psychological qualities can probably be developed more and more to an always higher level until the point that they lead us into the higher spiritual consciousness and the transformation of our nature.

## **Aspiration**

The first attitude that we must foster is aspiration to the Divine. We must ardently seek the Divine if we are to find, unite with, and manifest the Divine in our life. Indeed, this must become our overriding aim and endeavor in life, our number one priority, the focus of all our efforts. We must not only aspire in rare moments, when confronted with insurmountable obstacles or when we are peaceful and alone, but often and then constantly, and with an intensity that is always increasing.

There are various aspects of aspiration, various ways to aspire. Aspiration is essentially a call to the Divine. We must call the Divine down into ourselves. We must recognize that ultimately the Divine must make the change in us and in the world, that our human powers in themselves are insufficient. Thus, this aspect of aspiration presumes that we have a certain spiritual humility that recognizes we are powerless without the Divine. The Divine Mother is the Power of the Divine, we aspire to the Divine Mother to lead us to the divine Realization. We must ask her, pray to her, implore her to deliver us from the falsehoods and limitations in which we live and lead us to our divine fulfillment. We may put it into words as in a prayer, or it may be a silent unformulated yearning of our heart and soul, but essentially it is this, "take my life just as it is, good and bad, I offer it all to you, transform me, lead me to the Divine Life."

Whereas this side of aspiration is closely allied with surrender, another side of aspiration emphasizes personal effort. Ultimately, in the long course of the yoga, personal effort must melt away into surrender, but in the beginning and for a long time effort is very much needed. If we overemphasize surrender in the beginning there is a dangerous likelihood that it will be a passive and inert surrender, which actually is not surrender at all. If we say in the beginning, "the Divine is doing the yoga for me, I will wait patiently for the Divine to take care of it," then we are likely to delude ourselves and simply give in to and accept our lower nature just as it is, precluding any possibility of real change. We must resolutely put ourselves on the side of the Divine, we must be warriors for the Divine, we must stand and fight against the impulses and ignorance of the lower nature. Yes, we must recognize that the Divine Power is there behind our efforts supporting and leading us to victory, but we must be the willing and obedient instruments of our own transformation.

What must we fight against? We must fight against greed and selfishness, lust and seeking after vital pleasures, anger and hatred, fear and worry, laziness and unwillingness to change, doubt and narrow-mindedness, arrogance and pretension. We must fight against the enemies of our own inner progress. These things are natural accompaniments of the lower life in the ignorance, so we need not be ashamed of finding them within us. Indeed, we must learn to see them clearly for what they are, but our whole aim is to establish a Divine Life where these things are expelled from the nature and replaced. They are to be replaced with divine peace, light, harmony, love, strength, and ananda. They are not to be accepted but rather rejected from the nature. We must not be discouraged if the process of rejecting these from ourselves takes time, as it must, but at the same time we must not become complacent and allow them to remain indefinitely. We must exercise a steady and persistent will for their elimination, and maintain it against all resistance, however long it takes.

We must also use our efforts to develop the positive side of the discipline. The three main limbs of the discipline, in addition to the purification and perfection of the nature, are (1) the offering of our work and action to the

Divine, (2) concentration on the Divine, and (3) the cultivation of love and devotion for the Divine. Part of aspiration is to use our will and effort to put these three things into a living and eventually a constant practice. Service to the Divine is an essential side of the discipline that we must develop. We should aspire that each of our activities becomes an offering to the Divine. We can begin by making an offering of our food when we eat, consecrating it, seeing it as coming from the Divine and being offered to the Divine within us. Similarly, before starting our work, we can make an offering of it to the Divine, seeing that it is the Divine Force within us that enables us to do it, and asking the Divine's guidance and power to do it efficiently and in service of the Divine's will. Secondly, we should also aspire to concentrate more and more on the Divine. It is the aim of the yoga that we are always concentrated on the Divine, but in the beginning it is very useful to set aside some time to exclusively focus on this concentration. This can take different forms. One of the simplest is to read something by Sri Aurobindo or the Mother for a short time, and then either quietly contemplate on it, or allow oneself to go within towards the source of those words and thoughts. One of the most effective methods of concentration is to quietly stand back from one's thoughts and feelings, and any outward sounds or activities that may be happening around you, and simply observe them without becoming caught up in them. Yet another form of concentration is to focus in an upward aspiration to the Divine in the heart center, and if desired, this can be accompanied by repeating a mantra. Concentration on the Divine, with or without a mantra, can be gradually extended into one's normal activities as well. And third, we should aspire to develop a feeling of love and devotion to the Divine. This can be developed during periods of meditation, as well as when we make offerings of our work and other activities. This can also be fostered through prayer, whether by repeating formal prayers, or simply talking within to the Divine. Other ritualistic activities such as burning incense, offering flowers, or contemplating the photos of the Divine can also be helpful. Gratitude to the Divine for his gifts of beauty and delight, for his help and protection, and for his promise of spiritual growth and eventual realization, is also very helpful for developing a deeper devotion and closeness to the Divine.

## Quietude

A second great need in this yoga is quietude of the mind and vital. If the mind and vital are always churning, creating noise and disturbance, leading us down a myriad dead-end roads, heaping obstacles on our path, we will not make effective progress. While it is desirable in this yoga that the mind should fall silent, what is important as a first step is to free the mind of restlessness and disturbance. One of the great abilities of the mind is that it can imagine situations in which things are better than they are now. Indeed it is this ability that enables us to aspire towards a divine life. If this tendency would confine itself to showing us a better way it would be alright, but unfortunately the flip

side of this is that it also can find an endless number of things to regret or be dissatisfied with and complain about. Similarly, while it can show us greater possibilities of the future to strive towards, it can also imagine an unlimited number of dangers or catastrophes that may befall us. Complaints about the past and present and worries about the future create disturbances in the mind which makes it difficult to open ourselves to the Divine or to receive anything from the Divine. It is like a swirl of disturbing energy turned in on itself which can neither give itself to the Divine nor receive from the Divine. One possible aid for this kind of problem is to focus on the present moment, on what one is actually doing in the present moment, doing it carefully and with full consciousness as an offering to the Divine.

While an unquiet mind can retard progress, an unquiet vital can be still more upsetting. The vital is the center of our passions, desires, emotions, and dynamic energies and powers. It carries in it tremendous energy for both good and evil, and while properly it should be an obedient servant of our higher reason or deeper soul, more typically it acts according to its own ignorant and erring will and desire, leading to emotional upheavals and destructive behaviors. Quarrels, interpersonal strife, anger, jealousy, despondency, desire and hankering after food, drink, money, power, sensual pleasure and sex are its common activities. It is evident that this type of continual or repeated agitation of the consciousness makes spiritual progress slow and difficult. These types of vital disturbances must be quieted down; there must be an active will to dampen them as much as possible, to refuse to give in to them when their impulses threaten to overwhelm us.

The power of the intelligent will must be exercised to bring the vital under control. At first, our will may be weak and be swept aside by the sheer power of the vital impulses and their ability to cloud the mind or subvert it to their aims, but through continual efforts that are not discouraged by failure, the intelligent will gets stronger and is able to bring the vital under greater control. In addition, it is important to keep the intelligence free or relatively free from the vital influence. It should not justify the lower vital propensities and become a servant or accomplice in their actions. It should maintain an objective perspective, see these things for what they are and not only from the viewpoint of our egoistic preferences or desires. It should look on such vital disturbances as an agitation of the outer consciousness which should be discouraged from happening again and which should be brought back into quietude and harmony as soon as possible. This is not to deny that things may happen to us or people may do things which are not right, but in place of vital agitation and conflict there are quiet, intelligent, more effective ways to deal with such wrongs.

In addition to using the intelligent will to constrain unwanted movements, it is necessary to shift our psychological center or poise deeper within, away from the surface consciousness where this agitation has greater power. In part,

this means concentrating the attention within, preferably in the heart center, and from there keeping up a closer inner connection or remembrance of the Divine. We must learn to concentrate within and feel the peace and protection of the Divine which is there within us. We should become less preoccupied with minor outward things that have little importance in a wider or deeper view of things. What *is* vitally important is our spiritual growth, the development of our aspiration to the Divine and our growing conscious inner relation with the Divine; this will have a much more profound positive influence on our life than minor outward incidents of everyday life. We must learn more and more to keep our poise deep within, and not be swept away by outside waves of emotion or sensual attractions on the surface of our consciousness.

## Equality

Quietude develops hand in hand with a related psychological quality called equality. Equality means to remain unmoved within regardless of what happens or whatever conditions one may have to face. One must learn to face events, people, circumstances with a perfect calm and peace. However disagreeable people may be to you, however unpleasant the circumstances in which you must live or work, however terrible the events that may befall you, you must learn to remain quiet, calm, detached, unaffected. Similarly, you should not become elated, overjoyed by pleasant things that may happen to you. One must learn to be centered within on the Divine, quiet, peaceful, calm, taking joy only in the Divine, and not be dependent on the vagaries of outside events or people.

Naturally this is not at all easy to establish in its fullness, but it is an ideal that we can all work towards everyday in our life. Especially, our interpersonal relations with others present frequent opportunities for us to develop, work at, and deepen our equality. Sri Aurobindo has emphasized the development of equality in his yoga, devoting several chapters to it in *The Synthesis of Yoga*, as well as a number of letters. His explanation of it in one of his *Letters on Yoga* cannot be surpassed, so I would like to quote some of the relevant portions:

Equality means a quiet and unmoved mind and vital, it means not to be touched or disturbed by things that happen or things said or done to you, but to look at them with a straight look, free from the distortions created by personal feeling, and to try to understand what is behind them, why they happen, what is to be learnt from them, what is it in oneself which they are cast against and what inner profit or progress one can make out of them; it means self-mastery over the vital movements,—anger and sensitiveness and pride as well as desire and the rest,—not to let them get hold of the emotional being and disturb the inner peace, not to speak and act in the rush and impulsion of these things, always to act and speak out of a calm inner poise of the spirit...

Equality means another thing—to have an equal view of men and their nature and acts and the forces that move them; it helps one to see the truth about them by pushing away from the mind all personal feeling in one's seeing and judgment and even all the mental bias. Personal feeling always distorts and makes one see in men's actions, not only the actions themselves, but things behind them which, more often than not, are not there. Misunderstanding, misjudgment which could have been avoided are the result; things of small consequence assume larger proportions. (pp. 661-662)

And it is not only with respect to others or to outside things that we must develop an equal attitude; we must also develop it in regard to our own actions and inner movements. Sri Aurobindo continues in the same letter:

The first condition of inner progress is to recognize whatever is or has been a wrong movement in any part of the nature,—wrong idea, wrong feeling, wrong speech, wrong action,—and by wrong is meant what departs from the truth, from the higher consciousness and higher self, from the way of the Divine. Once recognized it is admitted, not glossed over or defended,—and it is offered to the Divine for the Light and Grace to descend and substitute for it the right movement of the true Consciousness. (p. 662)

We must learn not to be shocked or ashamed by the wrong movements that occur in ourselves, we must learn not to hide them from ourselves or deny them, but to look at them squarely and objectively, without distortion, without dressing them up or excusing them. Yes, it is natural that we find such things in ourselves, but if we have taken up the yoga in earnest, that means that we must use our will to reject them from our nature, and call to the Divine Light and Power to help us overcome and transform them. We should try to maintain an objective view of our difficulties, not attribute to them a greater power over us than they really have, and at the same time we can always hold them up before the Divine to eliminate or transform. In reality, the Divine Power can do everything, eliminate every obstacle, lead us to the heights of spiritual realization, but it requires our consent and our active aspiration and collaboration in its action. To the extent that we give this consent and collaboration, our progress will be more swift and smooth.

## Sincerity

If we are to succeed in our aspiration to unite with the divine consciousness and to make ourselves fit instruments for a divine life on earth, then our aspiration must not only be ardent but also sincere. This means that our aspiration must be wholehearted, integral. This integrality, however, takes time to establish. To begin with, we must have a central sincerity. This means that the central part of our being, the part which we call "I," truly wants the



Divine and is willing to undertake the necessary discipline and surrender, however long it takes. We must be able to honestly say, "I want to unite with the Divine, I want to surrender all of myself to the Divine, I accept to undergo the necessary discipline to reach the Divine and transform my nature." If we wish to undertake the Yoga, we should sincerely ask ourselves whether this is what we really want and whether we are willing to undertake the necessary discipline, however difficult it may be and however long it may take to do it. It is fine and good if we recognize that presently we are unable to fulfill all the requirements, that we have weaknesses and defects in our nature, but we must be willing to commit our life to sincerely working towards the fulfillment of the requirements of the Yoga. If we are not ready to make this commitment, we can still put ourselves under the Light, Protection, and Influence of the Divine, but we are not yet on the path of Integral Yoga.

But this is only the beginning, and this is where the real work of sincerity begins. Once we have accepted the aim of the Yoga as the aim of our life, then we must get to the work of fulfilling the conditions of the Yoga. And the fundamental condition of the Integral Yoga is that we must make an integral offering and surrender of ourselves to the Divine. This work must proceed from the center of our being, that which has fundamentally surrendered and accepted to undertake the discipline and spread to all the rest of the parts of our nature. Here we will find that although a central part of us accepts the aim of the Yoga, other parts of our nature do not accept or accept only partly or sometimes. We will find that there are many different personalities in us with their own agendas that may not be in agreement with our central resolve or with themselves. This means that we have conflicts in our nature which need to be made conscious and reconciled. Each of the different personalities and tendencies within ourselves has its own will and is very reluctant to surrender it. They are part of who we are and in this yoga we don't simply want to cut them all off, but rather we must convert them to the central aim and commitment. For example, the mind may have certain interests and activities which it wants to pursue independently of the search for the Divine. Similarly, there are many tendencies in the vital nature which will seek their own fulfillment regardless of what our central aspiration is. Some other yogas proceed by silencing all these activities by becoming inactive, but this does not lead to a full divine life but to a very restricted inner existence with little power for outward expression. The great difficulty of this yoga is to align all these different parts of the nature with our central aim, and thus to transform them into effective instruments of a divine living.

One of the most formidable obstacles to this alignment of the parts of the nature around the central aim is mental dishonesty, mental self-deception. This is almost a universal failing, and it requires a preserving self-discipline to overcome. One of the chief occupations of the mind is to find justifications and excuses for the indulgence of the vital nature's desires. A part of the mind is typically a servant of the vital, rather than an objective witness or master

of it as it should be. Instead of seeing that a mistake is being committed and should be corrected, it gives a little excuse for it and thus a free pass for it to continue. It is necessary to courageously and deeply examine these excuses for our vital indulgences and expose this mental insincerity. We may justify the indulgence of our desires with such thoughts as, "it is okay, nobody will find out," "this isn't so bad, everybody does it," "I worked hard, now I'm entitled to some indulgence," "I will deal with this overcoming this desire later," "this is my weakness, everybody has some weakness; I cannot control it." But when we probe such excuses more deeply, we will find they do not stand up to scrutiny. It does not matter if we can keep our mistakes hidden from others, it is the Divine with whom we must deal. If we profess to aspire to truly lead a spiritual life, then other people's failings cannot be a justification for continuing our own. In the spiritual life, desire must be eradicated from the nature and replaced with surrender and self-offering to the Divine—indulgence of vital desires is in contradiction to our aspiration. Postponing dealing with a defect of our nature is simply a ruse to allow it to continue; at some point it must be faced and it may as well be now as later. The problem with "later" is that later never comes. Years may be wasted, even lifetimes, waiting for this "later" to come. And it is not true that our desires cannot be overcome; they can be overcome if we face them honestly and courageously, and if we ardently and persistently call on the Divine Force and Grace to help us. For the Divine Mother, nothing is impossible.

## Faith

This requires another quality: faith in the Divine and its Power and in the possibility of the Divine to overcome our difficulties and lead us to spiritual realization and the transformation of our nature. Essentially faith comes from a knowledge of the soul that is at first hidden deep within us, but which comes out in the course of our spiritual progress. Deep within us, our soul or psychic being, is itself a portion of the Divine and knows the Divine as like knows like. But usually the soul is hidden at first by the activities of our mind and vital, only sending up sometimes jets of intuition or experience while also putting a general pressure on the mind and vital to seek out in life truth and goodness and beauty. Such intuitions or early soul experiences provide an initial basis for our developing faith; they suggest to us that there is something more to life than the mundane and checkered existence we see around us, that there are greater possibilities, that somewhere there is something that is perfect, whole, fulfilled which we can feel and touch and perhaps become. We also have the living examples of others who have already travelled the spiritual path before us, and the words of our Teachers and of others' Teachers who have explained the possibilities of spiritual experience and realization.

But we may say, "Oh this is alright for great Avatars and saints, but I am a simple person, I cannot realize the Divine, I cannot transform my nature." Another, apparently more reasonable form this takes is that "this yoga will



take many lifetimes, one should not expect to change right away or in the near future." But these are tricks of the mind and vital to hold onto its limitations and avoid the difficulty of change. The mind and vital nature are full of such ruses and continually try to snare and trip us in our aspiration for the divine life. We must learn to detect and avoid them. Indeed, much change can take place immediately if we set our mind and heart to it and insist upon it. We should not underestimate the power of human will, every day it achieves miracles, great achievements, by ordinary people who are not doing yoga. When we apply our will wholeheartedly to the sadhana, calling in to support it the Power of the Divine Mother, it can achieve even greater miracles; at least we should not decide beforehand that it cannot achieve much. It is better if we keep to the faith that if we have been called to this path of yoga by the Divine, then the Divine is with us and leading us on it, and if we cling to the Divine, he will surely lead us to the goal as quickly as possible. Remember, it is the Divine Power which does this yoga in us, not simply our personal will; we must have faith in that Power. We should not be impatient, but we also should not expect failure or little visible progress. Especially when we learn to keep quiet and centered within, concentrated in our aspiration to the Divine, we will find our difficulties and obstacles can quickly melt away.

We must learn to rely on this Divine Grace and Power more and more for all things in our life. Normally people rely on their own ego, their own strength and ability, as well as on other people, to achieve whatever needs to be done. People rarely rely on the Divine. It is precisely this transition that must be made in the course of the Yoga. Even when our own abilities, or those of others are instrumental, we must learn to see that it is really the divine Power behind that is responsible. All power ultimately comes from the one Divine Power, it is simply that in our egoistic ignorance we claim it as our personal property or attribute. As we turn consciously to the Divine Grace for our needs, then we will find that the Divine provides all that is truly necessary for our progress, often through intermediaries. The right person or opportunity may come along at the right moment, providing the very thing that we required. If we are in danger, in illness, or in distress, we should turn to the Divine for help, while being wise enough to be receptive to the help given, which may well come through the hands of another person. When we must make a difficult decision, we must learn to seek guidance from the Divine, and become attentive to receive the guidance which often may come in inner feeling or intuition in our heart center. When we must do a difficult task, we must turn to the Divine to support and help us through the endeavor. On the opposite side, whatever we receive in life, we should have faith, and develop the vision, that it comes from the Divine. Even our difficulties we should see as coming from the Divine in order to help us to make a needed progress. When Sri Aurobindo was in jail, he saw even the bars of his cell and prison guards as forms of Krishna. In this way, all of life, even our difficulties, will be welcomed as a gift of the Divine to help us grow and progress and will become full of delight.

## Harmony and Beauty

A great help in preparing ourselves to be receptive to the Divine Grace is to create within and around us an atmosphere of harmony and beauty. We should more and more cultivate the harmony and beauty of our mind, our heart, our vital nature, our body, our actions and physical movements. We should do the same with regard to our physical environment in which we live and work. We should keep them in order, peace, harmony so that the Divine may consent to dwell in us and with us. This could be called the cultivation of refinement.

Let us keep our mind and thoughts pure and noble and beautiful. On one side this means refusing to entertain thoughts that are low, vulgar, cruel, mean-spirited, selfish, refusing to argue or forcefully impose our viewpoints on others. On the other side it means learning to communicate and express our thoughts and ideas clearly, with precision, harmoniously, and with a kind consideration of different points of view. It also means learning to see and appreciate the expression of harmony and beauty in others, in nature, in the world around us. We must make a conscious effort to open our eyes to the beauty that is there, or we can go through life oblivious of the wonders around us. We can also develop our appreciation of beauty in literature, poetry, art, music, dance, film, photography, architecture, crafts, and other creations of the human mind and soul. Cultivating such appreciation elevates the mind and helps it from falling into inertia or vulgarity.

We should strive for harmony and beauty in our interrelationships with others. This means treating others with love and respect and compassion, whatever shortcomings we might perceive in them. All human beings have limitations and defects in their nature, but all human beings also have a divine soul at their center, they also are forms of the Divine. We should be more concerned with overcoming our own limitations and defects than in pointing out the defects of others. Let us rather be patient and tolerant of other people's weaknesses, and more severe with our own. Each individual has a unique relationship with the Divine, a unique karmic history, a unique set of strengths and weaknesses, a unique role to fill in the world, a unique trajectory of personal and spiritual development. Usually we cannot know all these things about another human being—it is difficult to know this even about ourselves—so we should not be prone to judge or advise others. Rather, let us be supportive of the positive elements in other people, and in this way foster the growth and the expression of their inner psychic being as well as our own.

We must also cultivate harmony and beauty in our emotions and in the flow of our vital energies. We must learn to control our emotions and vital energies so that they do not lead us into ignorant, violent, disturbing, or unwholesome acts. Anger and lust are perhaps the two most common and difficult challenges of the lower vital that disturb the peace and harmony of the being. Pride and arrogance are also common obstacles associated with the

vital ego, and should be controlled with the idea that before the Divine we are as nothing and that it is only the Divine within us that gives our life its significance. Desires for alcoholic drinks, tobacco, or drugs may affect some people and can be dangerous, often disturbing the health of the body and tending to create or exacerbate other personal and interpersonal problems. In others, desires for food, comfort, or luxury can create disturbances in the life and become obstacles on their spiritual path. In such cases, the will may need to be strengthened through repeated efforts to stop these activities, calling in the support of the Divine Power and Grace, until we are able to reject these unhealthy habits.

We should also work to establish and maintain harmony and beauty in our physical surroundings. In part, harmony translates in this sphere to order. We must learn to keep our things in order, in places that are assigned for them, such that they can be easily found when needed and do not disturb the beauty and harmony of our living space. At the same time, we should keep our things clean and in perfect working order and condition. When things are damaged or broken they should be quickly repaired if possible or replaced and not left in an unusable or dysfunctional condition. We should treat things not merely as material possessions, but as instruments of the divine manifestation for which we are the trustees. Indeed there is even a consciousness within physical things which responds to the care or unconsciousness with which we use them, and as we develop a greater consciousness in our use of things, we begin to see more and more the Divine within things. In addition to material things, we must also strive to be in harmony with the Nature of which we are a part, being conscious and considerate of the other living plants and animals around us, the air and water and earth which sustain us.

## Patience and Perseverance

Finally, this yoga requires patience and perseverance. One should not expect quick results. I think it is necessary to embark on this path with the attitude that one will proceed to the end however long it takes; it may take one's whole life and it may take more than one life. It is not that one should not expect to see any changes or growth; growth does come, but it may not be very dramatic. For example, over time, strong upheavals of the vital may become less severe and less frequent. This may not be much for one who is seeking realization of the Self, but it is an important gain from the point of the view of the transformation of the vital nature, an essential aim of the Integral Yoga. Similarly, one may find the mind and vital becoming calmer, one may see oneself growing in equality, or growing in understanding of oneself and others, one may find oneself growing in devotion, or even simply a stronger sympathy, empathy, or love for others. One may simply feel a stronger sense of purpose and direction in life, a stronger sense of the meaning of life. One may have fleeting experiences

in dream or while meditating, which although temporarily uplifting, leave one feeling pretty much the same. All these kinds of changes, while not dramatic, are yet significant and point to real and lasting progress.

Actually, I believe it is difficult to really gauge progress in this Yoga because of its character and aim of transforming the nature. It is as if the Yoga Force was working on many different parts of oneself at once, or in no apparent order, sometimes on one thing, sometimes on other things. It may also raise various difficulties in your nature, forcing you to deal with them. In such cases, during such periods, you may feel as if life is more difficult, not less. In addition, through learning more about the yoga and through growing in consciousness about your nature, you may see more clearly or experience more vividly defects which are there. As you struggle with these defects in your nature, it feels as if you not making progress, or even regressing to a lower level. But in actuality, this greater awareness, this facing more acutely the defects in your nature is a great progress. But it doesn't necessarily feel that way.

Another reason it is difficult to gauge our progress is that progress may be taking place on the inner parts of our being of which we are not aware. Sometimes, if we have some conscious access to the inner consciousness, for example, through dreams, we may see there signs of our inner progress. Such progress in the inner consciousness may not manifest immediately in the outer consciousness, or may not do so in an obvious way. When certain difficulties become less frequent or disappear, we may not notice it. But also, sometimes progress that has taken place in the inner consciousness may take some time before it begins to manifest in the outer life which is more under the influence of physical inertia.

There is something else. It may be that the Divine uses our weaknesses and defects to its own advantage. One must be a little careful not to turn this into an excuse for continuing mistakes, but often it seems that it is our difficulties and the pain they engender that keeps us motivated towards progress. They become a focal point of our efforts, almost a symbol of the ignorance, unconsciousness, or selfishness that we must overcome. They force us to persevere, to strive harder, more intelligently and skillfully. They require us to turn to the Divine more completely because sometimes it seems we cannot overcome these difficulties by ourselves.

So we must be patient and persevere. We must not give up because after much effort we still face the same difficulties. Mother said that victory goes to the most persevering. We may struggle with something for a long time, and then the thing may suddenly be swept aside and disappear. But other things may then take its place. One by one we may need to clear out many such obstacles from our nature. This yoga is a long labor; it is not easy. There are delights and surprises that come in its course, descents of ananda or peace or light that keep us afloat, encouraged, but there is also much difficult labor.